

Oman 2016





Oman *2016*

Published by
Ministry of Information
Sultanate of Oman
www.omaninfo.om
2016

*In the name of God
the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**“VERILY AS FOR THOSE WHO
BELIEVED AND DID RIGHTEOUS
DEEDS, WE SHALL NOT MAKE THE
REWARD OF ANYONE WHO DOES
HIS RIGHTEOUS DEEDS IN THE MOST
PERFECT MANNER TO BE LOST”**

(Holy Qur'an)

Surat al Kahf (XVIII,30)



EXCERPTS FROM HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID'S SPEECHES

"With God's help, the path we have chosen to follow in our foreign policy over the past decades has proved itself to be both practicable and sound and we are committed to pursuing it. It is based upon support for rights and justice, peace and security, tolerance and love, and the promotion of international co-operation in the interests of stability, development and prosperity. It also aims to tackle the causes of tension in international relations by finding just and permanent solutions to challenging problems in a way that will bolster peaceful coexistence between nations and yield benefits for the whole of humanity."



"With each passing day, the educational structure in this dear country of ours is continuing to improve in stature, and whenever the need arises we shall spare no efforts to add to it so that it and its foundations can become even stronger and more firmly established."



"...We recognize the importance of the media and the role it plays in the lives of nations and we are aware that it is a mirror which reflects what is happening in the country. This mirror must be clear and honest with itself as well as with others."



"...There can be no doubt that when the government, the private sector and the people support each other and co-operate in order to provide the national work force with employment, training and qualifications, this will be a major factor in achieving the basic aims of the development plans and their goal of enhancing the country's human resources, potential and expertise so that society can enjoy prosperity and stability."



"...We must not allow material things and imported ideas to dominate our feelings to the extent that they cause us to forget our heritage and our established Omani traditions."

QABOOS BIN SAID





His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said



Introduction

Oman's modern Renaissance continues to stride confidently ahead towards its noble goals with the same commitment and determination that it has demonstrated since the day it was first launched. In doing so it can pride itself on having built a modern state that reflects its illustrious history and civilization, while providing security, stability, progress and prosperity for the nation and its citizens and helping to spread the blessings of peace in the region and beyond. In doing so, it has been guided by the enlightened thought and lofty goals of its Leader and the Builder of the Omani Renaissance – His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Throughout its journey the Renaissance has proved its success again and again, so that today we find the evidence of the Sultanate's development all around us as its citizens see their aspirations achieved in every corner of the land. Oman's success is equally apparent when we look at it in an international context and the role it plays in the region and the wider world, where its impartiality and credibility – and the insight, wisdom and boldness that characterise its decision-making - have enabled it to contribute effectively to the resolution of a multitude of challenging problems.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the Sultanate is highly respected in the international arena for its services to the cause of world peace, co-operation and mutual understanding. It has been widely praised for its efforts in this regard, which have made it a meeting point and an oasis of dialogue and harmony, while further enhancing His Majesty Sultan Qaboos's global reputation as the region's man of peace.

The successes and achievements of Oman's modern Renaissance in every area of life are a clear indication that it is built on solid foundations and guided by a clear vision and exemplary goals.

Nevertheless, the greatest achievement of all is the Omani people themselves – educated, industrious and resolutely attached to their land, their values and their sense of identity, proud of their illustrious past and confident in the prosperous age in which they live today, as they look forward with hope and anticipation to an even better and brighter future. This book aims to provide no more than a brief overview of some of the Omani citizen's achievements, along with a picture of the blessings that this country has been able to enjoy during the reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Today Oman and its people are reaping the benefits of security, peace and stability, as His Majesty's wise policies lead them on to ever greater heights and attainments.

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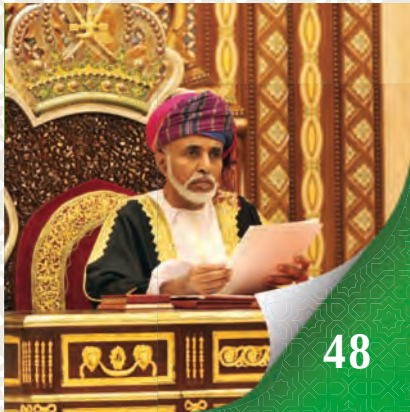


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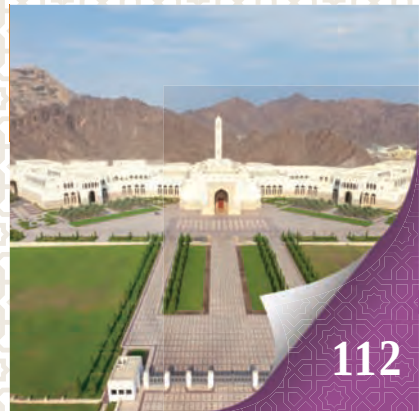
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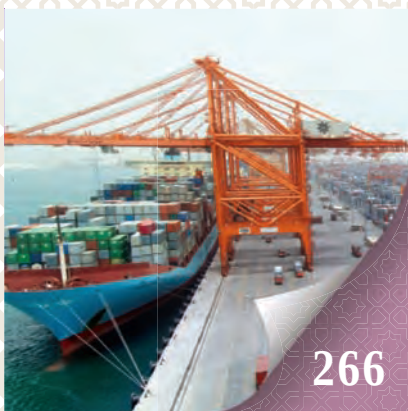
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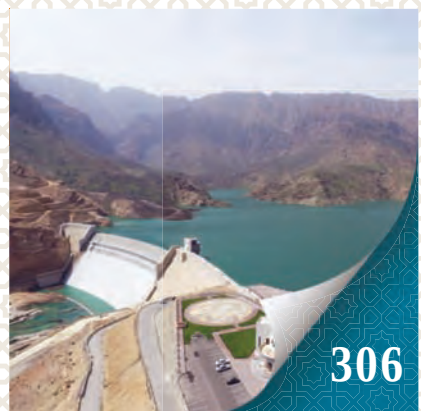
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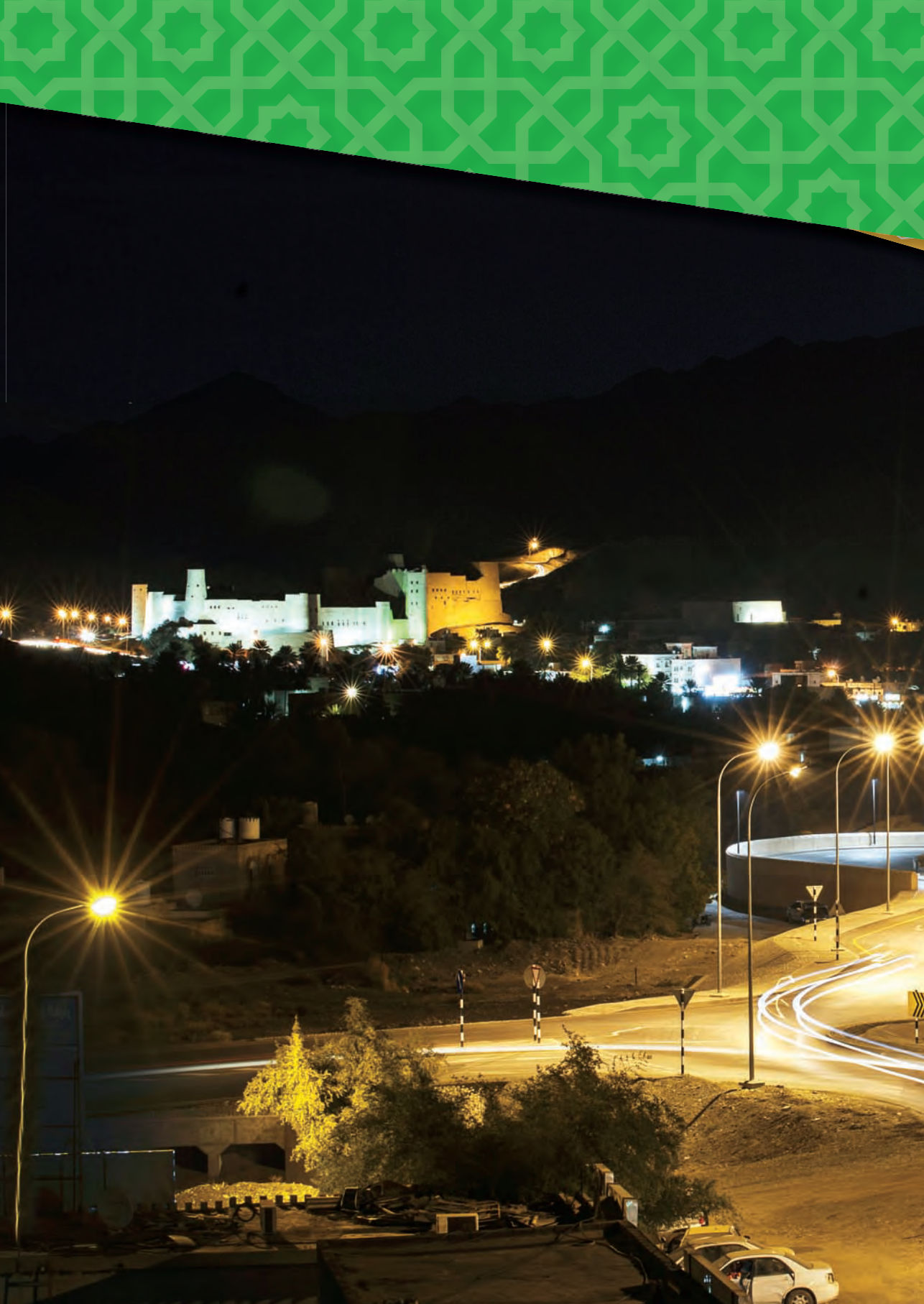
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Geography and History



Geography and History

GEOGRAPHY

While geography is essentially a question of location, terrain and land or sea borders, it also represents a kind of dialogue between nature, resources and environment and man's response to them – not only in the way he attempts to overcome any difficulties they may pose, but also in the extent of his success in converting them into material assets.

The Sultanate of Oman occupies a uniquely important location strategically and this fact has been reflected time and again in the choices it has made, along with its policies and style of execution, dictating how it interacts with issues and developments affecting it.

Situated in the extreme south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman extends from latitude 16.40 to 26.20 degrees north and from longitude 51.50 to 59.40 degrees east. Its 3,165 kilometre coastline runs northwards from the Arabian Sea and the entrance to the Indian Ocean in the far south-west to the Sea of Oman and Musandam, where it overlooks the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Gulf.

Oman shares borders with the Republic of Yemen to the south-west, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, and the United Arab Emirates

to the north. It has sovereignty over a number of small islands in the Sea of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, including Salamah and Her Daughters, as well as Masirah and the Hallaniyat Islands, and some other small islands in the Arabian Sea.

Lying on the Tropic of Cancer, Oman is one of the world's hot, arid regions, though part of the south of the country has a tropical climate.

As well as dominating the oldest and most important sea trade route in the world between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, Oman – with an area of 309,500 square kilometres – is also criss-crossed by the old north-south and east-west overland trans-Arabian caravan routes.

The Sultanate's most distinctive geographical feature is the Hajar mountain range, which extends down from the north in a great arc from Ru'us al Jibal at Ras Musandam (by the Strait of Hormuz, gateway to the Gulf) to Ras al Hadd – the Arabian Peninsula's most south-easterly point, which overlooks the Indian Ocean. At its highest point in the Jabal al Akhdar region, the Hajar range reaches a height of 3,000 metres.

In the governorate of Musandam the mountains rise to a height of around 1,800 metres above the Strait of Hormuz, which runs between

“ Oman’s strategic location has always found strong echoes in its policy options and in its approach to the handling of issues, especially regional issues and developments ”

the Omani and Iranian coasts; the navigable international shipping lanes lie on the Omani side.

Omanis compare the Hajar mountain range to a human backbone. They call the area lying on the Sea of Oman the Batinah, or “Stomach”, and the area to the west of the mountains the Dhahirah, or “Back”. The Batinah - the coastal area formed by the wadis (dried up areas of river bed) that flow down from the mountains – is between 15 and 80 kilometres wide and over 300 kilometres long. The Sultanate’s main agricultural area, which boasts farms

and orchards irrigated by groundwater, runs northwards from Muscat to the borders of the United Arab Emirates.

Several wadis cut right through the Hajar mountains. The largest – Wadi Samail – links the city of Muscat on the coast with the wilayats of Izki and Nizwa in the interior. Omanis call the mountains to the west of this wadi al Hajar al Gharbi (the Western Hajar); this region includes the Jabal al Akdhar and the wilayats of Rustaq, Nakhal, al Awabi and several others.

The mountain area to the east of Wadi Sumail is called al Hajar al Sharqi

Natural beauty in the village of Wakan, wilayat Nakhal



☞ The Strait of Hormuz is located between the coasts of Oman and Iran, with the navigable shipping channels closer to the Omani coast ☞



Nature paints a stunning landscape in Wadi Bani Ghafir

(the Eastern Hajar) and includes – among others - the wilayats of Sumail and Bidbid. The highest peak in the Hajar range is Jabal Shams in the Dakhilyah Governorate, the summit of which is around 3,000 metres above sea level.

At Qurm Heights in Muscat the Omani coast narrows and becomes rocky with numerous inlets. The shoreline from South Muscat Point to Ras al Hadd is similar. From Ras al Hadd to Filim on Masirah Bay the Sharqiyah Sands extend over a band of terrain some 160 Kilometres long by

8 Kilometres wide. To the south west of Masirah Island lies a vast area of flat, stony ground known as the Jiddat al Harasis. To the west of the Sharqiyah Sands is a stretch of low-lying rocky terrain around 250 kilometres wide crossed by wadis running from north to south; these include Wadi Halfain and Wadi Andam.

West of Masirah Island is the peninsula of Barr al Hikman, which is separated from Masirah by a channel 14 kilometres wide. It consists of salt flats, which can reach as far as 5 kilometres inland and, at some times of the year,

are covered by the sea. The population of this area earns its living from fishing.

The Omani coast – including the Wusta and Dhofar Governorates – extends along the Arabian Sea for a distance of 560 kilometres, some 130 kilometres of which are exposed to monsoon rains. This latter stretch consists of a coastal plain between eight and ten kilometres wide and includes Salalah and several other wilayats such as Taqah, Mirbat, Sadah, Rakhyut and Dhalkut. The coastal areas of the Governorate of Dhofar are rich in fish including prawns and hamour (grouper), as well as sardines, the surplus catches of which are used as animal fodder or fertiliser. The mountain region of Dhofar extends from east to west for a distance of around 400 kilometres, from opposite the Hallaniyat Islands to the borders of the Republic of Yemen, forming a continuous chain which includes Jabal Samhan in the east and Jabal al Qamar in the west. At no point is this range more than 23 kilometres wide or higher than 2,500 metres. A 75 kilometre swathe of these mountains is cloaked in greenery from June to September each year during the khareef (monsoon) season, when the south-western monsoon winds give the region a very different character from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula and the rains transform the land into a delightful summer resort with rich pastures.

Frankincense trees grow in some areas – a living reminder that the region was once renowned for its trade in this substance – the main

source of its wealth in ancient times.

Fresh water springs flow abundantly in Dhofar throughout the year.

Geology

The landscapes of Oman are strikingly varied and of bewildering beauty: cool lofty mountains cut by over 1000 meter deep gorges, seemingly endless simmering hot gravel planes, golden high sand dunes and grey salt-flats which all attract tourists and geologists alike.

Superb rock outcrops in the mountains are a paradise for geologists from around the world. The country's rock record spans to more than one billion years. Next to thick layers of limestone, testifying to tropical conditions in the past, the rock recorded three periods when the country was ice covered, somewhat surprising given its present climate. Dark coloured Semail ophiolites, a layered mix of volcanics and rocks originating from very deep up to 10 km in the earth, were pushed from north to south onto the land over hundreds of kilometres 75 million years ago. These ophiolites locally can be rich in copper and chrome.

The flat Interior plains are hiding a kilometres thick stack of much older sediments that host the country's hydrocarbon resources. Ancient salt, which comes to the surface in several salt hills, such as Qarat Kibrit, has been mined in the past, but also played an important role in forming oil and gas accumulations.



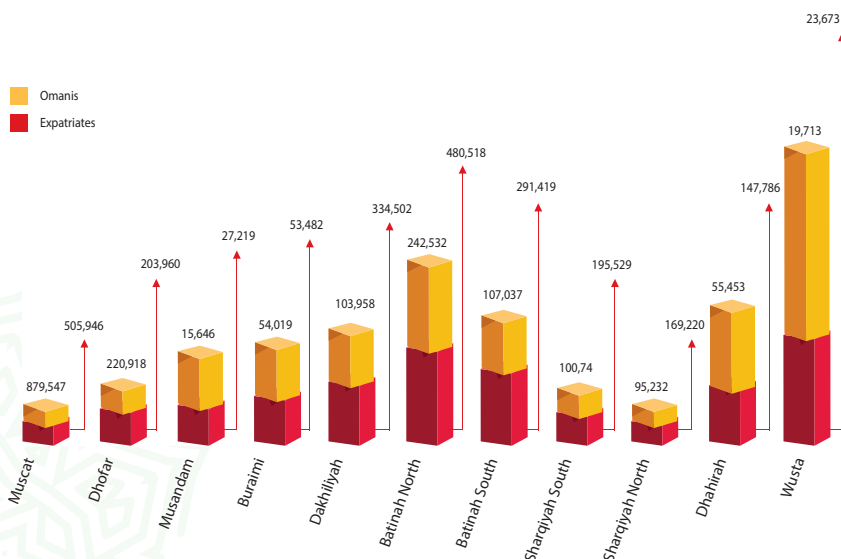
The beauty of Salalah - Wadi al Sheikh



Population Statistics by Governorate

Governorate	Omani	Expatriate	Total
Muscat	505,946	879,547	1,385,493
Dhofar	203,960	220,918	424,878
Musandam	26,219	15,646	42,865
Buraimi	53,482	54,019	107,501
Dakhiliyah	334,502	103,958	438,460
Batinah North	480,518	242,532	723,050
Batinah South	291,419	107,037	398,456
Sharqiyah South	195,529	100,074	295,603
Sharqiyah North	169,220	95,232	264,452
Dhahirah	147,786	55,452	203,239
Wusta	23,673	19,713	43,386
Total	2,433,254	1,999,126	4,432,380

Population statistics up to July 2016 (National Centre for Statistics and Information)



“ Each province or governorate has its own administrative, geographical and economical personality, and each is subdivided into administrative districts or wilayat, of which there are 61 in total countrywide ”

The Governorates and Wilayats (districts)

According to Royal Decree No. 114/2011, issued on 26 October 2011, Oman comprises 11 governorates:- Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, Buraymi, the Dakhiliyah, the North Batinah, the South Batinah, the South Sharqiyah, the North Sharqiyah, the Dhahirah and the Wusta.

Each of these governorates has its own distinctive administrative, geographical and economic significance and comprises a number of wilayats (districts). (In all, the Sultanate has a total of 61 wilayats.) The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for overseeing the governorates, with the exception of the Muscat and Dhofar Governorates. In accordance with Royal Decree No.115/2011, Sultan Qaboos appoints the governors of each of the governorates, while the wali (local governor) of each wilayat is responsible for the local administration and acts as a link between the government, its institutions and the public.

Over a succession of development plans Oman has been able to ensure that balanced and integrated development takes place across the country's different governorates. Major projects and industrial zones have been set up

from Muscat to Salalah, from Sur to Sohar, from Nizwa to Musandam and Buraymi and from Ibri to Duqm, within the framework of an overall plan that balances the nation's priorities and the needs of the individual governorates. Different governorates take turns in hosting major national and religious events, including, in particular, the National Day celebrations.

Muscat Governorate

Muscat Governorate is the heart of the country's political, economic and administrative system, as well as the location of the capital city – Muscat – the seat of government and the nerve centre of the state's administrative apparatus. It is also a vibrant hub of local and international economic, commercial and tourist activity.

Lying on the Sea of Oman at the southern end of the Batinah coast, Muscat Governorate borders the Eastern Hajar mountains and the North Sharqiyah Governorate to the east, the South Batinah Governorate to the west and the Dakhiliyah Governorate to the south.

Muscat has the highest population density of all the provinces in the Sultanate, with a population of 775,878 residents, according to the most recent (2010) census of Population, Housing and Establishments, that had risen to

“ Muscat has a long list of development-related achievements to its credit, spread across all areas of contemporary life ”

1,385,493 per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in July 2016.

This governorate witnesses active development in all sectors, including the establishment of a modern road network linking Muscat with the other wilayats in the governorate and beyond, landscaping projects, parks, markets, public utilities and upgrading of residential quarters and business districts. Upgrading of commercial and residential neighbourhoods has secured for Muscat a place among the most modern of cities. Its development strategies embrace the gifts of the past, while planning for the bright promise of the future.

Muscat Governorate comprises six wilayats: Muscat, Muttrah, Amerat, Bausher, Seeb and Quriyat, each of which is administered by a wali appointed by the Governor of Muscat. The wilayat of Muscat is the Governorate's main wilayat.

The Governorate is the administrative body responsible for providing public services within its administrative boundaries; its affairs are administered by the Minister of State and Governor of Muscat.

The Municipal Council of Muscat has 26 members representing the wilayats of the governorate.

Al-Bahri Street, or the seafront promenade in Muttrah, where bright street lighting illuminates contrasting images from past and present







“ The Governorate of Dhofar, the Arabian Peninsula’s land of frankincense, was Oman’s portal to the vast Indian Ocean and crossroads of the South Arabian caravan trade ”



Dhofar Governorate

The Dhofar Governorate has played an important role in Oman’s history, in recent times as well as in the more distant past, and it was from Salalah, in Dhofar, that Oman’s contemporary era of development first saw the light of day under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Historically, Dhofar – the Arabian Peninsula’s Land of Frankincense – was Oman’s great gateway to the Indian Ocean and the crossroads of Southern Arabia’s caravan routes, while in recent times it has become the country’s gateway to progress and prosperity.

Dhofar Governorate lies at the southern end of Oman, with Salalah some 1,000 kilometres distant from Muscat. It borders the Wusta Governorate to the north-east the Arabian Sea to the south-east and south, the Republic of Yemen to the west and south-west and, to the north and north-west, the Rub’ al Khali desert, or Empty Quarter, renowned for its seasonal climate, or khareef, as it is known locally. This is where she experiences her sweetest times amid lush plateaux cloaked in the rolling white mist that moistens and cools the air.

This governorate has ten wilayats – Salalah, the main hub, and Taqah, Mirbat, Rakhyut, Thumrait, Dhalkut, Mazyounah,

Ain Jirziz in Dhofar.

☞ Musandam has four wilayat, or administrative sub-districts: Khasab, Dibba, Bukha and Madha. The provincial administrative centre is Khasab ☞

Sultan Qaboos Mosque in wilayat Bukha - an architectural treasure and beacon of religion and learning

Muqshin, Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands, and Sadah.

Dhofar Governorate has a population of 249,729, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, or 424,878 in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, as published in July 2016.

The governorate's affairs are administered by the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar.

The Municipal Council of Dhofar has 24 members representing the governorate's wilayats.

Musandam Governorate

The Musandam Governorate lies at the northern end of the Sultanate of Oman. It is of immense strategic importance because of its geographical position overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, which forms the eastern gateway for shipping between the Gulf littoral states and the outside world. Linking the Gulf with the open waters of the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Hormuz is the most important regional and international waterway for oil exports and trade as some 90 per cent of the Gulf states' oil exports pass through it.



The Governorate of Musandam has four wilayats – Khasab, the main hub, as well as Daba, Bukha and Madha.

The population of the province was 31,425 in the 2010 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishment, and 42,865 in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information for the month of July 2016. The Municipal Council has 8 members representing the various wilayat.

The Buraymi Governorate

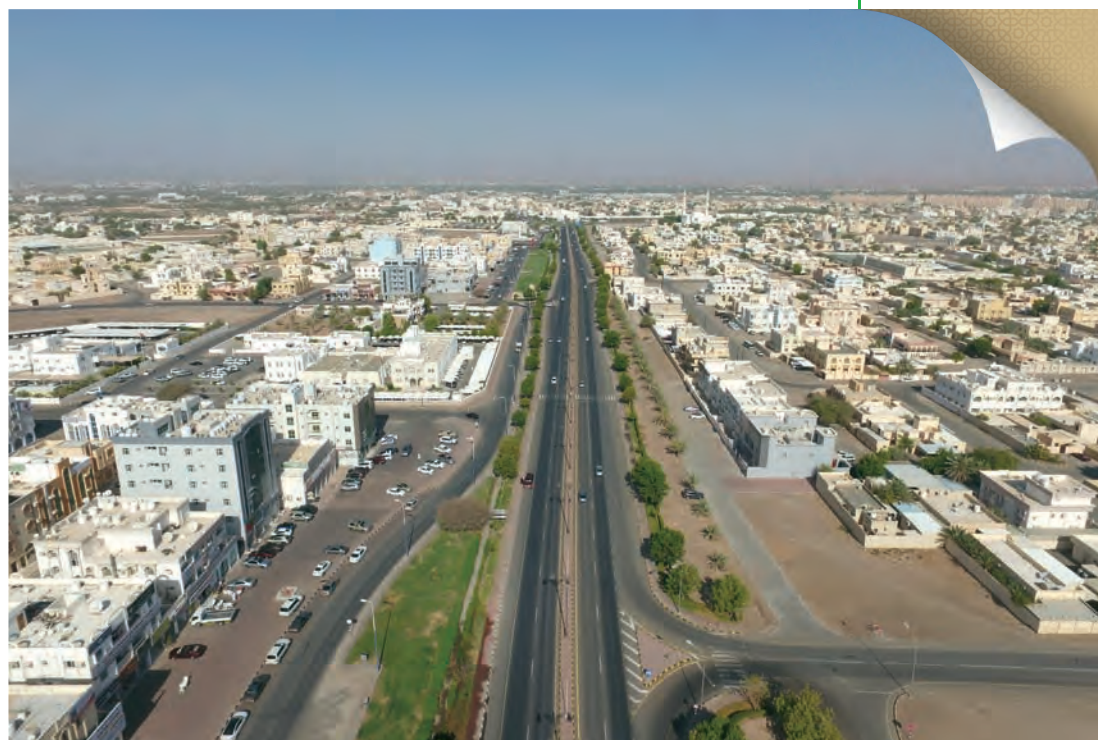
The Buraymi Governorate is renowned for its strategic location

in the north-west of the Sultanate. Historically, because of its height above sea level and abundant water supplies from its wadis and aflaaj (irrigation channels), it also became an important trading station on a major trade route and a significant producer of wheat, dates and other fruit.

There are several forts and castles in Buraymi, including – among others - al Khandaq, al Hillah, Bait al Nadd and al Khabib.

Buraymi is witnessing the implementation of promising development projects which are meant to promote the governorate's tourism potential. The new tourism

The governorate of Buraymi is experiencing a dynamic phase of development activity



and development schemes offer a pronounced and very promising advance to a level of development sophistication that will reflect not only on Buraymi, but on the Sultanate as a whole, given the scale and multifaceted nature of the projects envisaged.

The Governorate has three wilayats – Buraymi (the main one), Mahdha and al Sinainah – and a population of 72,917 according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, or 107,501 in the July 2016 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has 8 members.

The Dakhiliyah Governorate

With its rich history, cultural heritage, location and topographical features, the Dakhiliyah Governorate is one of the Sultanate's most important governorates and forms the country's strategic hinterland. It consists of a large upland in the centre of the country; this includes the Jabal al Akhdar mountain range, the slopes of which descend southwards in the direction of the desert. A pivotal link between the Sultanate's different governorates, the Dakhiliyah borders the South and North Sharqiyah Governorates to the east, the Dhahirah Governorate to the west, the Wusta Governorate to

An aerial view of
Nizwa



“ Al Dakhiliyah is not just a major agricultural province, but enjoys a pre-eminent position in the history of Oman ”

the south and the Muscat and South Batinah Governorates to the north.

Dakhiliyah has seen several development projects in the public service area reach culmination in 2015, notably in health, education and urban services, as well as road infrastructure, industry and communications.

As well as being one of the country's main agricultural regions, the Dakhiliyah Governorate has also played a prominent role in the country's history.

It has eight wilayats – Nizwa (its main hub), Bahla, Manah, al Hamra, Adam, Izki, Sumail and

Bidbid – and, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, it had a population of 326,651, now up to 438,460 per the July 2016 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has 26 members.

North Batinah Governorate

The North Batinah Governorate - a coastal strip between the sea and the mountains – is geographically and economically one of the Sultanate's most important governorates. It has six wilayats – Sohar (the main one), Shinas, Liwa, Saham, Khabourah and Suwaiq.

The Shinas Gate is a magnificent example of the defensive architecture in Oman



☞ Rustaq, Awabi, Nakhal,

Wadi al Ma'awal, Barka and Masna'a.

The provincial administrative centre is Rustaq ☞

The Governorate occupies a crucial geographical location along the southern shore of the Sea of Oman. It has long been a major Omani maritime and trade link with countries bordering the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. A visual representation of this governorate's major economic potential is the broad Batinah Plain, one of the Sultanate's largest agricultural plains. It is also rich in mineral resources, which are currently being exploited as a basis for several vital heavy industry projects.

Sohar Industrial Port is one of Oman's mega-projects. The Sohar Industrial Estate, which is linked to the port, continues to attract a large number of major industrial and manufacturing enterprises, including fertiliser, petrochemicals, aluminium and iron projects. These operations have been further boosted with the establishment of the Free Zone Sohar and Sohar Airport, a new portal to the Sultanate, one which will speed up the development of nearby commercial and industrial projects sectors and help promote investment.

Meanwhile, Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to convert the Port of Shinas into a commercial port and link North Batinah to Musandam by sea, via passenger and freight routes, and overland by rail, are ongoing. The rail link will be developed as part of the GCC railway project and will traverse the provinces of North and

South Batinah alongside the Batinah Expressway.

The Governorate's population stood at 483,582 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments and at 723,050 in the July 2016 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The North Batinah Municipal Council has 28 members.



The South Batinah Governorate

This governorate, with its six wiliayats of Rustaq (its main centre), Awabi, Nakhl, Wadi al Ma'awil, Barka and Musana'ah, had a 2010 population of 289,008, according to the General Census of Population and Housing, and Establishment, and 398,456 in the July 2016

statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

It lies between the Sea of Oman to the east and the slopes of the Western Hajar mountain range to the west. Because of its location, economic assets and large population, it has been an influential player throughout the course of Oman's history.

The Batinah South has been transformed by its new infrastructure of service, road and communications networks



Geography and History

Many achievements have been logged in the public service areas in this governorate, including road infrastructure, telecommunications, extensive public parks and other urban planning and amenities to keep pace with the development of economic and social life in the Sultanate.

Specific attention has been focused on the development of the natural warm water springs of Ain al Kasfah in the wilayat of Rustaq and Ain al Thuwarah in the wilayat of Nakhl. South Batinah Municipal Council has 22 members.

The South Sharqiyah Governorate

The South Sharqiyah Governorate, which occupies the north-eastern part of the Sultanate of Oman, borders the Arabian Sea to the east, the Sharqiyah Sands to the south and the Dakhiliyah Governorate to the west.

The Governorate comprises five wilayats – Sur (the main wilayat), al Kamil wa'l Wafi, Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan, Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali and Masirah.

South Sharqiyah has seen the implementation of a range of development projects, along

Wadi Shab - one of the most striking of the Sultanate's many valleys



“ The Sharqiyah South is known today for its substantial liquefied natural gas project, urea and ammonia plant and its industrial zone ”

with a major extension of the road network and infrastructure specific to tourism. The Al Saleel Nature Reserve is an important project in eco-diversity, which contributes to maintaining the regional ecological balance and promotes sustainable tourism.

The South Sharqiyah Governorate is home to major economic projects, including LNG plants, a urea-ammonia smelter and the Industrial Estate of Sur, a hub for small and medium industries.

With a population of 188,032 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments and 295,603 in the July 2016 statistics

of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the governorate's Municipal Council has 16 representative members.

The North Sharqiyah Governorate

The North Sharqiyah Governorate overlooks the inner flanks of the Eastern Hajar mountain range. It shares borders with the governorate of Muscat to the north, the Dakhiliyah Governorate to the west and the South Sharqiyah Governorate to the east and south.

North Sharqiyah's six wilayats are Ibra, the main centre, Mudhaibi,

Where water and land
embrace - Wilayat
Dima wa'l Ta'een



“ The Special Economic Zone in Al-Duqm has become a global economic interface, recognised as one of the most important projects in the governorate of Al-Wusta ”

Bidiyah, Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid and Dima wa'l Ta'een.

With a population of 162,482 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 264,452 in the July 2016 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Governorate's Municipal Council has 16 representative members.

North Sharqiyah has benefited from substantial development projects, spread over a range of public services, including health, education, road infrastructure, water supply, as well as tourism projects.

The Dhahirah Governorate

The Dhahirah Governorate is

Ibri is celebrating an economic upswing



richly endowed with agricultural resources, history and tourist potential, and during the years of Oman's modern Renaissance it has achieved impressive development in every sphere. It consists of a semi-desert plain which slopes down southwards from the Western Hajar range towards the desert of the Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter,



which borders its western side. The mountain of Jabal al Kawr marks its eastern boundary with the Dakhiliyah Governorate, while the Wusta Governorate lies to the south.

The Dhahirah Governorate has three wilayats – Ibri (the main wilayat), Yanqul and Dhank – and a 2010 population of 151,664, according to the Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, which had grown to 203,239 in the July 2016 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Its most distinctive features include a high level of agricultural production and a location at the crossroads of the centuries-old trans-Arabian caravan routes. It also has several oil and gas fields and has benefited liberally from substantial development projects.

Its Municipal Council has 10 members.

The Wusta Governorate

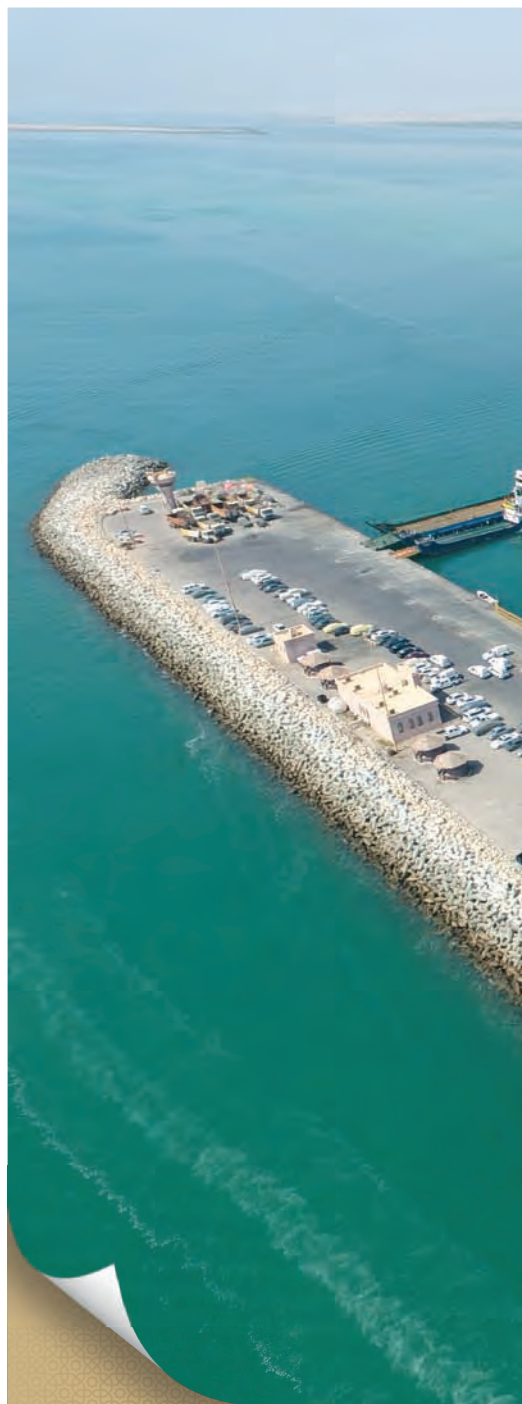
The Wusta Governorate lies to the south of the Dakhiliyah and Dhahirah Governorates. It overlooks the Arabian Sea to the east and borders the desert of the Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter, to the west and the Dhofar Governorate to the south. Its most distinctive features include a large number of oil and gas fields and a temperate climate throughout the year.

Al Wusta comprises four wilayats – Haima (the main hub), Mahawt, Duqm and al Jazer – and had a population in 2010 of 42,111, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, which had risen to 43,386 by July 2016, per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has eight members.

Duqm's Special Economic Zone (SEZAD) is one of the governorate's most ambitious projects. It is a multi-purpose economic interface of global proportions and key regional hub, assisted by Duqm's strategic geopolitical aspect, open to the Arabian Sea. Duqm has benefited significantly from development in recent years and now occupies a special position on the global investment map, given its competitive edge and the many incentives and facilities afforded investors.

The dry dock complex in the Duqm Economic Zone, meanwhile, reflects the government's strategy to develop Al Wusta Governorate into becoming a major contributor to the national economy and promoter of the Sultanate's standing internationally.

In addition to this complex, many projects of water, electricity, roads, fishing jetties and health and educational services have been introduced.



Al-Jazer Port. Maritime fishing ports are the cornerstone of all plans to develop the national fishing resources

“ Wadi Samail is the broad valley that connects the city of Muscat on the coast with the interior wilayat of Izki and Nizwa ”





The gorgeous, water-rich valley of Wadi al Hoqain



HISTORY

History and Oman's contribution to civilisation

Over its long history, Oman has been something of a cross-cultural entrepot, an outward-looking and highly evolved society interacting freely with other civilisations both at home and on its explorations overseas. It made major contributions along the way, during times of naval supremacy or extensive political influence. Oman had early links to China, and later to the United States, Britain, France and other major powers, and its ambassadors were received with respect in imperial capitals many centuries ago.

Oman's exchanges with the early civilisations of the Orient – with China, India and Mesopotamia – and of the East Mediterranean, Nile Valley and North Africa, are well documented in scholarly studies. Less widely known is the role it played in the propagation of Islam, as early as the lifetime of the Prophet himself. This powerful, constructive contribution had far greater reach than is generally acknowledged outside of specialist or scholarly quarters.

Records compiled and intensively studied in recent decades reveal Oman's history to be an unbroken continuum over many millennia, its fortunes ebbing and waning cyclically. The arrival of the Ya'aruba in 1624 drove the Portuguese from the coasts of Oman, the Persian Gulf

and Indian Ocean. When just over a century later, in 1744, the Al Busaidis swept to power under the charismatic leadership of Imam Ahmed bin Said, a period of stability, internal cohesion and growing regional influence commenced which has lasted for almost three hundred years down to the reign of the present inspirational leader, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. For almost all of this time Oman has remained in the ranks of the regionally powerful and influential. There were some episodes of internal failure or weakness that brought isolation in their wake, often exacerbated by geopolitical events. The final death throes of tribal dissension were ushered in on 23 July 1970 and a new era was born in Oman.

The names of Oman

There is no prevailing viewpoint as to the origin of the name 'Oman', some tracing it to 'Uman of the Al-Qahtani tribe, others to a linguistic derivation meaning 'staying' or 'settling'. Ibn al-Qabi writes: "Oman means those who occupy a place, as in the adjective a'amen, or amoun i.e. a settled man. From this was derived Oman." He continues: "If a man is a'amen, this means he settled in Oman." Al-Zujjaji, meanwhile, says Oman was named after Oman bin Ibrahim Al-Khalil, while Ibn Kalbi says it was after Oman bin Siba' bin Yaghthan bin Ibrahim Khalil Al-Rahman "because it was he who built the city of Oman."

“ The Al Busaidi dynasty managed over its 267 year reign to re-establish Oman as a strong and influential regional power ”

The Azd are said to have called Oman 'Omana' because they originated from a valley in Maarib which went by that name and which resembled their new home. Yalainous was one of the earliest Roman historians to mention Oman, in the first century of the Christian era. A century later, the name recurs in Ptolemy. A. Grohmann in the 1936 Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, Leiden) was of the view that the Omana described by these two historians was in fact Sohar, the predominant regional economic centre of the Classical Age.

Oman has been identified by other names, most extensively 'Magan', by which the Sumerians and Mesopotamians referred to it. The name may contain an allusion to

the shipbuilding industry for which Oman was noted. In cuneiform inscriptions a magan was a type of ship's hull, known to the Persians as a mezon, and deriving from a root (mazan), meaning clouds or abundantly flowing waters.

Arab sources referred to Oman as an independent territory. Al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal concurred that Oman was "a sovereign land with a sovereign people."

Ibn Khaldun had the clearest definition of all, describing Oman as one of a group of Arab districts in the Arabian Peninsula which had emerged as independent states, viz. Yemen, the Hijaz, Hadhramawt, Shihr and Oman, ruled separately as sovereign territories.



An Omani manuscript with exquisite embellishment holds prized position in the national archive

“Oman has been a prominent contributor to the Islamic d’awa and participated in the great territorial and maritime conquests, especially in Iraq, Persia and Sind”

Contribution to the propagation of Islam:

The arrival of Islam marked an important turning point in the history for Oman. The population responded voluntarily and peacefully to the invitation of the Prophet Muhammad to join the community of the faithful, and went on to play a leading role in the consolidation of the faith and promotion of the banner of Islam in its journeys both East and West.

The collected accounts agree that Mazin bin Ghadhuba was the first Omani to travel to the city of Madinah to meet the Prophet, to whom he said, “O son of a good and blessed people! Allah has shown the path of righteousness to the people of Oman through your religion. I hail from a country where prosperity and sustenance abound.”

The Prophet Muhammad replied, “My religion is the religion of Islam. Allah shall double the prosperity of the people of Oman. May blessings and prosperity be granted to those who believe in me and have seen me; may blessings and prosperity be granted to those who believe in me without having seen me, and to those who haven’t seen those who have seen me. Allah shall increase the faith of the Omani people.”

Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet, who dispatched Amr Ibn al Aas to Oman’s two kings (Jaifer and Abd, sons of Al Julanda ibn al Mustakbir) advising them to embrace Islam. Oman responded positively



under the leadership of the sons of Al Julanda and has ever since become a strong fortress of Islam and helped in the religion’s propagation in many regions, particularly in east and central Africa.

The speech delivered by the Caliph Abu Bakr to the Omani delegation that travelled to Madinah under the leadership of `Abd bin Al Julanda after the death of Prophet Muhammad is an important record



that tells of the good character and hospitality of the Omani people and their adherence to Islam.

Oman played a leading role in the spread of Islamic civilisation to other parts of the world. Omanis participated in the Arab conquests by land and sea of Iraq, Persia, the Indus valley and other places.

Omanis took Islam to East Africa, China and ports in other parts of

Africa and Asia where they engaged in commerce. The Omani people are well known for their adherence to their religion and values. This has created strong bonds between the people, which they are dedicated to preserving.

Rule of the Nabhan

Omani historians are agreed that the Bani Nabhan ruled for a combined five hundred years, spread

Nakhal Fort has borne witness to some of the finest moments in Omani history and to their impact on human civilisation

over two separate periods. The first of these two, or the First Nabhan Period, lasted four hundred years, from the death of Imam Abi Jaber Moussa bin Abi Al-Maali Moussa bin Najad in 549 AH/1154 AD to the defeat of Suleiman bin Suleiman bin Mudhaffar Al-Nabhani, the celebrated poet king, and swearing in of Muhammad bin Ismail as Imam of Oman in 906 AH/1500 AD. What followed was a violent succession of wars and invasions waged against the Bani Nabhan from within and without the country's borders, with intermittent periods of government by the Imamate.

The second or Later Nabhan Period, which lasted from 906 to 1034 AH/1500 to 1624 AD, featured a succession of failed imams and was beset by power struggles among the Bani Nabhan themselves, and between the Nabhan and several other tribes in a jostle for power.

For portions of their rule, the Nabhan were confined in their influence to the interior of the territory, and at their peak they held sway as far as the coast. At yet other times dissident tribesmen managed to secede from Nabhan control by retiring to the coastal regions.

The Yarubis and the expulsion of the Portuguese

By 1507, the Portuguese had taken control of large sections of the Omani coastline after having faced strong resistance from the Omanis. In spite of the difficult domestic

Al Hazm fort.. one of the most handsome and well-appointed fortresses in Oman, was built in the era of the Ya'araba



“ Omani historians agree that the
Bani Nabhan rule in Oman lasted for
five hundred years, spread over two periods ”



☞ The reign of the Imam Ahmed bin Said, who was governor of Sohar and its environs in 1744, represented an era of great change in Oman ☞

political conditions that prevailed at the time, the Portuguese and other invaders were unable to go further inland from certain coastal areas, and the Omani interior remained a stronghold from which resistance continued. Resistance campaigns were also launched from coastal areas such as Sohar. This was until the Omanis finally put an end to the Portuguese occupation altogether, which had lasted approximately one hundred and fifty years.

The appointment of Nassir bin Murshid as Imam of Oman in 1624 marked the beginning of Ya`rubi rule. Imam Nassir bin Murshid unified the country under his leadership, and so the country was united for the first time after many years of disorder. He established a strong navy which curtailed Portuguese influence and liberated some coastal cities from their grip. His successor Sultan bin Saif continued this important mission, expelling the Portuguese from all over the country, finally liberating Muscat in 1650. This spelled the demise of Portuguese influence in the Gulf region. The Omanis pursued the Portuguese all the way to the coasts of India and East Africa.

Al Busaid: The revival of Oman's ancient glory and the establishment of a modern state

The swearing in of Imam Ahmed bin Said, who was Wali of Sohar, in 1744 as ruler of Oman ushered in a new era in the history of the country,

an era that has passed through many stages of its process up to the present day, a span of more than two hundred and sixty seven years. The selection of the Imam was promoted by an influential stratum of society, who appreciated the positions he had taken and recognised in him the quality of courage that had ensured the successful dispatch of an attempted Persian invasion of Oman.

During the reign of Imam Ahmed bin Said, Oman had for the first time in its history a central government. Imam Ahmed was able to unify the warring tribes and took the steps necessary to lay the foundations for a modern state. This involved establishing an armed force to address the defence needs of Oman, modernising commercial activities and developing a naval fleet. During the reign of Imam Ahmed, Muscat maintained its position as one of the most important trading cities in the region. The Port of Muscat became a major port on the European trade routes. Imam Ahmed revived Oman's prominent role in the region. On one occasion, Imam Ahmed sent a 100-boat force led by the naval cruiser Al Rahmani in 1775 to the northern sector of the Gulf to break a siege set by the Persians around the Iraqi city of Basra in response to the call of the Wali of Baghdad.

Arab and European historians agree that a number of factors led to the Omanis playing a leading role in the region. The most significant of these factors was Oman's legacy

of centuries of maritime trade, the country's geographical location, and the unique heritage, coupled with the stability that prevailed in Oman at a time when the rest of the Gulf region was gripped by chaos and continuous instability. Imam Ahmed bin Said was a great asset to the nation. He commanded a great degree of self-discipline, steadfastness and the ability to make the right decision at the right time. Imam Ahmed gained the respect of European powers, and their confidence in his leadership attracted foreigners and encouraged them to set up commercial agencies in Omani cities, particularly in Muscat which in 1790 became "one of the most important cities in Asia" according to a report drafted by the British East India Company.

Imam Ahmed bin Said died in 1189 AH/1775 AD in Rustaq, the capital of Oman at that time. He was succeeded by a number of imams and sultans of the Al Busaid Dynasty. The capital city was moved from Rustaq to Muscat by Hamad, the grandson of Imam Ahmed bin Said. He ruled from 1193 AH/1779 AD to 1207 AH/1792 AD. Muscat has remained the capital of Oman until the present day.

The Omani people have a deep sense of belonging to their land, and a keen awareness of the need for unity in order to confront any challenges the country may face. This sense of unity has been a consistent feature of the Omani national identity throughout the history of Oman. The Al Busaid family's

continuous leadership since the mid-18th century until now has played a significant role in contributing to national unity, especially during the reign of Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1807-1856), and during the current reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the builder of Oman's Modern Renaissance.

Although periods of weakness occurred from time to time, the rule of the Al Busaid Dynasty has yielded many great achievements, notably the elimination of foreign occupation and the establishment of an empire which extended to many parts of East Africa during the first half of the 19th century. This empire had a strong maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, leading to the fostering of balanced political relations with major world powers such as Britain, France and the United States. During that time, many domestic and regional challenges were overcome and solid foundations for balanced regional and international relations were established. This enabled the Sultanate to protect its national interests and emerge as a prosperous country which ensures the right of all its people to equal citizenship. With Oman's unity remaining intact as it had throughout its history, the nation has revived its former glory and continued to make a contribution to the advancement of human civilisation.



Wilayat Samail, where palm oases intersperse with farms along the valley floor





Qaboos – the Path of Peace



Qaboos – the Path of Peace

The dawn that brightened the skies of Oman on 23 July 1970 may have seemed like any other, but that Thursday was anything but an ordinary day. In time its anniversary would become a symbol of rebirth, an annual reminder of a change of course that, now almost half a century on, has brought the Sultanate to where it is today as a stable, peaceful, thriving and influential modern state.

What vision propelled His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to rewrite the narrative of his country? An ambitious, many would have said near-impossible, vision of a nation in full command of its destiny, using the vast potential of its human and natural resources. Along with the country's pressing national priorities, His Majesty also identified a number of very specific strategies that would lead to their resolution. The journey began with small steps, given that Oman lagged so far behind in its regional and international context at the time. It was deliberate, not without obstacles, but always guided by that vision – and it became a genuine modern Renaissance.

A central imperative for His Majesty in creating the infrastructure for Oman's development was the consolidation of national unity, along with the extension of state sovereignty over the entire territory of the country. Security and stability, he realised,

would inspire a spirit of solidarity and cohesion among Omanis and stitch that spirit into the fabric of Omani society.

Oman's success was achieved primarily by the grace of God, and then by the vision and resolute will of His Majesty, who recognised the symbolic depth and significance of naming the country, on 9 August 1970, the Sultanate of Oman. Such symbolism helped galvanise the spirit of national unity that would set the country on course to achieve its full potential, taking it forward to a brighter future.

The pioneering objective of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, as leader of Oman's modern Renaissance, was nation-building – the nation being represented by the people, the state and society and founded on the principle of security as a basis for prosperity and progress. To restore Oman to its rightful and indeed glorious position among nations is the goal that has occupied His Majesty since 1970. It is this that has occupied his time and his leadership gifts to ensure that the foundation is laid correctly, that the governance built on that foundation is enlightened and adequate to meet the demands of the age and that the structures of the modern Omani state are solid, equitable and well managed.

“ His Majesty has devoted almost half a century to rebuilding the State on a strong and democratic foundation grounded in the rule of law. It is on this platform that all of the institutions of the modern Renaissance have been erected ”



While the process of construction and reconstruction progressed internally, impacting every area of life for every Omani, the Sultanate never hesitated in extending the hand of peace to its brothers and friends around the world. Nor was the desire for peace and stability ever tainted by vested interests in the execution of Muscat's foreign policy. The Omani identity has strong and deep ties to tradition and is an authentic expression of the country's Islamic and Arab heritage. Its values are the values of an ancient civilisation still vigorous today, and they are guided by the sophisticated world view espoused and promoted by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. His aspirations for

Oman were and are ambitious and comprehensive. They seek the revival of the finest traditions of Omani civilisation and the restoration of its glory, and they view this as being best achieved through the Omani people's strong connection with, and loyalty to, their land and to its place among nations.

Sultan Qaboos identified these imperatives when he launched the nation-building project in 1970. On the Sultanate's second National Day, on 18 November 1972, he restated his convictions regarding Oman's status with the world beyond its borders, *"Our foreign policy may be summarised in the following way:*

Driving His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' vision of modern Oman is a desire that Omanis themselves take responsibility for reviving the finest chapters of their proud and ancient culture

“ The Sultanate has managed to earn the respect and admiration of the international community, which supports its conciliation-based endeavours in the region and internationally ”

1. *The maintenance of good relations with our neighbours, and a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of all states.*
2. *The strengthening of our relations with the Arab countries and establishment of friendly relations with countries around the world.*
3. *Solidarity with the Arab cause in the international context.*
4. *Solidarity with our African brethren and support for them in their struggle for freedom and independence. Oman rejects the policy of apartheid practised by the South African government and the government of Rhodesia.*
5. *As developing countries, we are committed to the path shared by the countries of the Third World.”*

Thus Omani diplomacy has been - and continues to be - guided by a desire to build bridges of friendship and maintain cordial, equitable relations with peace-loving nations, to honour international conventions and the principles of the United Nations, to seek the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means, and to serve and protect global security and stability. These are the core and consistent values of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, as indeed they represent the highest emanation of the peace-loving and generous Omani character. In all of the events that the region and the world have experienced over the last half century, Oman's appraisal has always been prudent and enlightened, never permitting events, even in their moments of greatest extremity, to

impair its commitment to a firm yet non-belligerent response.

The wisdom and balance of Oman's foreign policy is recognised worldwide. Its effectiveness is well established, a consequence of the Sultanate's diplomatic input at crucial junctures in successive tense standoffs. Its openness to the world has led Oman to participate actively in world events and in the processes of international institutions of both political and cultural purpose. Meanwhile, development and construction continue apace inside the Sultanate, paralleling its active foreign policy, taking advantage of its gains and enabling Oman to play an effective role in addressing external issues and crises with an enlightened yet bold approach to negotiation and decision-making.

Sultan Qaboos outlined the principles of what would be Oman's modern Renaissance and its foreign policy ethos in his inaugural address to the nation on that extraordinary day in July 1970. Pledging to work with energy and urgency to create a better and happier future for the Omani people, he said: *“In the past, Oman was a powerful and much celebrated nation. Only our hard and dedicated work can bring back the glory of our past and mark us out for distinction in the Arab world. I will take the legal steps to gain recognition from friendly foreign countries. I am also looking forward to the immediate support and cooperation of our neighbours and to a long continuous dialogue between us to ensure a better future for our region”.*

His Majesty more than honoured this pledge, as indeed he has honoured every pledge he made to his people. This was his first step towards ending the Sultanate's isolation from its fellow states in the region and around the world. Soon to follow was the first of Oman's Friendship Delegations, dispatched on a mission of goodwill to Arab capitals to introduce the new, reborn Oman and explain the fundamental principles on which Omani foreign policy would revolve. The delegation was received warmly at every destination and earned for the Sultanate the support it needed in its bid for accession to the League of Arab States, as well as to other international organisations and institutions.

Before long, Oman was earning the growing respect and admiration of the international community, and was already extending its influence in regional and international affairs. On 29 September 1971 the Sultanate joined the League of Arab States. A few days later, on 7 October 1971, a major step away from its long isolation was achieved when it was welcomed as a member of the United Nations, when its proud flag took its place alongside the flags of other free and independent nations. Oman could now make a positive contribution to the attainment of peace in the world by the preferred process of international cooperation and understanding.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos attends the 1981 GCC summit in Riyadh alongside his Gulf counterparts



Qaboos – the Path of Peace



His Majesty addresses
the Sultanate's Ninth
National Day on 18
November 1979

The Sultanate won admission to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 10 February 1972, and went on to apply and accede to many international organisations, agencies and associations, to which it has made valuable and effective contributions over the years.

The Sultanate was a founding member of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the GCC, which was established in 1981, after it had already served as an important staging post in the earliest consultations that led to the founding of the Council. On 25 November 1976 the Sultanate hosted the fourth session of the Ministerial Council, comprising

the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the GCC member states. The meeting explored pathways to achieving closer cooperation between the governments and peoples of the Arab Gulf region with a view to protecting the region's security and stability. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos addressed the gathering and emphasised the urgent need for the countries of the region to build, by mutual agreement, strong and solid foundations on which they might collaborate in all fields to maximise development and progress and enhance the welfare of their peoples.

From that date, the energy of Oman's diplomatic efforts has not abated. Muscat has sought the

perfection of a regional formula for cooperation, relayed again and again its call for the implementation of a precise structural framework for regional cooperation which would be the product of a gradual process of building and aggregating specialist bodies in such areas as industrial development.

To reach a consensus in the defence and political spheres was a pivotal concern of His Majesty in his enthusiasm for the establishment of the GCC, and he confirmed as much in his address delivered on the Sultanate's 9th National Day on 18 November 1979, saying that *“the geographical, or political, importance of the Gulf as a region underscores the need for full cooperation between our countries... Consultation in relation to political and security issues is now very important for the stability of the region and if we are to remain invulnerable in the face of any and all foreign interventions.”*

At a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait in Riyadh in February 1981, the creation of what would be known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was formally tabled. The agreement of the respective leaders of the proposed member states was delivered to a meeting three months later in Abu Dhabi, on 26 May 1981. His Majesty addressed this meeting and again stressed *“the need to focus the bulk of our attention and efforts on the security and stability of our region if we are to provide a favourable climate for cooperation between our countries.”*

Since the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Sultanate has been active in promoting cooperation and integration among GCC member states, seeing the effort as valuable insofar as it responds to the aspirations of the countries and peoples of the GCC area, and to their mutually beneficial interests. Common purpose will tend in practical terms towards the goal of genuine Gulf citizenship and to the expansion of areas of collaboration and coordination between GCC states and their neighbours, including the Republic of Yemen and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is the path to stability, tranquillity and prosperity for these countries and for their citizens.

In another departure, the Sultanate has been working diligently to see the establishment of a trading bloc grouping together the nations of the Indian Ocean rim, binding the peoples of this vast littoral into an influential economic force. In order to support sustained growth and balanced development in the Member States and find common ground for regional economic cooperation, the Sultanate, in March 1997, contributed to the establishment of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Oman has sought to fulfil all of its duties to the fullest extent and within the context of the international organisations and bodies of which it is a member, in pursuit of such factors as would be favourable to development and to regional and international peace and security. Its endeavours have earned it the confidence and respect of all those with whom it has

“ Oman sees its borders with neighbouring countries as bridges of amity and promotes positive and mutually beneficial cooperation with all peoples of the region at every opportunity ”

His Majesty the Sultan and his late counterpart, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, HM King Fahd bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, sign the international boundary demarcation agreement for their respective countries

engaged. All has been conducted in a climate of peaceful exchange, the manner of negotiation favoured by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, with a view to establishing and maintaining cordial and close relations with all peace-loving countries, both Arab and those further afield. The manner of its approach is to seek conduits that serve mutual interests, and to support national development efforts.

Because the negotiating philosophy of the Sultanate is pragmatic in essence, this itself being the product of Oman's long external relations experience and the positive interactions for which it is widely acknowledged, the Sultanate has been able to contribute extensively

and practically to the art of effective dialogue with neighbours and partners. Sultan Qaboos has more than four and a half decades of leadership experience resolving conflicts of every kind. His particular philosophy, in the matter of border demarcation, revolves on the civilised principle of 'do no harm, no harm done.' In Oman's own experience, where His Majesty's negotiating style prevailed, this has transformed borders into bridges of human interaction and into contact points for neighbours and partners, where shared interests and mutual benefit are served equally and peaceably.

The Sultanate signed a border demarcation agreement with Saudi Arabia at Hafr Al-Batin on 21 March





1990. Five years later, in July 1995, the final maps delineating the international boundary between the two countries were exchanged, sealing the final practical details in the process.

On 1 October 1992 the Sultanate signed a similar agreement in Sanaa with the Yemen Arab Republic. The Sanaa Convention on the demarcation of the common border between the two countries was the outcome of border negotiations that had begun between the two countries in 1980 and which were accelerated following the announcement of the unification of Yemen in May 1990. The final maps of the shared borders were jointly signed on 27 May 1997.

To the north, the culmination of discussions with the United Arab Emirates on its border with Oman was the signing on 22 July 2008 of the final lists of coordinates and maps covering the region extending eastwards from Al-Aqaidat to Al-Dara on the Arabian Gulf.

The stretch running from Umm al-Zomoul to east of Al-Aqaidat was redrawn under the updated agreement signed between the two countries at Sohar on 1 May 1999. On the following day, 2 May 1999, addenda were signed covering the definition and application of executive procedures of the agreement in respect of powers assigned to each side and the installations of the

His Majesty the Sultan and his late counterpart, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, President of the United Arab Emirates, sign supplements to the border demarcation agreement between their two countries

respective parties along the road from Umm al-Zomoul to east of Al-Aqidat in the area shared with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In 2003 the Sultanate and the United Arab Emirates ratified the agreement and on 24 May 2005 detailed maps of the border region agreement covering the section between Al-Aqidat and Umm al-Zomoul were signed in Muscat.

The Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan agreed on 12 June 2000 on a demarcation of the maritime border between the two states, and on 26 May 2015 a similar agreement was concluded with the Islamic Republic of Iran covering the Sea of Oman.

These agreements are the embodiment of the diplomatic principles espoused by Oman. The Omani approach is grounded in the well-established premises and constants that underlie its foreign policy. It views Oman's borders with neighbouring countries and regions as 'goodwill bridges', fostering positive interactions and mutually beneficial exchanges between the inhabitants of the region.

Peaceful intent and evolved language

Peaceful intent is at the heart of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' approach to political dialogue in all its expressions, as indeed it has been from the outset of the Renaissance. It is the absolute conviction of Sultan Qaboos that the processes of national construction and development are best achieved

in an atmosphere in which specific needs appropriate to place, region or international arena, are met.

The peace mission, as perceived by His Majesty, comes from a place where basic rights are stoutly defended, dignity and faith preserved, and a hand of tolerance and understanding extended, in a world anxious to find sustainable harmony among peoples.

Addressing these sentiments on Oman's 8th National Day on 18 November 1978, Sultan Qaboos had these words to say: *"We have demonstrated without doubt that we support and that we will continue to support all sincere initiatives aimed at ensuring a lasting and just peace in the Middle East."*

Oman had shown its willingness, His Majesty went on, *"to respond warmly to all who are prepared to offer us their friendship based on mutual respect and goodwill"*. By this manner, the Sultanate has developed and maintained strong relationships with all nations, always seeking to ensure that the language of dialogue remains evolved when dealing with difference, when resolving outstanding issues between countries, and always with the understanding that interference in the affairs of another state is not acceptable.

A concrete expression of this conviction was the Sultanate's refusal to boycott Egypt after it signed the Camp David Accords on 17 September 1978. The boycott had been adopted by all Arab states with the exception of Oman, which tested the proposition with the same rigour as it

tests all of its foreign policy decisions. What it saw was a prospect in which, realistically and in the long term interests of the Arab region, Egypt could not be excluded from its position as a leading actor on the Arab, regional and international stage.

A year later, on the Sultanate’s 9th National Day (18 November 1979), His Majesty declared unambiguously that Oman would support any constructive initiative made by Arab or other committed leaders that might lead to the achievement of the goal of reintegrating Egypt, given that the discord between Arab countries was generating further threats to the region.

The soundness of Oman’s position was borne out by subsequent events, when all parties had arrived at the view that the Omani position was the one most likely to mitigate bloodshed, decelerate the arms race and reduce the threat of war, with payoffs for the peoples of the region in more generous welfare and more sustainable development in a safer future.

The Sultanate has remained on good terms with the Islamic Republic of Iran ever since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, managing to maintain its bilateral relations with both Iran and the Republic of Iraq throughout the 8-year-long Iran-Iraq war. The Sultanate made valiant efforts to bring the war to an end, and Muscat provided the forum where ultimately a convergence of views was reached between the parties that led to the ceasefire on 8 August 1988.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, Oman’s position was

characteristically clear. While the Sultanate condemned in an official statement the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and demanded that Iraq withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all Kuwaiti territory and restore the latter’s sovereignty, it was nevertheless the only Gulf state that maintained diplomatic relations with Iraq, as indeed it appeared to be the only Arab country to have taken a sober look at the storm clouds looming on the horizon following the Iraqi invasion and to have done everything in its power to avert the outbreak of a wider war.

His Majesty’s approach is that of a steady arbitrator, unmoved by adversity or challenge, grounded in the conscious and realistic assessment of the issues involved. Its focus is on the larger perspective, a perspective that is unwavering and comprehensive and that is immune to the blow and sway of heated emotions.

The Sultanate’s 20th National Day, on 18 November 1990, was a major anniversary. In his address to the nation, His Majesty was able to look back on two decades of consistently impartial foreign policy, a policy that from the outset of the Renaissance had built incrementally on steadily improving relations with countries and peoples across the world. Oman would, His Majesty declared, *“abide by this policy,”* for it was based on a belief in *“the principles of peaceful coexistence among all nations and peoples, respect for the rights associated with national sovereignty ... good relations between neighbouring countries ... and non-*

“ It is a matter of pride to the Sultanate that its policy platform has remained constant, irrespective of the challenges and circumstances faced by the region ”

interference in the internal affairs of others.”

“All of our relations are conducted in accordance with these principles. We extend the hand of friendship and cooperation to all, for we are keen to play a constructive role in international affairs and we are always seeking to facilitate peaceful solutions to the problems that arise between nations.”

As the crisis in Kuwait deepened, Sultan Qaboos held firmly to his conviction that *“a peaceful solution to the crisis in the Gulf region based on international resolutions and the restoration of Kuwait’s legitimate authority”* had to be found. He continued to pursue avenues that might lead to a negotiated settlement, *“so that the peoples of the region might be offered the opportunity to devote their energies to construction and development in a climate of brotherhood, harmony and mutual trust; that the malignancy of war and destruction be banished once and for all and the region once again blessed with security and stability.”*

To avert all-out war, it was imperative that Iraqi forces withdraw from Kuwait, and so Oman was one of the earliest countries to assemble a force to participate in the liberation of Kuwait.

One of the consequences of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was the adoption by the UN Security Council of devastating economic sanctions that deprived the Iraqis of food and medicine, as well as of every product of progress and technology introduced during the final decade of the last century.

The Sultanate repeatedly sought the means to alleviate the plight of the Iraqi people and reduce the impact of the economic embargo, contributing through its non-permanent membership of the Security Council to the drafting of the oil-for-food arrangement, which represented a significant benefit to the Iraqi people.

It is a matter of pride to the Sultanate that its positions and policies are not distracted by the many challenges and circumstances that confront our region. Oman’s message to the world derives from its long history of human interaction, when Oman was exploring unknown worlds by sea and trading with distant cultures and continents.

At a time when war and destruction threaten the Arab and Islamic world at every turn, when the drums of war beat constantly and when those who would stir up trouble are relentlessly at work, the Sultanate of Oman refuses to engage with the escalation, instead confining its political input to its customary diplomacy devoid of self-interest, coupled with a singleminded determination to see the parties turn aside from bloodshed, to respect the will of the people and return to stability and peace.

One major success of this approach was the careful early alignments that would ultimately develop into the historic agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the major powers on the Iranian nuclear issue. By encouraging and facilitating dialogue between the parties, the Sultanate contributed to the convergence of views between the two sides. From

its hosting, on 9 November 2014, of sensitive negotiations between the P5 +1 and Iran, Oman has regularly mediated efforts to end outstanding differences, so as to spare the region and the world the disastrous alternative of war.

The agreement reached was a historic event in every sense of the word. Oman reaffirmed its diplomatic credentials, bringing it new respect for its role in edging the two sides closer to agreement. The story of the Iran nuclear deal engaged the collective founding principles of the modern Renaissance, the tolerance and understanding that promote peaceful dialogue as the universal mechanism for resolving problems obstructing the attainment

of major humanitarian objectives. When international institutions are driven by these objectives, humanity may be assured that its future is safe and secure within a mutually beneficial system that respects the rights of all parties and interests.

The Sultanate continues its steady yet unostentatious efforts to promote the peaceful resolution of issues confronting the region, encouraging the parties involved to sit together and choose options that respect the sovereignty of states and the welfare of their respective peoples through participation, justice and equality. Oman is currently focused on bringing success to the Yemeni negotiations, seeking the convergence of views

By reviving the dialogue between the parties concerned, the Sultanate was able to prepare the ground for the historic nuclear agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the great powers



Qaboos – the Path of Peace



The Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs receives the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Yemen

among opposing parties to the conflict that is most likely to defuse the tensions fuelling the war in Yemen. The Sultanate is fortunate in this respect in enjoying the confidence of all of the parties involved.

Oman's perspective on the Yemeni crisis has been unequivocal from the outset. It abhors bloodshed and finds the loss of life on both sides of the divide intolerable. It has made clear to the conflicting parties that its doors are open; it has taken part in numerous meetings to press for negotiations; and it has attempted repeatedly to encourage the quest for a consensus that would bring an end to the war. Muscat has offered the parties at war the facility of a neutral haven where

they might meet to discuss options in the language of understanding and dialogue.

Sultan Qaboos saw the Yemeni negotiations, initiated in Muscat in early August 2015 and resumed in Kuwait on 21 April 2016, as a particular opportunity to make progress. His Majesty was propelled in his endeavour by an acute awareness of the impact the conflict was having on Yemen, and the certainty that every delay in bringing peace to Yemen will extend the damage into future decades. Generations will suffer from the human and environmental devastation wrought by this war, which is also destroying vital infrastructure. And that is not to count the cost of the

“ The Sultanate helped lay the first building block in the historic agreement signed between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the great powers on the Iranian nuclear issue, encouraging a process of dialogue between the parties ”



economic, security and socio-political consequences affecting Yemen in particular, but also the Arab and regional context generally. This conflict is one of the most damaging to affect the Middle East, and it is undermining the goal of sustainable development that could offer the citizens of the region's countries a future of hope; for the arming and re-arming of nations can only generate the grounds for permanent tensions.

The Sultanate has implemented the directives of His Majesty in helping to obtain the release of a number of hostages or persons missing in the war zones. It has also proposed several initiatives to save the lives of citizens in Yemen, including the war wounded,

and arranged for their medical treatment. Some have been referred for treatment to hospitals in the Sultanate, and they have been selected without distinction with regard to affiliation, in the spirit of good neighbourliness and brotherly cooperation that are characteristic of Omani diplomacy.

As regards Oman's sister state, Syria, at present engulfed in bloodshed and destruction, Oman has effected its customary diplomatic intervention in an attempt to bring resolution to the situation through low profile meetings unnoticed in the media. Its objective as always is to bring as many parties as possible to the table outside of the media frenzy, and to edge them towards finding a way out of the crisis.

The Sultanate is an important venue for the consultative work of the constituent body drafting a constitution for Libya

“ The Sultanate has earned a reputation for promoting peace, harmony and universal brotherhood that is a genuine source of national pride ”

Oman has examined closely all of the possibilities that could facilitate a peaceful solution, working closely with multiple parties who share the common denominator of serious intent to find a way out of the current dilemma, to close one more Arab tragedy where the lives of innocent civilians are being lost or irretrievably damaged daily.

The Sultanate was a significant home from home for the consultations that preceded the drafting of a Libyan constitution. From 18 March 2016, Salalah was the venue for a three-week series of sessions by the 32-member constituent body that completed the draft, during which time the Sultanate provided the appropriate ambience for dialogue and a peaceful healing of the divisions between Libyan factions. The happy culmination of this endeavour was the announcement of the draft Libyan Constitution, to be presented to the Libyan people for their approval by means of a referendum.

These recent successes confirm, if confirmation were needed, the unique status of the Sultanate as an oasis of neutrality, safety and peace in fraught situations, as a neutral broker that never interferes in the work of participants, that has no vested agenda or hidden purpose, that does not dictate outcomes or hold any special interest beyond its concern for the unfortunate victims of conflict.

The international reputation sustained through these initiatives by the Sultanate in its quiet promotion of peace, harmony and global brotherhood is a rightful source of

pride. In addition, Oman is a generous, below-the-radar benefactor of multiple humanitarian causes, in particular the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people. Indeed it views the Palestinian issue as a defining one for the Arab and Islamic brotherhood. The Sultanate has been an effective member of the community of nations from the beginning of the modern Renaissance, a leading player on the international stage, contributing positively and effectively to the promotion of a world in which justice might ultimately prevail.

In recognition of his substantial and many-faceted contributions to global peace and goodwill, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said was the first Arab head of state to be honoured with the National Council on US-Arab Relations International Peace Award in 1998. In 2007, he received the Peace Prize of the Russian International Association, as well as the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding. The following year saw him named Person of the Year for Justice and Humanity by the World Establishment for Press, Publishing and Distribution.

The Sultanate itself has won numerous international & global awards for its humanitarian contributions and enlightened policies. It regularly scores highly in reports published by international institutions and agencies based on a system of peace and security indicators. In 2007, the Sultanate won the Euro-Arab Cooperation Centre's Environmental Award in appreciation of its efforts in the service of peace, development and

the environment. The Sultanate was also ranked first for peace and stability among the countries of the Arab World and North Africa, as assessed by the Global Peace Index in 2008.

One of Oman's resounding success stories in bringing the message of peace worldwide is the RNOV Shabab Oman, the Royal Navy's sail training ship, which among many other awards for sail training, friendship among crews and long distance voyaging, has won the International Friendship Award no fewer than ten times.

In 2008, Oman was ranked first among Arab countries, third in Asia and

22nd of 121 countries globally in terms of its peace and security status, as determined by Britain's leading current affairs magazine, the Economist.

In summary, the Sultanate's foreign policy, pioneered and overseen by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, has clearly and publicly vindicated its ethical and pragmatic credentials through its regional, Arab and international impact. Today, after over four and a half decades of His Majesty's wise and astute leadership, Oman is facing the future with confidence and determination.

Oman is a skilled negotiator in securing the release of hostages and war victims





Institutions of the Modern State



Institutions of the Modern State

Basic Law of the State and its Organisational Structure

The objective of building a modern state and establishing the State of Modern Institutions has continued to be one of the basic pillars of the national development efforts of the past 45 years. The process has unfolded under the visionary oversight of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who laid down solid foundations for the modern state, so that this state might keep abreast with the age in the fields of science and knowledge, while at the same time preserving its identity and its originality.

The significance of what has been achieved in terms of the establishment and advancement of a modern State of Institutions was the result of a comprehensive vision, executed through careful planning and leadership. Citizenship was at all times based on equality between citizens, and the rule of law was a fundamental right extended to all citizens of the country.

This principle was ultimately enshrined in the Basic Law of the State, issued on 11 June 1996, and its amendments. The Basic Law is a charter that enunciates all fundamental aspects of the modern state, the

relations between its institutions and the responsibilities, rights, duties and tasks entrusted to the various organs of the State: administrative, executive, parliamentary and judicial. It ensures that each of these organs executes its national duties in a manner that supports harmony and integration between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman and its affiliated bodies: the Council of State and the Shura Council. It supports the independence of the judiciary in its mission to achieve justice by monitoring its performance to ensure that it does not deviate from the narrow path; as expressed through the work of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, the Public Authority for Consumer Protection, and other regulatory bodies which exercise their roles under the umbrella of this law. The associated obligations serve to secure and guarantee the basic freedoms of citizens, protected by law.

The Basic Law of the State

To advance the progression towards prosperity and stability and greater citizen participation in the development process, Royal Decree No. 101/96 was promulgated on 6 November 1996 instituting the Basic Law of the State. The Basic Law would

“ The Basic Law of the State was created as a legal framework to oversee the work of the various agencies of government, assigning and separating the powers that determine the authority of the respective State bodies ”

provide the foundation for a secure future for Oman and enhance its status internationally as it promoted its belief in peace and cooperation between nations and peoples.

The seven chapters and 81 articles of the Basic Law created the legal framework needed to define and oversee the work of the various State authorities, guiding individual agencies on the specific objectives and scope of their responsibilities. Meanwhile it provides maximum safeguards to protect the freedom, dignity and rights of the individual. It raises the status of law to the highest sovereign standards recognised internationally.

This historic document defines the system of government in the state and the principles guiding the state's policies at various levels. It specifies the public rights and duties of citizens and gives details of the provisions concerning the Head of State, the Council of Ministers and the judiciary. It also refers to the specialised councils, the financial affairs and the Council of Oman (*Majlis Oman*). While laws must be issued on the basis of provisions of the Basic Law of the State, these laws should not conflict with the Basic Law's provisions.

In confirmation of the participation of all members of society in the march of comprehensive development towards the desired goals of progress, some of the provisions of the Basic Law were amended for the first time under Royal Decree No 99/2011 on 19

October 2011. The new amendments granted legislative and audit powers and prerogatives to the State Council and the Consultation Council (*Majlis al Shura*) to ensure that both conform to the decisions issued by the Council of Ministers.

The amendments also granted the State Council and Consultation Council (*Majlis al Shura*) the right to amend all laws proposed by the Council of Ministers before submitting them to His Majesty the Sultan who issues them as enforced laws. The Basic Law's amendments grant the Consultation Council alone the prerogative to propose laws. They also define terms for membership at the State Council and Consultation Council, as well as the number of members in the two councils so that the number of the State Council's members shall not exceed the number of the Consultation Council members.

Firm foundations

The Basic Law of the State specified a set of firm foundations and specific principles for the State and the system of government. In its first article, this Basic Law states that the Sultanate of Oman is an independent, fully sovereign, Arab, Islamic State with its capital in the city of Muscat.

Article 2 states that the State's religion is Islam and that Sharia is the basis of legislation.

Part One of the Basic Law of the State also specifies the method and

“ The rule of law is the basis of the Sultanate’s system of government, dignifying the work of the judiciary, ensuring the impartiality of judges and safeguarding rights and freedoms ”

procedures for accession to power. Article 5 stipulates that the system of government is Royal Sultani rule that is hereditary through the male descendants of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan on condition that the one chosen as successor be a Muslim, judicious, of sound character and a legitimate son of two Omani Muslim parents.

Rule in the Sultanate is assumed in accordance with Article 9 on the basis of justice, consultation and equality. Citizens have a right to participate in public affairs in accordance with the law.

Article 59 stipulates that the sovereignty of law is the basis of government in the State and that the integrity, impartiality and probity of the judiciary shall be a guarantee of rights and freedoms.

The Basic Law of the State also guarantees the independence of the judiciary and makes interference in legal proceedings or the affairs of justice a crime punishable by law.

All aspects of Oman’s political system and the way it operates is defined by the Basic Law of the State in its Articles, which guarantee the rights and freedoms of the country’s citizens as well as the functions of the State’s authorities and institutions.

The Organisational Structure of the State

The State’s organisational structure consists of His Majesty the Sultan

and the councils, the institutions and authorities listed below:

First - His Majesty the Sultan:

His Majesty the Sultan is the Head of State, its paramount and final authority and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His Majesty’s person is inviolate. Respect for him is obligatory and his command must be obeyed. He is the symbol of national unity. He is the country’s guardian and defender. Article 42 of the Basic Law of the State defines His Majesty’s functions.

Second - the Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers assists His Majesty the Sultan in drawing up the general policy of the State. It is the institution entrusted with the implementation of the general policy of the State. In this context, the Council of Ministers undertakes the specific task of submitting recommendations to His Majesty the Sultan about economic, political, social, executive and administrative matters of concern to the government. This includes proposals of draft laws, Royal decrees, decisions aimed to promote the welfare of citizens or securing basic services to be rendered to them or raising the economic, health and cultural standards of citizens or determining the general objectives and policies of economic, social and administrative

development or proposing suitable means and procedures to implement these policies to guarantee the proper utilization of financial, economic and human resources.

In addition, the Council of Ministers discusses the development plans prepared by the departments concerned and submits them to His Majesty the Sultan for approval. It also discusses the proposals of ministries, each in their areas of discretion, and takes proper decisions on those proposals.

The Council of Ministers supervises the smooth operation of the State's administrative apparatus

and follows up the way it performs its duties and coordinates among its units. It is also entrusted with the general supervision of enforcement of laws, Royal Decrees, decisions, regulations, treaties, agreements and court rulings, in addition to other tasks or missions that are delegated to the Council by His Majesty the Sultan or tasks entrusted to it by the power of law. The Council of Ministers has a Secretariat General which helps it perform its functions.

Membership of the Council of Ministers, under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan, is as follows:

His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said,
Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers;

His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq al Said,
Minister of Heritage and Culture;

HE Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidi,
Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court;

HE General Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'mani,
Minister of the Royal Office;

HE Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Hareb al Busaidy,
Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs;

HE Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal bin Said al Busaidi,
Minister of Interior;

HE Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah,
Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs;

HE Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah bin Ali al Khalili,
Minister of Justice;

HE Darwish bin Ismail bin Ali al Balushi,
Minister Responsible for Financial Affairs;

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Abdullah al Salmi,
Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs;

HE Dr Mohammed bin Hamad bin Saif al Rumhy,
Minister of Oil and Gas;

HE Dr Rawiyah bint Saud bin Ahmed al Busaidiyah,

Minister of Higher Education;

HE Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidy,

Minister of Commerce and Industry;

HE Sheikh Saif bin Mohammed al Shabibi,

Minister of Housing;

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser al Bakri,

Minister of Manpower;

HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Obaid al Saidi,

Minister of Health;

HE Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibaniyah,

Minister of Education;

HE Sheikh Al Fahdl bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Harthy,

Secretary General of the Council of Ministers;

HE Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Shuhi,

Minister of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources;

HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Salem al Futaisi,

Minister of Transport and Communications;

HE Sheikh Khalid bin Omar bin Said al Marhoon,

Minister of Civil Service;

HE Sheikh Saad bin Mohammed bin Said al Mardhouf al Saadi,

Minister of Sports Affairs;

HE Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidi,

Minister of State and Governor of Muscat;

HE Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Sa'eedi,

Minister of Legal Affairs;

HE Dr Fuad bin Jaafar bin Mohammed al Sajwani,

Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries;

HE Mohammed bin Salim bin Said al Toobi,

Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs;

HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Said bin Saif al Kalbani,

Minister of Social Development;

HE Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidi,

Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar;

HE Ahmed bin Nasser bin Hamad al Mahrazi,

Minister of Tourism;

HE Dr Abdulmunim bin Mansoor bin Said al Hasani,

Minister of Information.

Three - The Defence Council:

On 28 December 1996, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree No 105/96 structuring the Defence Council under His Majesty's chairmanship and with 8 other people selected as members on grounds of their ranks or positions. The Defence Council meets at the direction of His Majesty the Sultan to discuss issues pertaining to the Sultanate's defence and security.

Four - The National Security Council (NSC):

The National Security Council (NSC) is responsible for reviewing all issues related to national security. It convenes under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan in cases deemed appropriate by Sultan Qaboos. Otherwise, the NSC convenes under the auspices of the Minister of the Royal Office. Its members are: The Inspector General of Police and Customs, the Head of the Internal Security Service, the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Chairman of the Communications and Liaison Department. The Council may request the attendance of non-members as and when appropriate. The Council has a Secretary-General who is appointed from the Royal Office staff.

Five - The Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council:

This Council undertakes the responsibility of drafting the State's fiscal policy and all matters related

to its financial and monetary system. It drafts the annual General State Budget and studies financial allocations for development projects, as well as anything related to domestic and external investment, its funding and other savings-related investment, financial and monetary affairs.

The Council's remit also includes the development of energy resources and their contribution to the national economy, as well as improvements to the ways in which the funds they generate are utilized.

The Council, which convenes under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan or its Deputy Chairman, was restructured under His Majesty's chairmanship by Royal Decree No 60/2011, issued on 9 May 2011.

The Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council reviewed and evaluated the State Budget for the fiscal year 2016, as stipulated in Article Three of the Royal Decree No. 2/2016 on ratification of the State Budget for fiscal 2016.

Six - Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman:

The Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman undertakes the task of drafting a suitable monetary policy for the Sultanate. It also runs the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), which was established on 1 December 1974 as per the provisions of the Banking Law No 7/74, later amended by Royal Decree No 114/2000.



His Majesty the Sultan presides over a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 26 April 2016 at Bait al Barakah



The Board is fully empowered to adopt all necessary measures to ensure that the CBO is properly managed. It also enjoys the full authority to issue currency, monitor the banking institutions and oversee banking operations in the Sultanate.

On 18 June 2012, the CBO Board of Governors was restructured, with His Majesty the Sultan as Chairman and comprises seven governors.

Seven - The Supreme Judicial Council:

In seeking to develop the judiciary and ensure its independence, the Supreme Judicial Council enjoys a wide range of powers and prerogatives including – specifically – drawing up general judicial policy; streamlining and guaranteeing the smooth running of the courts and Public Prosecutor's Office; facilitating the litigation process and access to legal proceedings and considering nominations submitted by the competent authorities for appointments.

Promotions in the judiciary, the Administrative Court and the Public Prosecution, in cases where the law stipulates such posts should be filled by Royal Decree, also fall under this Council's remit. As well as proposing draft laws on judicial matters and expressing views on draft laws it also gives its opinion on draft judicial co-operation agreements between the Sultanate and other countries, as well as on any other matter His Majesty

sees fit to put before it for review.

The Council was restructured on 29 February 2012 pursuant to Royal Decree No. 9/2012, with His Majesty the Sultan as Chairman.

Eight - The Supreme Council for Planning:

The Supreme Council for Planning was promulgated by Royal Decree No. 30/2012, issued on 26 May 2012. The Council drafts strategies and policies necessary for achieving sustainable development in the Sultanate. It also drafts mechanisms for implementing these strategies and policies towards the achievement of economic diversity and ideal utilisation of natural and human resources. The National Centre for Statistics and Information, established under Royal Decree No 31/2012, is affiliated to the Supreme Council for Planning.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has long been a strong proponent of economic diversification in the endeavour to shift emphasis away from dependence on the oil sector and towards other sources of national income. The Council is working to implement this shift, and its efforts are enshrined in the strategy laid out in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020). It is collaborating with an international expert body in an ambitious plan to monitor performance and provide support over the coming years for sectors of the economy that represent diversification from traditional sources of GDP.

“ The Supreme Council for Planning elaborates the outline structure of the Five-Year Development Plan and then conducts a biannual assessment review of the Plan as it rolls out ”

Nine - Higher Committees, Subsidiary Councils and Public Authorities:

Article No 56 of the Basic Law of the State states that “Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers defined and their members appointed in accordance with Royal Decrees”.

The State’s administrative apparatus comprises a number of Higher Committees, Specialized Subsidiary Councils and Public Authorities, each of which is responsible for managing or overseeing a specific sector with a view to drafting a comprehensive vision for development. In serving the public interest and to guarantee the smooth flow of work in each sector, these bodies coordinate with other relevant departments, including ministries.

The members of these Committees, Councils and Authorities include ministers and public figures according to their specialisation.

The Higher Committee for Conferences:

This Committee is responsible for preparing, monitoring and liaising on conferences attended by Oman – particularly those involving the Gulf Co-operation Council for Arab states – in coordination with the relevant ministries.

The Supreme Higher Committee for Five-Year Plans:

The Supreme Higher Committee for Five-Year Plans specifies the basic elements and guidelines for the five-year development plans. It conducts half-yearly assessments and follow-up of these plans.

It acts as an executive force in brokering the current priorities outlined by His Majesty, translating them into policies to be enshrined in and executed through the Five-Year Development Plan.

The Committee promotes ever greater coordination between the government and both the State and Shura Councils in mobilising energies to achieve national goals.

The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution:

The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI) was established as a financially and administratively independent body on 22nd November 1999. On 27 February 2011, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos gave orders to expand the powers of the State’s Audit Institution and amend its name to the State’s Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, while at the same time granting its members the quality of ‘judicial inspection’. His Majesty takes a particular interest in the work of the SFAAI and monitors its progress closely.

Crowning the sequential steps in the development of the Audit institution, the Financial and Administrative Audit Law was issued by Royal Decree No. 111/2011, coincidentally with the Law for the Protection of Public Funds and Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest (the "Anti-Corruption Law"), promulgated by means of Royal Decree 112/2011. These two enactments together bring focus to the work of the SFAAI and expand its terms of reference in a manner to sharpen its performance in meeting the broad objectives of national development.

In the exercise of its mandate, the SFAAI has been applying scientific methodology to issues of institutional and professional performance. This approach is consistent with the demands of the current phase in the construction of the modern state, and is paying dividends, in particular insofar as concerns its own performance and efficient use of human resources. It is also benefiting partnership with the community and upgrading the level of professionalism of personnel and partners.

On 15 January 2016, Sultan Qaboos issued directives including Muscat Municipality, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the Court of Administrative Justice and the Public Authority for Craft Industries in the sphere of responsibility of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution.

The Civil Service Council:

The Civil Service Council undertakes the responsibility of drawing up general policies related to the civil service and related plans of administrative development. It looks into decisions, laws and procedures aimed at increasing Omanisation and upgrading performance in the State's administrative apparatus.

The function of the Council is to undertake the task of developing civil service systems, and increasing the efficiency of the methods, means and procedures routinely used in the work of the civil service; also to review policies, systems, harmonised pay tables, along with allowances, benefits and bonuses; and to propose amendments to same to the Council of Ministers; finally to adopt systems of administrative control designed to verify the integrity of the application of laws and regulations relating to the civil service.

The Sultan Qaboos University Council:

The Sultan Qaboos University Council works to maintain and advance the standard of university education and to achieve the maximum extent of conformity between the courses offered at Sultan Qaboos University and its graduate output and the requirements of the National Development Plan.

On 20 June 2016, the Council adopted a proposal to accept

students with physical disabilities at the University, a decision prompted by the University's experience addressing the particular issues facing students with disabilities and which affect the degree programmes available to them and even the admissions process itself. The Council also published a broad descriptive of the characteristics it aspired to in its student body, the features that it hoped would distinguish graduates of the University, and it issued a document fees guideline for students attending its various undergraduate and graduate programmes.

The Tender Board:

The Tender Board undertakes the responsibility of announcing tenders, opening bids, analysing and awarding government tenders whose cost exceeds RO3 million. Excepted from this process are contracts relating to security and defence projects and projects with specific connotations in law. The Council approaches its functions guided by measures designed to raise performance levels in government agencies, in order to ensure the proper and efficient use of public money.

Sixty one tenders were awarded in 2015 by government branches and agencies. Their total value came to RO575,499,675 (five hundred and seventy five million four hundred and ninety nine thousand six hundred and seventy five Omani rials).

The Education Council:

The Education Council (TEC) was established by Royal Decree No. 48/2012, the outcome of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' commitment to the steady advancement of the Sultanate's education sector, of all of its stages and disciplines. The quality of education is vital to the needs of the labour market, as well as being a core value enshrined in the general policy of the state. The Education Council was founded to be an extension of the Higher Education Council, itself established in 1998 by virtue of Royal Decree No. 65/1998.

On this basis, and in line with its terms of reference, the Council since its inception has rolled out successive projects all designed with the purpose of developing education in the Sultanate. Several resolutions were approved in 2015, notably one converting the Rustaq College of Applied Sciences into the College of Education, entrusted with training and qualifying teachers; the educational qualification programme for private universities; and a decision to raise the intake ceiling at the Sultan Qaboos University Faculty of Education.

The Council also approved the establishment of a centre affiliated to the Ministry of Education and tasked with evaluating school performance and preparing detailed studies for analysis. Also adopted was a study assessing the reality of the private higher education sector and the

challenges it faces with a view to finding appropriate solutions.

The Oman Medical Specialty Board:

The Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) oversees the training and qualification of doctors in the various medical specialties at postgraduate level. The goal is to equip them to meet the demands of health care at safe practice levels, and to reach the highest attainable standards of quality in their provision of superior patient care.

In implementation of the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Omanisation is an ongoing national goal on the path to full self-reliance in the labour market. Royal Decree No. 31/2006 created the Oman Medical Specialty Board, a legal personality with financial and administrative independence.

Since its inception, the Board has accumulated a body of expertise in specialist medical education and can today claim position as a leading academic institution in this region of the world.

In addition to its operations inside Oman, the OMSB sponsors overseas training opportunities for doctors in various specialist skills. In the 2015 calendar year, 24 doctors completed postgraduate medical courses in 11 different specialties in countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Singapore and India.

The Research Council:

The Research Council has passed many milestones since its foundation under Royal Decree No. 54/2005, announcing and initiating the immediate implementation of a national strategy for scientific research. Policies and mechanisms adopted were supportive of research as a means to meeting local requirements while adhering to international standards in innovation and scientific excellence. To this end, the Council values research links, knowledge transfer and a research environment that is both stimulating and grounded in real needs and capacity.

The Council established an open research grants programme and in 2009 initiated the funding of research proposals submitted by researchers in various disciplines. The national strategy is to build competence and capacity and to nurture an environment likely to yield advanced research objectives. The programme receives research proposals, examines their potential and dispenses funding as appropriate in six research sectors: viz. energy and industry; communications and information systems; the environment and vital resources; education and human resources; culture and social and basic sciences; health and social service.

The programme encourages researchers to pursue projects in their areas of interest and as befits local need. They are expected to keep pace

“ The Public Authority for Craft Industries concerns itself with all matters related to the craft sector and the preservation of traditional industries as an important contributor to the economy and representative of continuity in manufacturing ”

with scientific and other relevant developments globally. The Council has to date received 320 research proposals across the various research sectors and has adopted 160 of these. Among academic research proposals funded were 65 PhD projects and 139 at master level.

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority:

The Omani Academic Accreditation Authority for was established as the official body responsible for the accreditation process and for ensuring the quality of all public and private higher education provided by institutions in the Sultanate; and for accrediting the academic programmes offered by these institutions. The Authority plays a key role in disseminating the culture of quality.

The Omani Academic Accreditation Authority for has worked since its creation to develop a national system for the quality management of higher education based on international best practice, while taking into account the special requirements of the local Omani environment.

It has logged many achievements in this regard, including: development of a plan to manage the quality of higher education in the Sultanate. Known as the Quality Plan, this strategy was based on the results of a comprehensive analytical study of

the quality requirements of higher education.

The Public Authority for Craft Industries:

The Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI) is responsible for every aspect of the country's traditional crafts and seeks to nurture and develop them to continue to thrive as productive industries.

The Authority values innovation and is supportive of all endeavours that advance the capabilities of Omani craftworkers, offering expertise and other assistance to them to encourage the adaptation of traditional skills to modern tastes. Statistics for 2014/2015 report a national total of 3,125 artisans in receipt of cash support. There were 153 separate projects ongoing throughout the Sultanate at the start of 2016.

The Sultan Qaboos Craft Excellence Competition reflects His Majesty's recognition of the value and significance of the craft industries and demonstrates his high level of commitment to Oman's crafts people.

The 2015 competition had an entry level of 834 craftworkers in the craft product category, specialising in such diverse areas as fabric, silver, ceramics and wood. Seventy nine contestants qualified, and 11 won awards. Of the institutions participating in the craft project category, 12 qualified and three won awards.

“ The Oman Charitable Organisation undertakes acts of charity that ease circumstances for the needy both inside and outside of the Sultanate ”

The Capital Market Authority:

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) was established with an oversight role to ensure greater transparency in the activities of the stock market, and to take all such action as would improve the efficiency of the capital market, and the protection of investors.

The Authority has worked to develop the legislative and regulatory infrastructure of the capital market sector in the Sultanate, through the introduction and modification of regulations and controls and regulations governing the sector. These controls support the stability of the stock market and enhance its efficiency, factors essential to the current economic needs of the Sultanate and region and that march in step with developments in the global markets.

The Authority also plays a critical role in overseeing the Muscat Securities Market, and in promoting regulation and control of security offerings and transactions. This includes, as necessary, decisions and actions deemed of service to the interests of investors and the national economy.

The Oman Charitable Organisation:

The Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) supports various social care and relief causes both inside and outside the Sultanate.

The OCO has provided assistance to beneficiaries in many countries and situations, to Kosovan refugees, for example, and to Palestinians in need, as well as providing resources for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and the establishment of a number of educational facilities in the West Bank.

Over the years, the Organisation has responded with relief assistance in situations of personal or collective disaster resulting from accidents, earthquakes or famine in various parts of the world. It has special units devoted to the care of children and orphans, the disabled, the elderly and other disadvantaged social groups.

Information Technology Authority

The Information Technology Authority, since it came into being under Royal Decree No. 52/2006 on 31 May 2006, has been responsible for Oman's national digital strategy, or project e-government. Its purpose is to lead the transition to a knowledge-based economy by means of a range of digital age initiatives and projects across all aspects of society.

On 14 March 2016, the Authority, acting in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police, introduced 27 new activation sites for the Tam electronic certification service at Civil Status Centres across the Sultanate. Three months later, on 5 June 2016, the Sas Centre for smart mobile applications development was launched to provide a quality platform and industry cluster

to build and enhance the national development skills, talents and capacity required to develop ideas into commercially sustainable mobile applications and businesses.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was established on 12 March 2002 under the Telecommunications Regulatory Act, issued by means of Royal Decree Law No. 30/2002 and designed to liberalise and upgrade services in the sector. It was given responsibility in 2012 for reorganising the national postal services sector in line with the Postal Services Executive Regulation Law that stemmed from Royal Decree No. 71/2012 on the development and liberalisation of the postal sector.

The TRA has concentrated its energies on giving users access to quality global communications services at affordable prices. To this end it promotes growth in the number of licensees operating in the market so as to be able to offer greater choice to the consumer.

The Authority has also worked to optimise the regulatory environment so that a product-conscious public may be assured of a world class service by the end of 2018. To this end it sponsored two specific regulatory tools, the first relating to price (the interconnected Access and Interconnection Regulation, the Retail Tariffs Regulation and the Accounting

Separation Regulation); and the other to quality (the Quality of Service Regulation). These regulations were published in the Official Gazette in early 2016, and are expected to promote and encourage competition in the market and to improve the quality of services provided.

The Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW):

The Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW) was established under Royal Decree No. 92/2007, issued on 9th September 2007, following the privatisation of the electricity sector in 2004. Headquartered in Muscat, the PAEW specialises in regulating the electricity and related water sector in the Sultanate in accordance with existing laws.

The PAEW - a legal entity that is financially and administratively independent - has the right to own the funds needed to enable it to achieve its objectives. It seeks to ensure the availability of electricity and water services throughout the country, protect consumer interests and enable the privatization of the Sultanate's electricity and water sectors to be implemented smoothly. It also aims to protect the interests of subscribers, particularly people with limited income, patients and the elderly.

The PAEW is tasked with implementing the general policy for this sector and preparing the

plans and programmes necessary for developing that policy.

The National Documents and Archives Authority:

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), established under Royal Decree No 60/2007 issued on 2nd July 2007, as a national project to preserve Oman's history and establish a comprehensive system for managing public records related to government departments subject to the NRAA Law.

The NRAA has since its inception pursued its core aim of collecting documents and archives relating to the Sultanate from countries that contributed through their past relations with Oman to constituting the documentary archive. It also collects documents from citizens of the Sultanate. The NRAA has by these methods assembled a collection of more than a million documents, including 36,226 manuscripts, 1,623 newspapers and magazines and 361 maps. It has restored and maintained 15,162 documents, or a total of 60,128 printed folios. The archive is stored electronically and on film, the latter on 463 spools of film, representing 1,419 files or 242,000 pages. At the present date the NRAA has 579 files, on 19,376 pages, stored electronically.

The NRAA also maintains an archive derived from the oral tradition, based on interviews with individuals describing historical events they either experienced or learned about.

It stores a collection of 143 interviews with 94 Omani citizens covering historical, religious, political, cultural and literary material.

The Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development (Ithraa):

The Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development (Ithraa) was established by Royal Decree No. 52/2011 of 27th March 2011, drafted under the government strategy for the continuous development of the investment sector and promotion of Omani exports through attractive packages offered to local and foreign investors.

Ithraa is committed to encouraging greater participation by the private sector in support of Oman's drive for greater internal investment and export growth in sectors unrelated to fossil fuels. The overriding goal is to increase Oman's trade balance.

The Authority is also concerned with attracting foreign investments by facilitating all transactions and realising 'economic weight for the Sultanate' by following up economic developments in the world.

The Public Authority for Social Insurance:

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) provides social insurance cover for nationals employed in the private sector. It was

set up for this purpose under Royal Decree No. 72/1992. Its role is vital in protecting this segment of the working community.

PASI aims to improve the quality of its services and promote mutual trust and satisfaction between employers and insured employees within the available resources and in line with laws and regulations in force.

Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve:

The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve is responsible for storing and managing the State's basic foodstuffs as a food reserve on a permanent basis. It is responsible for maintaining this reserve in a fit state for domestic consumption and in a state of readiness for intervention in the event of economic crisis or climatic adversity. It also serves to stabilise the price of basic foodstuffs where local or overseas factors may cause sudden, sharp increases, keeping the price of these vital items at all times affordable to all.

The Authority serves multiple roles in meeting its policy brief, from the management and maintenance of facilities, storage depots and accessories, to storage of basic foodstuffs and expansion of warehouse and ancillary facilities and equipment. It assesses and maintains adequate quantities of basic foodstuffs in safe storage throughout the Sultanate, and ensures that sound storage practices are followed to

prevent damage to or deterioration of food stored.

A review of stores took place in 2015 with a view to ensuring permanent access to and quality conservation of strategic stores of basic foods. To this end new world class, high-quality strains of rice and other food commodities were added to the national reserves. The same year saw completion of the expansion scheme at the warehouses under the Authority's management at North Batinah.

The Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP):

On 26 February 2011, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos issued directives on the establishment of an independent body to protect consumers and Royal Decree No. 26/2011 of 28 February 2011 founded the Public Authority for Consumer Protection. The Public Authority for Consumer Protection Regulations followed on 5 April 2011, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 53/2011.

From the outset the PACP has worked to enact legislation, regulations and guidelines within its terms of reference, bearing on price stability, the mobilisation of consumer awareness in regard to misleading advertising and the processing of relevant complaints from individuals and consumer associations. It examines and tests appropriate solutions to these issues, monitoring all commercial activity on an ongoing basis and observing the

☞ The Sultanate, represented by the Public Authority for Consumer Protection, and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, has been vigilant in creating and overseeing deterrent legislation that guarantees the rights of the consumer and prevents fraud in all its forms ☞

movement of goods and services and to ensure their proper distribution. It promotes competition, challenges commercial fraud and works to avert monopoly situations that would be harmful to the national economy. In general, it pursues action to protect and strengthen consumer rights in all of their aspects.

With Royal Decrees No. 66/2014 and No. 67/2014, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos amended the Consumer Protection Law and issued Oman's Competition and Anti-Monopoly Law, in response to the rapid developments in market growth and the recovery of the domestic market in the Sultanate. These changing circumstances summoned the existence of laws governing the relationship between traders and consumers that would keep pace with consumer expectations as apply to current consumer transactions in the Sultanate and abroad. The Sultanate, as represented by the PACP, and in collaboration with various stakeholders, has been keen to introduce deterrent legislation that defends consumer and supplier rights from fraud. These laws also aim to regulate the relationship between the individual consumer and the business sector supplying goods and services.

The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm:

The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD), established under Royal Decree No

119/2011 on 26th October 2011, has been active in its role of managing the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, while overseeing business relations between companies and investors in the SEZAD Zone. It has concentrated on completing the drafting of legislation as necessary to the smooth running of the Economic Zone and to building its capacity in terms of technical, administrative and financial human resources to secure the maximum benefit for this enterprise.

On 26th December 2013, Royal Decree No. 79/2013 delivered a major boost to domestic investment in the region and to the attraction of foreign investment through its incentive offerings in the form of facilities and guarantees for projects built specifically within the SEZAD zone. Heading up the incentive list was an exemption from taxes, 100% foreign ownership of projects and exemption from the minimum capital investment required under business and other legislation; along with exemption from all restrictions in regard to the introduction, handling and exchange of foreign currency and from application of the provisions of the Commercial Agencies Law.

The Public Authority for Radio and Television:

The Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART) came into being on 19 October 2010, established by means of Royal Decree No. 108/2010. It is responsible for the dissemination of

its media message through successful audio and visual programming. PART's message promotes high-minded social and cultural values, community engagement and patriotic identification, embodying the state ideology and vision, and aspires to leadership in the field of audio-visual media. Its programming ethos is grounded in the historical authenticity of the Omani identity and the modern Renaissance and it offers a high-quality information product which is rewarded by strong audience confidence.

In recognition of the ongoing success story of Oman's audio and visual offerings, PART in 2015 revamped its image, with new radio and TV channel logos, the inauguration of its digital studio building and launch of the new news centre.

These facility innovations were accompanied by an overall upgrade of audio and visual quality, matched by superior programming content and technique; bringing Oman's broadcast media, in both their home-grown and imported offerings, up to international production and content standards.

The Public Authority for Manpower Register:

On 19th May 2013, Royal Decree No 32/2013 was issued to amend some of the provisions of the regulations for the Public Authority for Manpower Register. This Decree specifies the

powers and prerogatives of the Authority, which is entrusted with the establishment of a comprehensive database of manpower in various departments within the government sector (civil, military and security) and in private sector establishments.

The Authority, on 17 July 2016, launched the career aptitude and skills job search registration form for job seekers. This represents step one in a valuable project to identify job seeker trends and guide job seekers on how to obtain work commensurate with their skills and career aptitudes, as well as towards training and upskilling programmes consistent with their aspirations and potential.

The Public Authority for Civil Aviation:

The Public Authority for Civil Aviation, acting pursuant to Royal Decree No. 43/2013 of 16th September 2013, defined the Authority's objectives in promoting the civil aviation sector and all of its supporting facilities, and raising standards to the maximum achievable in terms of efficiency, quality, and safety and security of civil aviation and air transport.

In addition, the Authority provides meteorological and early warning services and management of the facilities it oversees. It puts in place regulations that ensure the quality of data and information and the speed with which they are transmitted to the relevant authorities. It reviews

landing, transit and departure fees for aircraft, along with fees associated with meteorological services. It oversees air transport companies and airport operators in Oman, and strategies for the modernisation and development of national aviation policy.

In July 2016 the Authority issued preliminary approval in the form of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to Class B aircraft operator licences for the Salalah and Al Sharqiyah aviation companies. Under the licences they will be able to operate aircraft of 19-seater or lower capacity and a maximum take-off weight of less than ten tonnes in the general aviation field, having successfully passed the evaluation criteria under the economic licensing regulations for civil aviation.

The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises:

The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) was established under Royal Decree No 36/2013, issued on 30th May 2013 with a brief to strengthen the role of small and medium-sized companies capable of providing renewable employment opportunities for Oman's youth. The Authority helps and encourages them to establish and implement projects of their own, to take a hands on role in managing and developing these projects in fulfilment of the aspiration to self-employment and of the desire to contribute to

economic diversification, innovation and expansion in the use of modern technologies.

More than 18,000 small and medium enterprises were registered in the Authority database in 2015, and over 2,700 privilege cards for entrepreneurs issued to citizens leaving full-time employment to manage their own businesses. The card is the official document recognising full-time Omani entrepreneurs. Meantime one thousand training courses were held for entrepreneurs, 13 enterprises were incubated in a business-supportive environment and visual identity and other branding services provided for more than two hundred enterprises.

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance:

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance was established under Royal Decree No. 3/2013, issued on 8 January 2013. It is a legal entity that is materially and administratively independent and it operates under the jurisdiction of the Royal Oman Police (ROP). On 30th November 2014, the organisational structure of the Authority was defined with the announcement of Royal Decree No. 68/2014.

The Authority has outlined a clear forward strategy to keep pace with development by providing the equipment and machinery needed to perform the work assigned to them in fire and rescue (land and water), and rescue of the injured, as well as search

and rescue operations and dealing with hazardous materials.

The Omani Authority for Partnership for Development (OAPD):

The Omani Authority for Partnership for Development (OAPD) was established by Royal Decree No. 9/2014 of 2nd March 2014. It is a legal entity affiliated to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, but which enjoys financial and administrative independence.

The OAPD's broad remit includes providing opportunities for the training and qualification of Omanis in specialised skills, supporting small and medium enterprises, and working to strengthen the private sector. It also promotes the use of technology in both the public and private sectors, and the integration of modern techniques into existing systems. It contributes to the strengthening of the military and security capabilities of the Sultanate at all levels; facilitates investment; introduces proposals to diversify sources of national income and move towards a sustainable and efficient economy, all in application of the partnership for development programme.

The Authority signed five partnership agreements in 2015 with American and European company leaders in the military and security fields under its development promotion policy, which supports sectors contributing actively to the national economy.

Public Authority for Mining:

The Public Authority for Mining was established by Royal Decree No. 49/2014 issued 21st September 2014 with the founding strategy of conducting a comprehensive geological survey of the Sultanate and then developing the mining sector.

The Authority has worked since its inception to refine the overall strategy for the mining sector in the Sultanate, the primary objective of which is to develop it to optimal benefit. Thus it seeks investment in and exploitation of mineral wealth in directions best suited to the objectives of economic diversification. It is hoped to improve the contribution of the mining sector to the Gross Domestic Product by maximising its added value, for instance by supplying metals to the construction sector or other raw materials to local industries, such as cement works and producers of ceramics.

As and of mid-January 2016, the Authority had issued 573 mining licences covering all mineral ores, including landfill, which supplies material for building infrastructure.

The Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences:

The Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences (ONCECS) has as its main function the streamlining of the overlapping connections between Arab, Islamic and international organisations

working in the areas of education, science and culture (UNESCO, ALECSO and ISESCO) on the one hand, and between the concerned authorities and educational and cultural institutions in the Sultanate on the other. It and publicises Oman's heritage and the Sultanate's efforts in educational, cultural and scientific fields. It cooperates with the three above mentioned organisations in the interest of mutual understanding and interaction among people belonging to different cultures.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation is awarded biennially through UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme. The prize is given in recognition of a distinguished contribution to environmental conservation made by individuals, groups, institutions or organizations in line with UNESCO policy and programmes.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation is the first Arab award to be established internationally for environmental conservation. It was instituted on the initiative of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in June 1989 with UNESCO's approval and blessing.

The Oman Human Rights Commission:

Reflecting His Majesty's continued commitment to the welfare of Oman's citizens and human rights in the Sultanate over the past 40 years, Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree No 124/2008 on 15 November 2008

setting up the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and defining its prerogatives. The Decree states that the Commission is a legal entity with operational independence. Based in Muscat, the Commission comes under the jurisdiction of the State Council (*Majlis al Dawla*).

Announced on 18 April 2016, Royal Decree No. 23/2016 changed the name of the National Human Rights Commission to the Oman Human Rights Commission. Royal Decree No. 24/2016 was then issued appointing the members of the Oman Human Rights Commission, a body consisting of 14 members representing diverse areas of interest. The membership includes four women.

The National Youth Committee:

The National Youth Committee was established under Royal Decree No 117/2011, issued on 26 October 2011 and is an independent legal entity.

The Committee seeks to open up channels of constructive communication and productive dialogue with and between young people in the Sultanate, with the aim of promoting a sense of allegiance to the nation and its leader.

Its functions also include instilling religious values and the values of good citizenship, and promoting attachment to Oman's cultural heritage, the principles and practices of interaction and dialogue between different social groups, and the

concepts and principles of social work and community service.

The Committee also seeks to raise awareness among young people about the legislative measures which define their obligations towards the State and society and guarantee their personal rights and freedoms in line with the provisions of the Basic Law of the State.

The National Crisis Management Committee:

The National Crisis Management Committee was set up at His Majesty's instruction on 8 June 2010 to manage crises and establish protocols to ensure prompt response to exceptional circumstances requiring immediate services and/or subsistence and medical assistance.

Among the objectives of the Committee are the re-formulation of the national plan for crisis management and the creation of a central entity equipped to manage such crises. It is working to update information on all civilian facilities, roads, terrain and GIS databases; and to redistribute reserve stores food to all governorates of the Sultanate. It is currently engaged in establishing rapidly deployable hospital facilities, which can be airlifted and outfitting specialised operating units for use in crisis situations. It is also overseeing the supply of desalinated water to referral hospitals for use in the event that desalination plants are rendered out of commission.

National Training Fund

The National Training Fund, established by means of Royal Decree No. 48/2016 of 17 October 2016, is a specialist public service institution which was created to bridge the skills gap between supply and demand in the labour market. Its function is to build a national skilled manpower base that is globally competitive.

The Fund has all of the powers needed to achieve its principal objective. It will be assessing the current status of training efforts in the Sultanate in order to judge how best to serve the specialty and qualification requirements of both private sector and national projects. It will evaluate weaknesses in labour market supply and in this way identify training priorities. A particular focus will be the requirements of emerging sectors of the national economy and the national development plan and in this pursuit it will collaborate with the private sector and act in coordination with the various relevant authorities.

One of the Fund's first objectives will be to build a comprehensive information infrastructure that will support its training brief, collecting data on current supply and demand needs and on admission and graduation trends at existing training institutions nationwide. It will act as an advisor to government agencies and to the private sector on matters of training and employment in light of extant global quality standards and accreditation policies.



*Sovereignty of the law and
access to legal action*



Sovereignty of the law and access to legal action

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos gave key status to the law and court system in marking out the road to statehood, seeing a strong judiciary, crowned by its Supreme Judicial Council, as the necessary solid ground on which to build a truly modern state. The strength of the judiciary and the perception of this strength would be a measure of how far the process towards democracy had advanced.

Royal Decrees No. 9/2012 and 10/2012 pertaining to the establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council and the organisation of judicial affairs brought critical value to the principle of the state of law and institutions. The following year, the Civil Transactions Law issued under Royal Decree No. 29/2013 of 6 May 2013 completed the legislative infrastructure that was the embodiment in appearance and practice of His Majesty's aspiration for justice in Oman.

The inauguration of the Supreme Court on 25 May 2016 was an event of major consequence, as the final institution among the judicial institutions of the Sultanate, and its highest legal authority. Justice may now be said to enjoy every support

and facility for its proper exercise in Oman, in the presence of an independent judiciary and all of the institutions and services needed for its fair administration.

The achievements of the justice sector are the fruit of systematic and thorough planning, with the objective a system that is constant, and yet not inflexible as society changes. It is vital in this time of rapid development that the legislative environment be supportive of the requirements of a modern and outward-looking state and able to keep pace. Oman's judicial system meets the most exacting global standards in its ability to fulfil its mandate.

Court complexes

The development of the national court infrastructure has paralleled in pace and quality the advance of legislation, with Court Complexes now present in several governorates, incorporating summary courts and summary level appellate courts.

Muscat was the first governorate to see the construction of one of these two-court complexes, incorporating the Muscat Primary

Court and the Muscat Court of Appeal. The Complex consists of eight courtrooms, legal chambers, administrative offices for police and prosecutors, waiting rooms and holding cells for incarcerated defendants.

The court complex provides an excellent example of the Sultanate's move towards e-government, offering a one-stop system that facilitates all users, including judges, lawyers and litigants, since it permits access to details of cases passing through the courts, including the progress of litigation, rulings and sentences.

Similar complexes are scheduled for Nizwa, Rustaq and Al Buraimi. They will share common features in their architectural design, with traditional and contemporary themes acknowledged.

The Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs

The Basic Law of the State stipulates that *“the rule of law shall be the basis of governance in the State”*, and in exercise of this principle, the Sultanate has shown determination in creating an apparatus that guarantees the independence of the judiciary. Royal Decree No. 10/2012 reorganised the administration of justice, removing from the Ministry of Justice powers of court administration and judicial inspection and transferring these

to the Administrative Affairs Council established and set out in the Judicial Authority Law. Royal Decree No. 54/2012 established a General Secretariat of the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs and the Council immediately pronounced its independence from the Ministry of Justice and continues to work towards full completion of the Sultanate's intention to install a sophisticated judicial system, progressive in both its infrastructure and its human resources.

The Administrative Affairs Council was originally established under Royal Decree No 90/99, which promulgated the Judicial Authority Law. Article 16 states that *“The Judiciary shall have an Administrative Affairs Council headed by the Chairman of the Supreme Court; its members shall comprise the three longest-serving deputy chairmen of the Supreme Court, as well as the Attorney General, the longest-serving Court of Appeal chairman and the longest-serving Primary Court chairman.”* When the post of Chairman of the Council becomes vacant, or in his absence, or in the event of an obstacle precluding his attendance, he is replaced by the longest-serving member. In the absence of a Council member or in the event of an obstacle precluding his attendance, he is replaced by the next member in line, from the area represented by the retiring member.

“ The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the Supreme Court and Supreme Judicial Council building together constitute a masterful architectural statement expressing the close correlation between religion and justice and the concepts of originality, values and ethics ”

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is the capstone of the judicial pyramid. It convenes as stipulated in Article 139 of the Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 29/2002, in order to consider appeals brought before it on certain rulings of the courts of appeal.

The overarching status of the Supreme Court in the hierarchy of justice in Oman is celebrated in the magnificent architecture of the new

Court building, formally inaugurated on 25 May 2016, and which houses also the headquarters of the Supreme Judicial Council. The complex is located in Ghubrah, close to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, where the dome of justice salutes the minarets of faith. Together these two uplifting structures manifest the majesty of a process built brick by brick on values of truth and goodness. There can be no injustice and no darkness in a land governed by these values.

The Supreme Court building in Al-Ghubrah, Wilayat Bowshar



The new Supreme Court building incorporates heritage and Islamic motifs in its design, yet its overall character is contemporary. It has four halls where judgments are pronounced and these august chambers carry the names of Muscat, Nizwa, Sohar and Salalah respectively, at the specific request of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. These are deeply symbolic names in the historical context, recalling the long tradition of justice in Omani society. From modern technology the complex has availed of such

apparatus as serves the exercise of due process, helps deliver the rulings which are the product of the justice system in operation: dais, computers, monitors, digital equipment interlinking directly the equipment and processes located or taking place throughout the building. Moreover, all can be connected electronically in a live broadcast to the Higher Judicial Institute, giving the country's future judges, studying at the Institute today, direct access to the performance of the Supreme Court, where judges have attained the highest degree of judicial experience and knowledge.

Courts of Appeal

The courts of appeal hear appeals against rulings delivered by the summary or primary courts. Appeals are adjudicated by a three-judge panel. Every one of the Sultanate's governorates now has its own court of appeal.

Royal Decree No. 14/2001 initiated the establishment of six appellate courts: in Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Ibri and Ibra. However, with advancing urbanisation and rising population density, the number of appellate courts has now been expanded to 13, so that every governorate has one appellate court and Muscat has two, one at Seeb and one in Muscat itself.

In 2015, a combined 25,718 cases were heard by courts of appeal across the Sultanate, of which 19,331 achieved sentencing completion.



Primary courts

The primary courts or courts of first instance are the courts of first recourse in matters of litigation. They consist of a single judge or of three judges (third circuit), and specialize in hearing civil or commercial cases, requests for arbitration, personal status cases and general, labour, tax, leasing and other cases filed before them in accordance with the Law.

The Sultanate's 44 primary courts are to be found throughout the country.

A total of 63,163 cases were heard before the Sultanate's primary courts in 2015, and 49,366 judgments were achieved in the various circuits, including 36,366 final rulings and 1,319 by referral.

Of all the cases that came before the summary courts in 2015, 2,620 were settled, a further 5,768 were struck out, and 2,430 abandoned. Four hundred and four suits were settled amicably, another 40 terminated and 122 failed through timeline expiry.

Public Funds Court

Oman's court system is progressive and dynamically evolving, flexible in the face of society's changing needs. It observes developments as they arise and adapts quickly, so that litigants may at all times be confident in the judicial system and its ability to obtain justice in all matters of difference or dispute.

Against this backdrop, and as

a signatory of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Oman has been proactive in tackling fraud and corruption, through policy and through the justice system. By means of Royal Decree No. 64/2013, the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs established, in judicial year 2015/2016, a chamber at the Muscat Primary Court specialising in matters pertaining to public funds. The Public Funds Court has jurisdiction in cases involving bribery, misuse of public funds, wilful neglect and misconduct in public office, as well as all offences bearing on the illegal handling of public money.

The Public Funds Court will challenge financial and administrative corruption in all its forms and promote the principles of transparency and integrity.

The court hopes also to speed up the process of deciding issues that involve public funds, given the sensitivity of such matters, and not only because they adversely affect foreign investment objectives, but also for their direct impact on growth, transparency and competitiveness, the three most important indicators in any classification of economic development.

The Administrative Court

Oman has seen phenomenal advances in recent decades, the goal of which has been to better serve the citizens of the country. State institutions have become more

“ Among the successes of the Sultanate’s judicial system was the establishment of the Administrative Court after its supporting law was issued in the form of Royal Decree No. 91/99 ”

complex and more sophisticated as they cope with the requirements of the times. These many achievements came at a time of great prosperity for the country, a time in which the legislative infrastructure also grew in complexity. Major legislative advances were introduced successively of benefit to justice, and protective of public, corporate and individual rights and freedoms. All serve to support the accomplishments of the Renaissance period, which will remain secure so long as every man and woman in the country, citizens and residents alike, can be assured of equality before the law. This has been the principal goal of His Majesty

Sultan Qaboos in his overall plan for the justice system, and it is a goal on which he has given no ground.

One achievement of the Sultanate’s justice system was the establishment of the Administrative Court and its associated law by means of Royal Decree No. 91/99. The Administrative Court has power to review decisions by government agencies and identify conflicts of interest that might arise between stakeholders and officers of the administration, as defined in its founding law. Article 67 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates: *“The Law regulates the settlement of administrative disputes through a panel or special court whose regulation*

The court system underwent sustained development and modernisation by means of a structured succession of legal enactments



“ The Reconciliation Committees combine with the contemporary judicial organisation to forge a system of justice that has built respect and confidence through the progression of the modern Renaissance ”

and the manner of exercising its functions shall be specified by the Law.”

The court was structured to be independent from the ordinary justice system, from the legislative perspective that specialisation in judicial practice was a necessary component in facilitating proceedings, and speed of dispatch in administrative litigation a prominent feature of administrative justice.

The Court has had to keep pace with a steady escalation in its caseload as a consequence of the additional responsibilities assigned to it under Royal Decree No. 3/2009. In this context, a second appellate circuit has been added to speed up

the processing of appeals. In addition Royal Decree 3/2009 established a court unification unit to oversee the harmonisation of decisions emanating from the two appellate jurisdictions.

The Notary Public Departments

The Notary Public Departments play a vital role in regulating relations between parties and sealing their rights in social transactions of many kinds, such as in documenting marriage and divorce arrangements, verifying widowhood, costs and the like; and also commercial relationships, where notaries clarify

The Notaries Public are a major component of the justice system in the regulation of relations and preservation of rights



the exact nature of trade and financial ties for individuals and institutions. The legislative framework within which notaries operate guarantees the rights of participating parties under the Sultanate's extant regulations. Notary departments are independent and are present in all governorates, a total of 61 distributed throughout the Sultanate.

Notaries public signed off on 209,344 contracts and records, including informal transactions, statements of non-marriage and certificates of widowhood in 2015, endorsing content and verifying signatures and dates. Of this total, 149,748 documents were of an official nature, or 72%, a further 46,470, or 22% involved endorsements of informal transactions, 10,815, or 5%, were declarations of non-marriage, 2,024, or 1%, certificates of widowhood and 287 verification of informal transactions.

The Reconciliation Committees

The Reconciliation Committees stand alongside the modern judicial structure as a highlight of the modern Renaissance. These committees, established by Royal Decree No. 98/2005, were designed to become a key pillar in establishing justice and documenting rights by the quickest, easiest and least expensive route for disputants. Their existence is testimony to the principle that justice is the responsibility of the state, an

obligation to be sought out and defended.

The Reconciliation Committees embody the inspirational vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, founder of the Renaissance and leader of modern Oman. They spring from the understanding that to build an effective modern society, the instruments of modernity must be introduced without neglecting the distinctive ingredients of traditional and national culture.

The Committees have jurisdiction in all disputes involving personal status, as well as in civil and commercial litigation. A statement of reconciliation at its adoption becomes a directly executable bond.

There are 40 Reconciliation Committees distributed throughout the Sultanate, and these committees received 18,047 conciliation requests during 2015. Of these requests, 88% were settled where the parties appeared before the magistrate, a success rate that strongly validates the benefit of this facility to the legal sector and to society.

The Higher Institute of Justice

The Higher Institute of Justice is a beacon that lights the path to national development and the rule of law. It has done much to consolidate and expand awareness of the law and how it needs to permeate every aspect of life if society and the individual are to

“ The quality of the Public Prosecution, tasked with examining evidence in matters of criminal investigation, is key to the successful pursuit of justice through the court system ”

feel secure in their rights. As a standard bearer in legal scholarship and practice, it has been responsible for upgrading the expertise of judges and members of the administrative court and public prosecution and training a cohort of judges, assistants, and public prosecution personnel in the proper administration of justice and the law.

The Institute was established by means of Royal Decree No. 35/2010 of 11 April 2010 and opened its doors in readiness for the 2011/2012 academic year. By the end of 2015, 185 graduates from various branches of the judiciary, such as the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs, the Administrative Court and Public Prosecution, had successfully completed studies at the Institute.

During the 2015/2016 academic year, the Institute had 137 training programmes on offer, including 42 for legal assistants and 95 specialist courses.

The Public Prosecution

The Public Prosecution Department continues to pursue its judicial mission in society by way of a rapid yet well studied sequence of steps towards optimum development, exercising meanwhile the functions with which it is entrusted. Its development proceeds apace alongside the steady advance of the Sultanate as it adopts the tools and technology of a contemporary state. The role of the Public Prosecution Department in the community

continues to strengthen and conform to the realities of modern life.

The Public Prosecution Department safeguards the process of investigation and law enforcement on behalf of the public, using the best technology and manpower available at any time to assist it in its work. Today this translates into sophisticated electronic services, and high performance judicial and administrative cadres to examine evidence and prepare prosecutions that are likely to succeed. It also means ensuring a strong complement of women in the ranks of its personnel and sustaining such internal and external partnerships as will benefit the Department in its present and future practice.

Well qualified legal personnel are key to the work of the Public Prosecution and the Department is rigorous in the execution of its recruitment policy, appointing only personnel who are capable and well qualified.

The Department seeks out the highest achievers in the faculties of shari'a and law. From the date of its inception it has gathered a vast amount of experience in the exercise of the law, and in the process confirmed its authoritative status. As such, and with a substantial body of complex case files to its credit, it now plays a pivotal role in all aspects of the investigation and discharge processes.

There were 158 Department personnel operating across the

country in mid-2016, of whom 26 were women and a further 31 auxiliaries in training.

By the end of 2015, the Public Prosecution Department had handled 41,072 cases, a drop of almost ten percent from the previous year.

Of the cases prosecuted, 3,260 were felonies and 37,332 misdemeanours, and 5,796 were referred to appeal. While the total number of accused Registered (45,246) and the number of saved cases (21,934) the issue by (53%) of the total number of cases, while the total cases referred (17,181) by the issue (42%), and cases under investigation (19,571) issue (5%).

Legal Affairs

The Ministry of Legal Affairs plays a vital role in establishing and updating the schema of Omani laws, on the peak of which lies the Basic Law of the State promulgated by Royal Decree No 101/96, which is the source of reference for all Royal decrees and laws that are issued from time to time.

It drafts royal decrees and bills and takes measures for their promulgation. It also reviews draft Royal decrees, laws, statutes and decisions produced by ministries and government departments before they are promulgated and published in the Official Gazette.

The Ministry studies and reviews draft international treaties, conventions and agreements to which the Sultanate becomes a party,

offers opinions on applications to join existing agreements, conventions and treaties, and reviews contracts before they are signed if they entail financial commitments on the part of the state in excess of half a million Omani Rials. It also protects the government's interest in disputes arising out of the implementation of contracts to which the latter is a party.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs also provides legal opinions and issues official approved interpretations of Royal decrees, laws and statutes when circumstances so require. These are binding on all government departments with the exception of the judiciary.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs publishes the Official Gazette, which contains the official versions of decrees, laws, statutes and ministerial decisions, along with announcements and other materials which the law requires to be published in the Official Gazette.

To provide easy access for those with an interest in the law, a bound volume is issued yearly, containing the Royal decrees, Royal commands, laws and statutes of a legislative nature issued during the course of the year.

Other publications of the Ministry include books explaining the legal principles underlying opinions on legal issues. These appear annually and contain the texts of legal opinion issued by the Ministry that year, together with the statutes from which they are derived.



The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Sohar



“ The imperative of religious tolerance is one of the most basic principles protected by the Omani modern Renaissance ”



The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat is an architectural masterpiece, combining Islamic tradition and contemporary design

Religious tolerance

Tolerance ..a civilised and deeply ingrained feature of Omani society

Tolerance is one of the finest and most generous qualities that have long characterised Omani society. Peaceful coexistence and compassion for others come naturally to Omanis, who were known for their willingness to cooperate and to share responsibility wherever they travelled, on land or sea. Their interactions were always respectful and this respect was their passport to people's hearts.

The gentle and sanguine disposition which favoured Omani merchants and navigators in their expeditions enabled them also to contribute in a positive way to the successful spread of Islam, with its

highly evolved traditions and humane values. They took the message of Islam to the shores of East Africa, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, and even to parts of Central Africa where they traded regularly with indigenous tribes. They brought Islam, as they had earlier brought with them the gracious customs of Omani civilisation, to the Chinese and Asian ports they visited. They conveyed their message with the open spirit and moderate demeanour for which they were renowned, as they were for their readiness to accept and accommodate all opinions, religions, cultures and civilisations.

The Renaissance built the ideology of religious tolerance into the foundations of contemporary Omani society. The newly created Sultanate guaranteed religious and intellectual

freedom to citizens and residents alike, within the bounds of the law; for no fundamental human right can in fact be confiscated. Every person has the right to worship freely and by the rules of their own religion, so long as no others are harmed.

This perspective is also central to the ethos of the Omani Renaissance, which worked hard to establish it, to sustain a civilised dialogue between religions on a basis of mutual respect. By this method is genuine co-existence between peoples fostered and, by extension, world peace achieved. The dynamics of Oman's benevolent foreign policy enabled it to navigate the oceans of political, economic, military and security issues globally. It reflects well on Oman and on those with whom it engages and it furthers the attainment of common interests on the basis of sound and well-established relationships.

The State guarantees personal freedoms and practice within the law. Article (28) states that *"the freedom to perform religious rites in accordance with established customs is guaranteed, provided that it does not disrupt public order or morality."* Meanwhile, Oman's Personal Status Law guarantees non-Muslim residents of the Sultanate the right to apply their own judgment, insofar as these judgments are not incompatible with Omani traditions, in line with Article 282 of the law. It is common knowledge that other religions are permitted houses of worship where non-Muslims may practise their respective religions

freely and in the reassurance that they are protected by the law.

Given its long-established reputation for peaceful coexistence, the Sultanate's contributions to furthering this culture of tolerance, so greatly needed in the world today, are earning deserved recognition. Oman relentlessly promotes the principles of respect for religious freedom, as evidenced in its efforts to foster communication with other world views. It has established centres of dialogue with the different religions and sects, and created the Sultan Qaboos professorships at internationally renowned educational and academic institutions. The academic chairs are conduits of cultural advance, ambassadors of the message of peaceful coexistence and human harmony, of the tolerance and peace which is the true message of Islam.

Again, the series entitled "Message of Islam from Oman", which took the form of a travelling exhibition focusing on three images of Islam that needed clarification, proved an effective way to broadcast Oman's own experience of social peace. The exhibition examined religious tolerance, understanding of others, and peaceful coexistence. Oman had in the past demonstrated how an Islamic country by its example could influence the dissemination of these values around world. The recent exhibition, which was received with genuine curiosity and interest internationally, was coordinated with the help of a number of organisations, notably UNESCO, and supported

by religious centres that shared the message of moderation and coexistence among people, cultures and religions.

Since it set out on its travels in April 2011, the Message of Islam from Oman has been seen by more than four and a half million visitors and viewers. It has visited 75 locales in more than 35 countries around the world. In early February 2016 it arrived at the National Museum of Cultural History in the South African capital of Pretoria.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is responsible for the Islam in Oman website, which is presented in eight international languages. In addition, it has produced three documentaries designed to highlight aspects of the Sultanate's experience in the areas of tolerance and coexistence, Islamic art and religious discourse.

The exhibition catchphrase : *"Let me do something for tolerance"* personalised its purpose of encouraging the spread of a culture of tolerance in human societies, favouring individual, collective and institutional action as a practical expression of this compassionate ethos.

A convincing example of Oman's desire to deepen communication between cultures and to nurture a spirit of harmony and coexistence among nations built on Oman's long historical and cultural connection with Russia. The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs chose the Russian city of St. Petersburg as a venue for the Sixth Conference on Ibadhism: *"Reformist Thinking as applied to the Islamic Schools in the Modern Era"*.

The conference took place on 1-3 June 2015 and was hosted by the Russian Academy's Institute of Oriental Manuscripts. The Institute's grand metropolitan building houses one of the world's finest collections of early printed material in the Asian languages, including a large number of religious manuscripts from Oman, some more than 200 years old

Academic contributions to the conference examined the history of cultural exchanges between Oman and Russia, by reference to Russian Orientalist studies of documents archived by the Russian Navy. These included records of their interactions in and around Oman and the Gulf region in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries.

Under the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and, in furtherance of the principle of religious and cultural harmony as well as implementation of UN Resolution 65/5 of 2010, which designated the first week of February every year a week devoted to human harmony, the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences organised the 5th round of the "Human Harmony and Rapprochement Week" from 14 to 17 February 2016.

The event was built around the theme of religious and cultural understanding and the need for intercultural communication, and promoted the role of dialogue in enhancing peace and stability in the world — notably by raising public awareness about key issues and reiterating the most basic values of tolerance and cooperation preached by

“ The series ‘Message of Islam from Oman’ exhibitions was designed to present a clear picture of Islam and highlight Oman’s coexistence and religious tolerance ”

all religions for the good of mankind. The week is also in full alignment with the core ethics of the Islamic religion and Islamic and Arab culture. Equity and justice, and constructive communication with all cultures and civilisations, are values espoused by these social communities. Dialogue is the intelligent option, the choice of the wise, and the means best suited to the resolution of problems and of the crises facing contemporary societies; for these challenges undermine the stability and harmony of human coexistence.

The Centre is a strong contributor to the project of promoting dialogue with other peoples and cultures and regularly invites scientists, intellectuals and academics from leading American and European institutions and

research centres to give guest lectures. Meanwhile it participates actively in seminars held within the Sultanate, as well as in relevant Arab, regional and international events.

As part of its policy of highlighting the value of Oman’s intellectual contribution and cultural influence generally on Islamic thought, and as an expression of its profound interest in system values that enrich the human experience in an integrated manner, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs publishes a quarterly entitled “*Tafahum*” (Understanding), which seeks to narrow differences among people of different beliefs and to foster the Islamic call for tolerance.

“*Tafahum*” has an extensive readership, and a tradition of inviting

Since it was launched in April 2011, the exhibition “Message of Islam from Oman” has been seen by more than four and a half million visitors and viewers



“ The Sultan Qaboos academic chairs play a vital and useful role in promoting the study of Arab and Islamic civilisation and in deepening the foundations and parameters of inter-religious dialogue ”

respected scholars specialised in aspects of Islam to contribute articles on topics of broad interest. As its title suggests, the magazine has a particular partiality to the aspects of Islam that encourage dialogue and understanding. It offers a platform for the exchange of opinions from all sides of the issues discussed, in the belief that the experience and views of others, even at their most entrenched, must be heard if we are to honour and include the knowledge and reality of other cultures in the debate.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is using modern technology to develop its services and facilitate the beneficiaries of these services. It is also working on developing and investing its respective endowment resources - mosque, school, charity and civil - to most beneficial effect.

Statistics show a total at 127,548 endowments, while endowment investments of recent years are currently valued at more than 350 million OR. The Ministry sponsors upwards of sixteen thousand mosques under the mosques programme, as well as 350 Koran schools, incorporating some 1500 teachers. The Ministry has also launched the Koran distance learning project, providing access to allcomers online. It maintains a publishing list of religious books and other material of Omani provenance, along with new imprints of the Koran and electronic Koran.

In addition to the Sultan Qaboos academic chairs established at some of the most prestigious American, European, Asian and Australian

universities, and which play a vital and useful role in the study of Arab and Islamic civilisation, and in deepening the foundations and reach of dialogue between religions, the Sultanate has either established or supported the setting up of cultural centres and foundations around the world that share the goal of achieving more understanding between peoples and cultures.

An example is the Sultan Qaboos Centre in Washington, which is active in communicating and interacting with American society, the Lebanese-Omani Cultural Centre in Beirut, and the Liqaa International Centre for Dialogue of the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East in Beirut.

Motivated by the wishes of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and in exercise of instructions delivered by him, numerous new mosques have been built throughout the Sultanate, helping to alleviate the pressure on existing mosques as the population grows. Other mosques have been restored or rebuilt, and ancillary services added to facilitate the needs of worshippers.

The many mosques that bear the name of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said and which were built at his personal expense, tell another chapter of the story of the modern Renaissance he pioneered and of its deep concern for people. The Renaissance believes in providing the faithful with the means to perform their rites of worship in surroundings of peace, tranquility and safety. It tells a story of Oman's role in and contribution to Islamic civilisation from its earliest days, as evidenced in

Sovereignty of the law and access to legal action

architectural masterpieces that exude the spirit of Islam. Wonderful mosques, marked by creativity and harmony in their engineering and design, express the deeply felt impact of Islamic culture in the hearts of Muslims, manifested in these religious buildings of surpassing beauty.

The Office of His Eminence, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, plays a leading role in spreading religious awareness based on proper knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and the guiding teachings of the Prophet's Sunnah. The office is the recipient every year of more than 150 thousand religious *fatwas* in all areas of human activity. Its work derives from the programmes of the Institute of Sharia Sciences, an institution that aims to consolidate the tenets of Islam

and its noble principles. The institute focuses on disseminating the values of tolerance and human love, which involves extending a friendly hand to the 'other' with a view to achieving positive cultural communication among peoples of different cultures and belief systems, while at the same respecting their identities.

The Institute of Sharia Sciences strives through its academic programmes to prepare specialists in shari'a science and Islamic studies, and to provide them with an advanced level of the knowledge and culture of shari'a law and related skills. It also promotes research and studies in shari'a science and related learning.

The College of Forensic Science encourages scholarly research in forensic science and related areas of study





Council of Oman



Council of Oman

Council of Oman ... genuine partnership propels further development and growth

The broad and genuine support that quickly greeted the *shura* system introduced by HM Sultan Qaboos confirmed for him the successful potential of the choice and the certainty that Oman was on its way to full maturity as a modern State. The *shura*, embodied in the Council of Oman, was the manifestation of the state of law and institutions, based as it was on genuine partnership and consultation, fully respectful of opinion sought and decisions taken. It supported the concepts of collective national action, born of His Majesty's conviction that since the homeland belonged to its citizens, then its fate and the manner of its development were a matter for all, working together to complete national projects under the guidance of national institutions.

His Majesty closely follows the work of both branches of the Council of Oman, the Consultation Council (*Majlis al Shura*) and the State Council (*Majlis al Dawla*) and referred to this interest in his address to the opening of the sixth session of the Council of Oman at Shoumoukh Fort, Wilayat Manah in the Governorate of Dakhiliyah on 15 November 2015. "I value" he said, "those past efforts of the

Council of Oman that had such powerful effect in driving forward the process of development towards ever greater advancement and growth".

The legislative and regulatory powers granted to the Council of Oman under Royal Decree No 39/2011 of 12 March 2011 allowed for the institution to express more clearly the aspirations of citizens. It paves the way for them to participate more extensively in decision-making. The experience of the Municipal Councils, currently preparing for second term elections at the end of 2016, another major landmark in the political process, demonstrates a significant advance in democratic practice. The Councils have expanded the scope of citizen participation in local community issues and as a supplement to the Omani *Shura* system – a development which took place hand in hand with other steps to consolidate the structure of justice and Public Prosecution.

Majlis Oman (Council of Oman)

The Council of Oman (*Majlis Oman*) consists of the State Council (*Majlis al Dawla*) – whose members are appointed by His Majesty the Sultan from among distinguished

☞ The Council of Oman consists of the State Council (Majlis al Dawla), the members of which are selected and appointed by His Majesty the Sultan from among the country's leading experts in their fields, and the Shura Council (Majlis al Shura), which is composed of the publicly elected representatives of the various wilayat ☞

Omani citizens with the highest levels of expertise – and the Consultation Council (*Majlis al Shura*), whose members are elected by citizens as representatives of their wilayats.

The Council meets at the invitation of His Majesty to discuss issues of concern as proposed by him. It adopts decisions by majority vote. The Council's annual sessions following recess are inaugurated by His Majesty, who calls on the respective branches of the Council to convene and take up the work of the new session.

Opening the sixth session of the Council on 15 November 2015, His Majesty noted the many advances achieved by Oman, calling them *"a source of collective pride... We anticipate driving forward the Renaissance with even greater resolve. This is something that can only be achieved by collaborating in the endeavour and integrating all efforts for the benefit of the whole"*.

To stimulate more effective partnership and cooperation between the State Council and the Consultation Council in their joint work, a training centre specific to the Council was inaugurated on 19 May 2016.

The mission of the centre is to assist and empower the honourable members of the State and Consultative Councils in the exercise of their legislative and supervisory duties. It will also offer refresher and other skills courses to personnel to upgrade and regularise work procedures.

State Council ... a sound rationale for consolidating the Shura

The State Council represents a solid foundation for the structure of Omani society, enhancing the achievements made and reaffirming the principles at their core. It constitutes a medium for proper consultation (Shura) that derives from the heritage of the country, its values, its Islamic Shari'a code and the history in which it takes pride, while benefiting from the methods and tools of the modern age.

As it carries out its mission and functions, the State Council is enacting a crucial role, not only towards comprehensive national development, but also in advancing Omani society towards goals and objectives set forth by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos at the Council's inauguration.

The State Council, which comprises a selection of Omanis with expertise in various different fields, is a springboard for the sharing of deep intellectual insights. It provides a forum for active contribution to legislation based on opinions raised during its deliberations, with a view to achieving the benefits of the major national goals. The Council operates in accordance with the principle of shared differences of opinion and ideas, as underlined by His Majesty the Sultan. The Council makes a vital contribution to nationwide

participation in decision making through the expertise of its members, who deal with a variety of matters with full objectivity.

Membership of the State Council

The State Council consists of a chairman and members (whose number does not exceed the number of Consultation Council members) who are appointed by His Majesty the Sultan. They are selected from among former ministers and under-secretaries and those of equivalent rank, as well as former ambassadors, former senior judges, retired senior officers, dignitaries and eminent personalities from the worlds of science, literature, culture, business and academia, in addition to people who have provided distinguished service to the nation and any others whom His Majesty the Sultan sees as fit to appoint.

On 8 November 2015, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree No. 47/2015 appointing the members of the State Council for its sixth term, with new members constituting 72.6% of the total. The Council consists of 84 members in addition to the Chairman. Twenty three others, or 27.4% of the full complement, were retained from the previous session. Of the new Council appointees, 12 are women.

Functions of the Council

The State Council, as befits its status within the Council of Oman, is a legal entity with full financial and

administrative independence. It is based in the Governorate of Muscat. The Council sits annually for an accumulated period of not less than eight months, as and of the date His Majesty Sultan Qaboos convenes and addresses the annual session, outlining the broad features of the forthcoming work of government and Council.

Article 58 of Royal Decree No. 99/2011 on the Council of Oman defines the powers available to the State Council and necessary for it to achieve its objectives. These objectives consist of approving or amending draft legislation referred to it by the Council of Ministers, proposing and approving new legislation, reviewing and amending existing legislation, and discussing and making recommendations affecting development projects and the annual State Budget as forwarded by the Council of Ministers. It also reviews the annual report of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution.

Sessions of the State Council and affiliated bodies

The State Council is appointed for a term of four years. The Council is currently sitting in the second year of its sixth term (2015-2019). Its first procedural session commenced on 16 November 2015 with the swearing-in provided for in Article 3 of the of founding statutes of the



Councils of State and Consultation as promulgated by Royal Decree No. 86/97. This is followed by the selection of two Deputy Chairmen and members of the Council Office.

The State and Consultation Councils are convened annually, for sessions of not less than eight months in a 12-month period, beginning with the formal inaugural session of the Council of Oman.

The Council sits regularly, as determined by the Council Office on the basis of the issues before it or draft legislation referred to it for review; or as proposed by its Standing Committees from issues sanctioned by the Council Office. The

Chairman of the State Council may convene extraordinary sessions as necessary.

The State Council is constituted of a Chairman, the Council Office, Standing Committees and the Secretariat General.

The Council Chairman

The Council Chairman broadly oversees the proper functioning of the work of the Council and ensures compliance with national legislation and Council regulations. The Chairman has two deputies, chosen by direct secret ballot by an absolute majority of Council members at the inaugural sitting of each annual session.

The State Council plays a vital role in national development

The Council Office

The State Council Office prepares the Council's agenda and decides on its sittings, as well as the work of its committees. It assists the members in performing their duties, offers support to Council committees and drafts regulations organising task management and coordination for the committees that comply with Council by law.

The Standing Committees

Inaugurating its sixth term (2015-2019), the Council constituted five Standing Committees, viz. the Legal Committee, the Economic Committee, the Social Committee, the Education and Research Committee and the Committee on Culture, Information and Tourism. The Committees are constituted from the Council membership as determined by the Council at the recommendation of the Council Office at the outset of each annual session. Their job is to study draft laws referred to them, in addition to the specific topics within their jurisdiction. At the beginning of each annual session, the standing committees specify the subjects that need to be studied during the session, in line with the Council's new legislative and auditing powers.

The Secretariat General

The General Secretariat is composed of the Secretary-General, who shall be appointed by royal decree, assisted by a number of

assistants and staff of departments and divisions. The Secretariat shall perform the necessary actions to assist the Council and all its organs in the direct competence and responsibilities in accordance with the general regulations of the Office of the Council and approved by the Board. The Secretariat General consists of four assisting Secretariats: the Assistant Secretariat-General for Sessions and Committee Affairs, the Assistant Secretariat-General for Information and Research Affairs and the Assistant Secretariat-General for



“ Since its foundation, the State Council has convened 11 regular sessions and two additional sessions jointly with the Consultative Council ”

Administrative and Financial Affairs and the Assistant Secretariat for Media and Public Relations.

Activities impacting the lives of citizens

Under the legislative and regulatory powers vested in the State Council by virtue of Article 17 of the Council of Oman statutes, and in accordance with Article 18 of the Basic Law of the State, the first annual session of the State Council's sixth term had a full agenda of legislative

and regulatory activities to process. The Council saw 17 bills through to completion, involving reviews of proposals received from both the Royal Court and from government quarters. It also examined a Council proposal on "Civil society institutions from a legislative and regulatory perspective" submitted by the Council's Committee on Culture, Information and Tourism.

The State Council has convened 11 regular sittings and two in partnership with the Consultation Council since the start of its sixth term, during

The State Council Office sets out the agenda of the Council and its committees



which five Standing Committees were constituted, nine bills and proposals approved, and 82 Council committee meetings held. The Council Office met 14 times over the same period and five of these meetings were attended by invitation by Chairmen and Liaison Officers of the Standing Committees for discussion of reports compiled by the respective committees on proposals submitted by the Council for legislation. The Council Office also addresses the many reports, proposals and submissions received by the Council from all quarters.

Sultan Qaboos has asked for greater coordination between government agencies and the Council of Oman in the higher interests of the country and as confirmation that the state of law and institutions envisioned by His Majesty is not just a concept, but a functioning reality. In application of Article 58a (37) and further to directives from His Majesty, the State and Consultation Councils held two joint sessions in the first year of the sixth term. At the first, agreement was reached on the articles which were the subject of disparity between the two chambers, on proposed amendments to the income tax bill, the law on foreign capital investment and the insurance companies act. The outcome was then referred to His Majesty, along with the opinion of the two chambers, after debate and analysis and after a vote had been taken on the modified articles that resolved the differences.

The second joint sitting also

addressed disagreements between the two chambers, this time on the draft text of penal legislation. The result was amended articles that secured agreement, allowing the final draft of the Omani Penal Law to be submitted to His Majesty, together with the opinion of the two chambers, following debate and a vote.

In ordinary session, a sequence of bills was drafted and debated and referred to the Royal Court or to the government during year one of the sixth term, as prescribed in Article 58 of the Basic Law of the State. In all, five drafts were referred to His Majesty. In addition, draft amendments of six separate legislative items were returned by the Royal Court for review and debate and resubmission.

Five bills were referred to the Council by the government for debate and approval. Meanwhile, the Council adopted for referral to the government a proposal submitted by the Standing Committee on Culture, Information and Tourism on “Civil society institutions from a legislative and regulatory perspective”.

The Council of State is keen to cement bonds with the regional counterparts and communicates well with the regional and international bodies that share its experience in institutional democracy. It arranges mutual parliamentary visits and cooperates generally with the parliamentary structures overseas, especially in countries that replicate Oman’s bicameral system. Such

exchanges serve to showcase the Sultanate's dynamic experience in the exercise of *shura* and its incremental approach to democratic development. The Omani approach is grounded in a strong sense of national identity, coming from an interest and pride in its heritage and culture and the values of the Islamic *shari'a*. It appropriates from the history and precedent such tools as benefit the advance of democracy today and furthers dialogue and exchange with counterparts in the region and beyond.

The Shura Council .. supervisory and legislative roles enhance the parliamentary process

The elections to choose members of the Shura Council for its eighth term (2015/2019) took place on 25 October 2015, an important anniversary, being

45 years from the event that catapulted a stagnated Oman into the modern age. Sultan Qaboos, whose vision gave birth to the modern Renaissance, has guided the democratic process ever since. Democracy has developed gradually and incrementally in those four and a half decades, from guidance to consultation, to the oversight and legislation achieved in the seventh term of the Council that completed in 2015.

Official statistics show a participation figure of 56.66%, or 252,905 voters, for the eighth term elections, which is higher than the previous average. Of this figure, 127,955 were male and 124,950 female. Oman has a registered electorate of 525,785 eligible voters.

The newly instated eighth Council, which serves a four-year term until

The Shura Council serves an eighth dynamic and successful term in its legislative and oversight activities



2019, convened in extraordinary session on 4 November 2015 to elect a Chairman and two Deputy Chairmen from the Council membership of 85, as complies with Royal Decree No. 99/2011 and in turn with Article 58a(12) of the Basic Law of the State. The latter describes the grounds and mechanisms governing procedure for extraordinary sessions, including the provision that *"the Shura Council meets at the invitation of His Majesty the Sultan, in an extraordinary session preceding its inaugural session to elect a Chairman and his two Deputy Chairmen for the duration of the term by an absolute majority of members of the Council."*

During the first annual session (2015/2016) of its eighth term, the Council handled a packed schedule of legislative and supervisory duties, in addition to a raft of constituency issues, in particular matters related to the consequences of the current economic crisis. The Council's interactions with constituents has undergone a paradigm shift in recent years, increasing emphasis on constituency affairs. The debate on the draft State Budget for 2016 produced a set of recommendations and proposals, as did the Council's examination of the Ninth Five-year plan.

Debates at ordinary sessions of the Council were facilitated on occasion by inviting Ministers responsible for major public policy decisions to be questioned by members, benefiting more extensive and thorough discussions. Also debated in this manner were matters relating to proposed new legislation, or

amendments to existing legislation, as emanating from government or from the floor of the house.

The Shura Council Office also held frequent weekly meetings, 20 in all up to the start of June 2016, following up Council work and the response of government agencies to Council decisions. The Office reviewed 126 parliamentary questions, 57 requests for information, 15 matters of principle and 10 debate requests. It also examined responses by government ministers to parliamentary questions that had been put to them.

The Standing Committees also met regularly, attended events and issued invitations to discuss and examine matters of concern to constituents. They analysed studies and findings and recommendations of concern to the institutional government and private sectors, making proposals that benefit sustainable development. The Committees also scheduled special topic meetings as the need arose.

Coordination and integration

One of the most distinctive features of Oman's Shura system is the high level of co-ordination and cooperation that exists between the parliamentary institutions, and different state bodies and authorities. This reflects an approach designed to serve the interests of the country and its citizens in a number of ways, ranging from the implementation of development plans and improving performance to expanding the scope of public participation in decision-making.

“ Positive coordination between the legislative and executive branches is an attribute of the Omani Shura’s approach in its pursuit of the interests of citizen and homeland ”

A particular interest of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos is uninterrupted collaborative communication between the institutions of State and, in the case of the Council of Oman, between the State and Consultation branches. This protects the multiplying effect of individual efforts made for the purpose of meeting current challenges. It consolidates cooperation and consultation between the two chambers on matters of national action where the government and other institutions of State are endeavouring to best serve the public interest. The Council Office and Cabinet met jointly on 14 June 2016 and discussed matters of social, economic, educational and health concern.

In an example of cross-collaboration, the Council facilitated a meeting on 23 June 2016 between the Committee on Education and Scientific Research and the Committee on Youth and Human Resources with cabinet ministers who had been invited to discuss the harmonisation of the third level graduate cohort with the needs of the national labour market.

The meeting yielded a set of aspirations and proposals addressing the challenges that stand in the way of such harmonisation.

On the matter of community outreach and the involvement of constituents in the process of consultation and decision-making, a series of exchanges was arranged during which representatives of government agencies and of the

private sector were invited to discuss particular topics, or specific aspects of topics of broad community concern.

Prerogatives of the Consultation Council (Majlis al Shura)

The Consultation Council (Majlis al Shura) is a financially and administratively independent legal entity with its premises in the Governorate of Muscat.

The Consultation Council undertakes the responsibility of discussing the Five-Year Development Plan and the General State Budget in the presence of the minister concerned, who responds to any queries the Council members raise with him before the relevant Royal Decrees are issued and come into force. The Council also studies and comments on topics referred to it by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos or the Council of Ministers, on which the Council makes recommendations and suggestions. The Majlis al Shura submits an annual report to His Majesty the Sultan about the outcome of its tasks.

The Consultation Council has the right to put forward proposals to the government on draft laws and help draft the Five-Year Development Plans. The Council’s Chairman is a member of the Supreme High Committee for Five-Year Development Plans, which sets out the Plans’ main features and monitors their implementation.

“ The first annual session of the Council's eighth term saw a marked increase in the use of regulatory tools, as compared with its seventh term ”

Sessions of the Consultation Council and affiliated bodies

The Consultation Council's term runs for four years beginning from the date of the declaration of the official results of its elections. The term ends on the 30th of September of the fourth year of its term. The current Council was inaugurated on 16 November 2015 and will complete four annual sessions in this eighth term before it is dissolved in 2019. The inaugural session was given over to the election of the six members completing membership of the Council Office for half of the term, as well as approving the formation of the main Council committees. The Council was also briefed on a draft of the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2020) and the draft State Budget for the 2016 fiscal year.

Bodies of the Consultation Council (Majlis al Shura)

The Consultation Council exercises its powers and prerogatives through its four main bodies. These are the Chairman, the Council Office, the Standing Committees and the Secretariat-General.

The Council Chairman

The Chairman oversees the activities of the Majlis, manages its sittings, represents it in its dealings with other bodies and speaks on its behalf. He has the right to summon extraordinary sessions as necessary. He and his two deputies are elected at an extraordinary session summoned

by His Majesty in accordance with Article 58 of the Basic Law of the State.

The Council Office

The Council Office sets the timetable and agenda for the Council's ordinary sittings in the light of the activities of the Council's committees and the topics referred to them or put before this council. It also manages the council's business between sessions.

The Standing Committees

At the inaugural meeting of the first annual session (2015/2016) of its eighth term (2015-2019) on 16 November 2015 AD, the Council approved the formation of the Main Council Committees, namely: the Legislative and Legal Committee, the Economic and Finance Committee, the Health and Environment Committee, Education and Scientific Research Committee, the Social Development and Services Committee, the Youth and Human Resources Committee, the Food Security and Water Committee and the Information and Culture Committee.

In the first year of its eighth term, the Council approved nine studies undertaken by its Standing Committees and forwarded these to the Council of Ministers.

The Secretariat-General consists of the Secretary-General who is appointed by Royal Decree and a number of employees and specialists. The Secretariat-General assists the Consultation Council and its bodies in carrying out their tasks and facilitates all that relates to organizational and

administrative procedures of relevance. The Secretariat-General plays a vital role in the success of the Council's functions. The Council debated the draft organizational structure and internal regulations with a view to developing the performance of the Council.

Legislative and regulatory tools and other activities

The Consultation Council exercises its powers and prerogatives in accordance with recognised parliamentary lines. Its legislative and regulatory powers have been expanded since the Basic Law of the State was amended for this purpose and the Council of Oman was granted legislative and regulatory oversight that raises the ability of the Council to participate more effectively and with greater impact in the decision-making process on the one hand, and better express the aspirations of constituents on the other. The Council monitors the performance of government agencies and acquaints itself with policies, plans and programmes being implemented to ensure that they meet best practice standards.

The Council statutes, in their express provisions, determine the appropriate regulatory means and mechanisms available to it, specifically in their Articles 145-154. These procedural mechanisms include urgent questions, briefing requests, expressions of interest, parliamentary question time, requests for debate, discussion of ministerial releases and fact-finding committees.

The first annual session of the Council's eighth term saw a marked increase in the use of regulatory tools, as compared with its predecessor. This included eight urgent questions, against four recourses to this option in the entire four years of the seventh term. This alone confirms the determination of Council members to exercise full legislative and oversight powers in matters of urgent concern to the public and the national interest, as is consonant with Article 147 of the Council's Rules of Procedure.

There were 63 briefing requests from the floor of the chamber on a range of issues of constituent concern and 15 expressions of interest, far exceeding the seventh term statistics for the use of these tools.

The most commonly used procedural tool in the first year of the eighth Council was the parliamentary question procedure, which saw 142 questions addressed to a minister or equivalent, again creating a strong new precedent. Members requested debates on 10 occasions, against 15 for the entire four-year duration of the seventh term.

In addition to its regular focus on matters concerning national development and policy coordination with the government, the Council maintains an interest in promoting bilateral relations between the Sultanate and friendly countries. In the first year of its eighth term, the Council participated in numerous international parliamentary gatherings and conferences, and engaged in dialogue



The municipal councils represent another brick in the Shura approach to participatory government

with Arab, GCC and international legislatures, where it was able to discuss the broad work of legislating and overseeing aspects of national policy-making. These exchanges also provided opportunities for the analysis of Arab and international issues of common concern. The Council approach conforms well with its core belief that the appropriate and most effective way to seek solutions is through dialogue, with all parties seated at one table. It brings this belief to all meetings and events in which it participates, both within the Sultanate and abroad.

The Council has become an active member of many Arab and international parliamentary organisations and federations, as well as of more than twenty parliamentary friendship groups around the world.

Municipal Councils ... a further step towards active participation

While the Council of Oman, both State and Consultation branches, works to advance the process of comprehensive development, preparing and debating studies that benefit the implementation of development programmes; while it searches for appropriate solutions to economic and social challenges and ways to improve administrative performance; the municipal councils also contribute to the process. Municipal councils offer opinions and recommendations on ways to improve municipal systems and services in their respective areas of authority. They work hand in hand with the Shura in the formulation of development policies, advising on the adjustment

“ The municipal councils have been particularly effective in the project recommendations and studies proposed and tabled by them in the context of their specific powers ”

of plans to tailor them to the needs of specific provinces. They operate closely with the community in the service of constituent and local needs insofar as they do not conflict with the overall plan of national development.

As the councils prepare for the term two municipal elections scheduled for the end of 2016, they have a largely successful platform of achievements on which to build their campaigns. Term one saw the establishment of structures which ensure continuity in the delivery of municipal services. High performance levels were recorded across the country and positive satisfaction ratings for community development and benefit to citizens, all helping to strengthen and perpetuate the progress achieved by the Renaissance.

While the municipal councils have established themselves as a positive force in popular democracy, having served up proposals and studies on such projects as are within their remit under the Municipal Councils Act, issued pursuant to Royal Decree No. 116/2011 of 26 October 2011, they have also launched a new phase of popular participation, acting as a broker between social groups and government institutions. Their creation represents a step further by the Sultanate on the road to institution-building, and to active public participation in the decision-making process, another brick in the *shura* edifice, built on an infrastructure of institutional partnership, cooperation and collaboration and an active and participative electorate.

The municipal councils served their first term as a true embodiment of the legal and procedural principles established for the purpose. One of their most important achievements was the ethos of responsibility and enthusiasm they brought to the development dialogue. Council members responded positively to the requirements of local communities and demonstrated diligence and persistence in pursuing municipal matters with government agencies. They dealt realistically with local community matters, declining to isolate themselves from the people they represented. The participatory approach is essential to the effective exercise of local democracy at this introductory stage. Moreover, they demonstrated a willingness and ability to anticipate elements of their development work that demanded close collaboration with other government agencies in the interests of continuity and of the public benefit.

Under the legislation resulting from Royal Decree No. 116/2011 and its bylaw enacted by Diwan Decision No. 15/2012, the Sultanate's 11 governorates are required to deliver 192 members, of which 26 members represent the Governorate of Muscat, 24 the Governorate of Dhofar, 8 Musandam, 8 Al Buraimi, 26 Al Dakhiliyah, 28 Al Batinah North, 22 Al Batinah South, 16 Al Sharqiyah South, 16 Al Sharqiyah North, 10 Al Dhahirah and 8 Al Wusta.

In addition to the 192 members elected by citizens, municipal councils in the governorates of the

“ In their first term in office, the municipal councils performed strongly within the clearly established legal parameters that define their authority, and demonstrated sincerity and enthusiasm in the exercise of their responsibilities ”

Sultanate consist of representatives of government departments having grade levels not lower than director-general or department director in the case of governorates that do not have directors general. The government departments in question are the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, Muscat Municipality or Dhofar Municipality, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development, Royal Oman Police, and Sohar Municipality in the case of Batinah North governorate. In addition, each Council co-opts two dignitaries of sound experience and reputation selected from citizens of each governorate. In the case of the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar, the dignitaries are selected by the Minister of Interior and the Minister concerned.

The Municipal Council is presided over by the, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, while the Dhofar, Municipal Council is presided over by the Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. As for the rest of the governorates, their Municipal Councils are headed by their respective governors.

Towards this end, a municipal council may present proposals for the construction of new roads or improvement of existing ones, beautification of streets, public places and beaches, presenting recommendations on public

health; proposing procedures for the protection of the environment from pollution; proposing projects related to water supply, waste water, lighting, schools, housing, places of worship, health centres, commercial outlets, parking lots and other utilities and public services of importance to citizens, along with development outlines for parks and entertainment areas, protecting beaches from erosion and pollution and coordination on these matters with the competent authorities.

A municipal council sees to the enforcement of regulations on lighting, water, sanitation and other public utility systems. Acting always in collaboration with other relevant authorities, it assumes responsibility for the preparation and circulation of public service information, determines and monitors shop and other commercial displays, proposes the establishment of markets and slaughterhouses and waste burial systems, along with attendant regulations. It outlines suitable waste collection and disposal or recycling systems, based on the latest scientific information and economic methodology. It proposes regulations governing the operation of shops, restaurants, cafes, commercial and industrial premises, hazardous sites and sites generative of disturbance and harmful to health, as well as the activities of street hawkers and shares these proposals with relevant partners in the community.

The prerogatives of the Municipal Council also include participation

alongside other principal stakeholders in optimising public benefit from development projects, as complies with the terms of the Law on Expropriation of Public utilities; in drafting systems for monitoring stray animals, jointly with the departments concerned; proposing the naming of residential quarters, public spaces and roads; studying and planning urban places and presenting map recommendations for residential, commercial, industrial and tourist areas.

Further the Municipal Council will study the proposals submitted to it and issue decisions or recommendations on the matter and propose to identify and create public parking for vehicles and ship berths and coordinating with the competent authorities, the study of complaints lodged by citizens and others on matters within the jurisdiction of the Board, and he may ask the parties competent necessary to examine these complaints data, and make recommendations on the regulation of residential, commercial and industrial areas, schemes, and coordinated with the competent authorities.

The Councils determine municipality fees and their amendment, cancellation and the manner of their collection. They monitor the implementation of public services in the various governorates and provide commentary to the departments concerned. They participate along with the parties concerned in the consultation

process governing the exploitation of public facilities within the respective governorate boundaries.

Social issues also fall within the advisory remit of the Municipal Councils, including negative or antisocial phenomena, to which they propose appropriate solutions in collaboration with the departments directly concerned. They make recommendations in relation to public transport and vehicle lease and liaise with the relevant departments. They monitor the execution of contracts related to the various governorate's financial rights and obligations.

Within a specific governorate the Municipal Councils liaise with neighbouring Councils to resolve issues related to services to villages and residential quarters. They follow up procedures to control begging and propose suitable recommendations. They suggest schemes to assist the needy and support those with limited incomes, as well as facilities benefiting orphans and the disabled.

The Municipal Councils also propose programmes to streamline and expedite relief aid to victims of fire, flooding or adverse climate. They mobilise urgent available cash for distribution to those affected. They coordinate in this respect with the departments concerned and communicate with the local community and private sector establishments. The municipal councils hold meetings to receive development-related proposals for the respective governorates.



Foreign Affairs and Media



Foreign Affairs and Media

Friendship, dialogue and credibility support development and peace

The foreign policy of the Sultanate developed naturally out of Oman's historical experience. Its combination of pragmatism and diplomacy is the approach consistently favoured by His Majesty in dealing with events that impact Oman directly or indirectly.

From the earliest days of the State as we know it today, the purpose of its foreign policy has been to build bridges of friendship and to extend cooperation and good relations to other States on the solid ground of mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs, and good neighbourliness. Dialogue is exalted as the means by which all disputes may be resolved. The consistent exercise of these principles has enabled the Sultanate to build close and well-developed relations with other nations and peoples, and they have grown deeper over time. Oman's foreign policy is an instrument of immense value to its economic and social development efforts, protecting peace and stability and providing both Oman and its neighbours with reassurance of continuity. It can thus be truly said to be an arm of the national development project and a force for the consolidation of peace and stability in the region and beyond.

The outstanding features of Oman's foreign policy are calm, candour and clarity in all interactions with others. These are the factors that allow it to state its positions in full confidence, and it is always ready to take such action as will benefit the preservation of its own security and reduce tensions regionally and internationally. Favouring the Sultanate's capacity in this area also is the fact that it nurtures no disagreements or problems with any country. It addresses all issues from a perspective of legitimacy under international law, and it is at all times acutely conscious of the geopolitical and economic importance of the region and the significant challenges it faces on that account.

Within the GCC

Oman was an active participant in the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council and went on to fulfil a major role in supporting its goals of development, security and stability in the region. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has made clear the determination of the Sultanate to preserve the gains achieved thus far and to pursue further programmes within the collective framework of the Council.

“ The Sultanate contributed actively to the establishment of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and continues to play a significant role in supporting the drive for regional development, security and stability ”

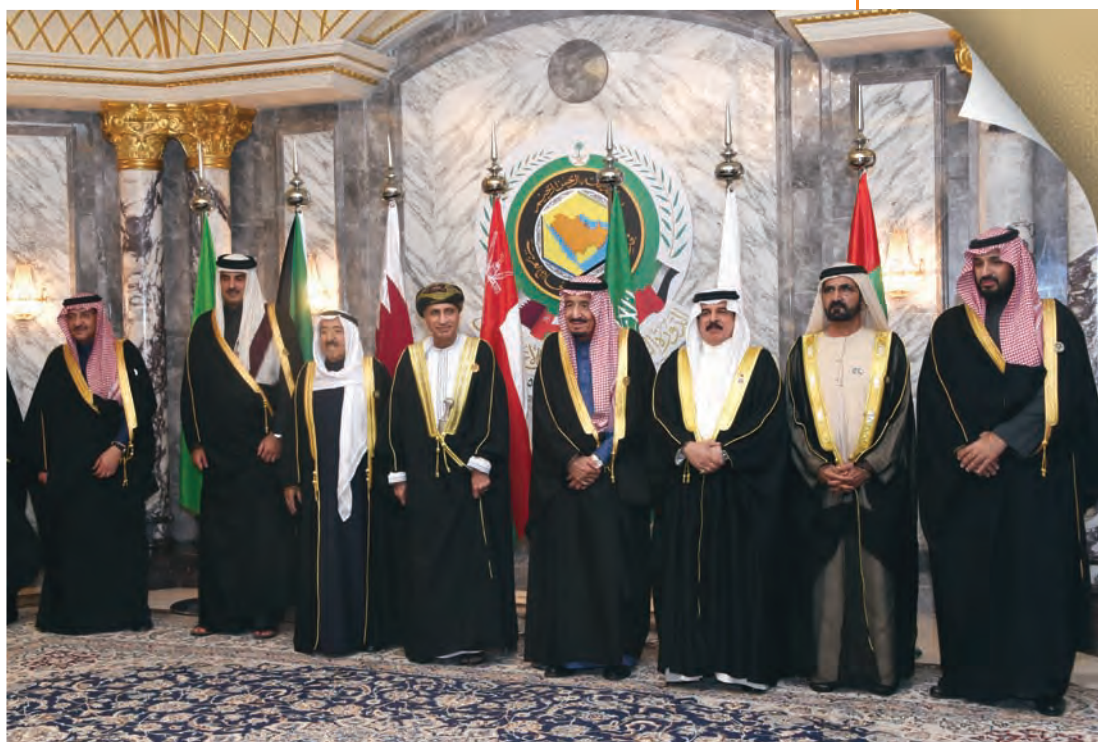
The strong ties that bind Oman and its fellow GCC states are cemented by shared history, by common political, economic and social goals. Together GCC members seek to achieve greater coherence, cooperation and integration in ways which will reflect positively on the lives of the peoples of these countries. The Sultanate believes in the significance of the role played by the GCC and has always encouraged greater endeavours by the Council towards integration and closer cooperation among member states.

Oman has been involved in all GCC summit meetings. It has consistently promoted more prominent joint

action by GCC leaders, along with action that can achieve greater prosperity and better standards of living for the citizens of its constituent states. Underlying its philosophy of greater harmony among neighbours is a desire to see the region spared of the risks that threaten its security and stability and the achievements of development. As always, Oman has sponsored the language of dialogue and understanding and promoted peaceful solutions to problems and conflicts, addressing them individually without prejudice and with reason and wisdom.

Sultan Qaboos keeps an open door to his neighbours, the leaders

HH Sayyid Fahd bin
Mahmoud represents
His Majesty the
Sultan at the 36th GCC
Summit in Riyadh



☞ The Sultanate's policies and positions on matters of Arab concern, which it pursues actively and with commitment, are widely respected ☞

of the GCC countries, always maintaining a readiness to consult on any and all issues that might be of service to the peoples of the region.

His Majesty delegated His Highness Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said to attend the 36th Summit of the Supreme Council of the GCC States, which was held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on 9-10 December 2015.

His Highness Fahd bin Mahmoud was again delegated by His Majesty to represent him at the 16th Consultative Meeting held at the King Abdullah International Convention Centre in Jeddah on 31 May 2016.

HH Assad bin Tareq led the Sultanate's delegation to the 27th Arab summit in the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott

Within the Arab region

The Sultanate's policies and positions on matters of specific concern to the Arab world are generally well regarded, principally in light of its positive contributions to past and to ongoing issues and of the authenticity of its relations with all countries, driven by the aspiration to benefit mutual interests and goals. The Sultanate is highly committed to the principle of joint Arab action and all that serves cooperation between States that share language and culture. To explore this potential, and the potential of investment partnerships between like-minded States, can only further the



achievement of a better life for all Arab peoples.

In this context, the Sultanate supports the endeavours of the Arab League, both those related to improving its internal mechanisms of action and to achieving a durable, just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with relevant and legitimate international decisions. Oman supports all efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the region and to find solutions to tensions by peaceful means and through dialogue.

The Sultanate makes sure never to miss an Arab summit; it leaves no stone unturned in its endeavours to heal rifts in Arab relations. It believes in its duty to support and strengthen Arab cohesion, to serve the objectives of joint Arab interests, embodying in its actions the spirit of Arab unity. In this context, and as the representative of His Majesty, His Highness Assad bin Tareq Al Said participated in the 27th Arab Summit held in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, on 25 July 2016.

Ongoing activities in the International arena

Oman does not confine its attention, or its positive and active contributions, to matters of Arab and Gulf interest. It monitors closely a broader geopolitical horizon that spans Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as the activities

of regional and international organisations of which the Sultanate is a member. It acts from a deep awareness of the close interconnection between the countries and peoples of the world and of the importance of cooperation in ensuring that regional peace, security and stability are not impacted adversely by what happens in other parts of the world.

The Sultanate supports the actions of the United Nations and its specialised organisations, such as UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and others. Its purpose is peace and understanding and a desire to create bridges of dialogue between peoples and cultures around the world. It is always eager to develop and deepen its relations with friendly countries, and seeks out grounds for bilateral exchange..

Oman has been looking eastwards to expand its ties with sister countries on the Asian continent. It builds relations on shared interests in the economic, trade and technological fields, underpinning these exchanges with a strong and well-founded base of mutual political respect and support.

Omani-African relations are strong and positive, sharing many common cultural features inherited from Oman's long presence in East Africa. The Omani Sultanate headquartered in Zanzibar was responsible for

enriching African culture with the civilised virtues of Islam and for the deeply respected status enjoyed by Oman and Omanis in Africa today. In terms of foreign policy, this translates for the Sultanate into binding and mutually beneficial bilateral relations with individual countries across the African continent.

Even further afield, Oman maintains favourable and balanced ties with the United States, Britain and other countries of the European Union and with the Russian Federation and Latin America. His Majesty the Sultan is greatly respected and trusted by the leaders and peoples of these friendly countries.

The Sultanate willingly participates in the decision-making and other activities of various regional and international organisations and agencies. It backs all peace efforts and programmes that help embed respect for human rights. It participates in anti-terrorism efforts and in the fight against piracy.

Reflecting this commitment, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos assigned State Council President Dr Yahya bin Mahfouz al Manthry to represent Oman at the 13th Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, held on 14-15 April 2016 in the Turkish city of Istanbul under the banner "Unity and solidarity for justice and peace."

The following month, on 23-24 May 2016, His Majesty was represented in the same city by

HE Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, at the World Humanitarian Summit.

Oman has always backed up its verbal commitment to positions of concern to the international community, frequently involving issues of human rights, by signing such recognised and legitimate conventions as seal that commitment. A recent addition to the list of conventions to which the Sultanate adheres is the International Agreement on the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System, ratified in 2016 by means of Royal Decree No. 13/2016.

The Sultanate ratified several other agreements and memoranda of understanding regionally, among them the revised Charter of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (by means of Royal Decree No. 44/2015), the General Agreement on the Electric Grid of the GCC States (Royal Decree No. 25/2015), and the Agreement on the Foundation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Royal Decree No. 31/2016).

To copper fasten its cooperation with neighbouring and friendly countries, the Sultanate has concluded a succession of bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding covering political, economic, social, tourism and consular areas of activity.

“ The Omani media has a significant role to play in disseminating the message of the development and construction processes, shining a light on their goals and mechanisms from a standpoint of truth and objectivity ”

MEDIA

The modern Renaissance saw in radical changes in Oman and the Omani media has been a crucial player in transmitting the message of these changes to the public. Throughout the many stages of the development and construction process, the media has reported and illustrated the various components of this process with clarity and impartiality, inspired by the great project and by the vision behind it. It was and is the philosophy of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to explain the process to the citizens who will benefit from it, to point out its milestones and support its continuity in whatever way will further the achievement of

its goals. In this the media has been of paramount importance and it has fulfilled its role enthusiastically.

The Omani media values quality, discrimination and professionalism in its programming policy. Its message is delivered with regard for the principles of credibility and responsibility, and genuine competitiveness. Its strategic objectives include the promotion of national unity, loyalty to the homeland and to His Majesty the Sultan, and the advancement of society through the dissemination of good information and fair commentary. By reporting events impartially and non-selectively, it serves the 'knowledge society' and builds awareness of its essential role in construction and development and in

The Omani media developed from its origins at a steady pace to become what is today a cornerstone of the modern state



protecting the achievements of Omani society, bolstered by its affiliation to Islamic and Arab traditions and values.

Media audiences inside Oman are encouraged by the message of the official broadcast and print services to view citizenship as a responsibility that respects social cohesion and shared national goals. This message fosters public awareness and participation in the creation of a desirable future for succeeding generations. This involves participating in the decision-making process, as well as interactive, constructive, critical dialogue. It promotes a strong work ethic and elevates young talent.

The message broadcast outside Oman takes these principles to a wider audience, confirming the Sultanate's respect for the national sovereignty of all countries, non-interference in the affairs of others, and good neighbourliness. It rejects sectarianism and racism, advocates justice in issues being adjudicated before international forums. Its preference in the resolution of such issues is peaceful exchange, and it seeks out paths to shared interests with all parties and to the creation of friendship in place of rivalry.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos retains a personal interest in the work of the media and frequently acknowledges its successes. In his 20th National Day address, he congratulated the official media for its reporting of positions taken by the country on regional and international issues, noting in particular the accuracy and measured

delivery of its commentary generally. He urged it not to slow its advance to ever higher levels of professionalism: *"As the media plays out its constantly expanding role in contemporary society and the lives of individuals... it is more than ever necessary for the Omani media to pursue its lead in encouraging individuals to develop their capabilities, in fostering public awareness of the citizen's primary role in building his and her nation, while also contributing to deeper friendship and cooperation within the international community."*

The Ministry of Information has turned this counsel to practical effect in its influence on media performance. Its overall strategy is to ensure that the Sultanate's standing is supported, both at home and abroad, by its official media, an objective it sees as benefiting from good organisation within the media network, improved standards of performance and a commitment to providing highly effective and efficient information services.

Acting pursuant to Royal Decree No. 35/2009, the Ministry undertook to reorganise and oversee the performance of the media sector. The Decree outlined its terms of reference, the most important ingredient of which was aligning overall media policy with the broad policy objectives of the State, supporting these in the selection of programming content. The Ministry also proposed legislation and issued relevant regulations governing the media imperative of providing full and accurate public service

information, objectively delivered, on matters of internal and external importance to the Sultanate. The role of media commentary would be to give depth to its reporting in a manner to enlighten public opinion, local and international, on the grounds on which the Sultanate's policies are based.

Other functions of the Omani media would be to celebrate landmarks of the country's progress and development; to circulate news and analysis of positions taken by the Sultanate on local, regional and global events; to use the awareness-raising media message to encourage cultural openness in society, bolstered by a guarantee of freedom of opinion and expression upheld by law; to ensure continuity of the Omani presence in the media beyond its borders; to support the national press and facilitate it in the performance of its functions; to celebrate creative talent in programming and staffing; and finally to constantly upgrade the skills and professional qualifications of media personnel.

Royal Decree No. 45/2015 of 2 November 2015 approved the organisational restructuring of the Ministry of Information in line with new developments in the Omani media. The Decree initiated the creation of new Directorates and restructured others to the effect that the Ministry is now constituted of five directorates general and four departments, in addition to the Oman News Agency.

Promoting the Sultanate

In its role of interpreting and broadcasting the narrative of the national development effort to as wide an audience as possible, of highlighting Oman's significant contribution to civilisation, the Ministry of Information has been an active presence at many international forums, introducing the Sultanate's outstanding cultural, educational, environmental and health achievements under His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The modern renaissance has brought Oman's culture and heritage out of the shadows and onto the world stage, actively assisted by the Ministry of Information. The Ministry participates in numerous international book fairs in neighbouring, Arab and other friendly countries, introducing the Sultanate and its unique scientific and cultural heritage. It emphasises the country's safety and stability aspects and its potential as a tourist destination and as an attractive investment environment.

On the home front, the Ministry of Information collaborates with government agencies, other ministries and libraries in organising the Muscat International Book Fair, attended by major publishing houses from both inside and outside the Sultanate.

The 21st Fair ran from 24 February to 5 March 2016, when over 650 publishers from 27 Arab and other countries exhibited. In addition, there were 44 official stands representing

the Sultanate and various other countries, and 33 participating stands in the Overseas Writers Hall, attending from GCC, Arab and other countries.

Abroad, the Sultanate was country guest of honour at the Festival for Arab Media hosted by Jordan in its capital, Amman, from 22-25 August 2016. Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, had participated with a pavilion on the margins of the festival that displayed a pageant of the history of the Sultanate and its civilisation and culture through the ages. The pavilion included an exhibition of photographs and historic documents, silverware, traditional handicrafts, women's fashion, books, publications and palm leaf decoration. Omani customs and traditions were demonstrated at an 'Omani night', in the form of documentaries and other entertainments, with live performances by musicians, including traditional oud players.

The Ministry of Information is acutely aware of the influence of the external media and its potential for presenting the Sultanate to overseas audiences in a positive light. The foreign print and broadcast media constitute a valuable publicity channel for the dissemination of Oman's views and underlying belief systems, clarifying Muscat's official policies and positions to optimal effect. The Ministry has sought to develop and expand the channels through which the Omani media functions externally; as such it maintains media liaison bureaux in three countries, respectively the

Arab Republic of Egypt (Cairo), United Kingdom (London) and the United States of America (Washington).

These media liaison bureaux monitor news events involving the Sultanate published or broadcast overseas, and analyse attendant media trends. They also monitor news events and developments as they arise in the Sultanate and prepare reports and commentary on these events and distribute these to theme-appropriate newspapers and magazines. They maintain an ongoing dialogue with media and press institutions with a view to influencing them to publish positive reviews of advances in the Sultanate, and they represent the Sultanate actively at seminars and lectures.

In turn, the Directorate General of External Information promotes a positive image of the Sultanate, in part by ensuring publicity for its peaceful approach to many international issues. It uses every communication format - press, news agencies, radio and television, electronic publishing, embassy media channels, books, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, events and festivals - to drive home its message, as well as direct participation in regional and international media events.

During 2015, a total of 7,774 news items and features involving the Sultanate were published in the Arab and foreign press, as compared with 4,450 in 2014, a 27% rise that demonstrates that the system is working effectively.

“ The Sultanate was guest of honour at
the Arab Media Festival hosted by Jordan in its capital,
Amman, from 22-25 August 2016 ”

The Ministry of Information website, <http://omaninfo.om>, presented in both Arabic and English, is a source of accurate and reliable information about the work of the Ministry in particular and about the Sultanate in general. The site publishes news of activities and events in which the Ministry is participating, along with an overview of media legislation and services. The site is constantly streamlining to provide an easy browsing experience for surfers and visitors, introducing them to services provided by the Ministry. It publishes prominent Ministry press releases and regularly updates a photo gallery of the

Ministry's activities and of aspects of development in the Sultanate.

Training and preparation of specialised cadres

Training and qualification are cornerstones of the media industry, given the need for media professionals to interact comfortably with senior personnel in specialised fields. Training programmes are readily accessible to technical and editorial specialists working in areas of the media and ambitious to advance their skills and rise to prominence in their profession.

Training programmes and schemes for media personnel are reviewed for upgrading annually at

Training and requalification are central to the philosophy of the Omani media sector, which values the professionalism of its working cadres



Access to professional training courses and workshops continues to rise, with 124 programmes made available in 2015, attended by 1,002 trainees

the Ministry's Media Training Centre. The courses are both in-house and off-site. Some trainees are sponsored for overseas training or internships with selected Arab and foreign media organisations with a view to their gaining experience and new skills in aspects of media work.

In 2015, the Ministry hosted 15 training programmes, which drew 344 participants from media institutions throughout the Sultanate, as well as media workers at ministries and government institutions and departments. In the same year, 124 workshops and training courses were attended by 1,002 participants from various career functions and

categories, including government and private sector officials and staff, journalists and ministerial personnel.

Oman News Agency

The Oman News Agency, established by Royal Decree No. 39/86 on 29 May 1986, is the official news agency of the government of Oman. A decade later, Royal Decree No. 43/97 founded the Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising (OEPPA), which would henceforth incorporate the Oman News Agency. Finally, in 2006, Royal Decree No. 75/2006 transferred the Oman News Agency to the umbrella of the Ministry of Information with effect

The newsroom at the Oman News Agency



from 16 July 2006. Today the Oman News Agency falls directly under the Minister of Information and has a director general and editor to oversee its work and the implementation of its goals and functions.

The agency covers events in the political, economic and development areas of activity, as well as all other areas impacting the Sultanate, whether as participant or subject, in local, Gulf or Arab regional or international levels. It also disseminates the Sultanate's positions on various issues and developments, and provides press and audio-visual media channels with images and news reports.

The Oman News Agency reports in both Arabic and English, via satellite and via the agency's website.

ONA is always keen to develop its content and to expand distribution within and outside the Sultanate. To this end, subscribers to its successful *Sabq* service can be first to receive breaking political, economic, sports and entertainment news, which in 2015 had 125,699 subscribers (125,907 in 2014, or a slight drop of 0.165%). In 2015, *Sabq* sent out 12,849 news alerts, against 10,702 for the previous year. Moreover there were 1,796 news on demand users in 2015, an almost ten-fold increase on the figure of 221 in 2014.

The ONA website, in Arabic and English, was launched on 5 June 2014, offering fast turnover and easy online access to the latest agency news,

image and feature offerings online.

The Local News Service offers special coverage of events in the Sultanate and is made available to member institutions, while providing background and information material to reporters and media outlets based in the Sultanate. The agency also archives data and images relating to the most important events of the day and all events covered by ONA, and facilitates access to this material for Arab and overseas journalists and media channels seeking to cover events taking place in the Sultanate.

During 2015, Oman News Agency disseminated 33,896 news items, or 4,150 more than 2014, at 29,431 items. Productivity was up, breaching the daily record of 184 processed news stories, a major advance on the daily average of 40 to 60 that had prevailed for many years.

Of news reports and features of direct relevance to the Sultanate, 8,153 were archived electronically, along with 45,091 images, as calculated at the end of December 2015.

Oman News Agency received the Best News Agency award in 2015, cited for its coverage of local and Arab tourism affairs. The award was granted by the Arab Centre for Media Tourism, and was shared jointly with the Saudi Press Agency.

Omani press

Oman's press seeks to keep pace with international developments in media and communications;

while never losing touch with the concerns and aspirations of its Omani readership, with whom it maintains a close and transparent interaction.

A unique feature of the Omani press is its almost 100% ownership by the local private sector, with the exception of the Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising. The operational parameters of news organisations in the Sultanate, as well as the publication of newspapers and foundation of publishing houses, printing presses and advertising companies are governed by the Press and Publications Law, which was amended by means of Royal Decree No. 87/2004 to mandate that newspapers, magazines and media outlets be owned by Omani citizens or entities.

As of October 2014, there were 27 press institutions operating in the Sultanate. Oman publishes 9 daily newspapers in Arabic and English, 95 newspapers, magazines and periodicals – published daily, weekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, biannually and annually. In addition, the number of free sports, entertainment and advertising publications is growing in response to the evolution of consumer demand. And several government ministries and agencies issue newsletters explaining or highlighting their public service activities or providing a perspective on issues of general or local public interest.

Muscat's five Arabic language

dailies are "Oman", "Al Watan", "Al Shabiba", "Azzaman", and "Al Ruwaya". It also publishes four English language dailies, the "Oman Daily Observer", "Times of Oman", "Oman Tribune" and "Muscat Daily". In addition, several tabloid format weeklies dominated by entertainment, sport and advertising themes are delivered free of charge with their parent newspapers or distributed individually.

Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising

The Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising (OEPPA) is the Sultanate's largest news organisation, both in terms of its human and technical resources and of its publication output. It is a constantly developing enterprise and is a pioneering force operating at the very forefront of journalism, as well as in all branches of the print media.

The OEPPA has faced down many challenges to bring it to its position today as a strong survivor of changing media realities. Turning such challenges to positive effect, OEPPA has succeeded in adapting its resources, rationalising expenditure and streamlining aspects of production. The result is better trained personnel, despite lower operating and production costs. Given that raw materials, such as newsprint, are such a major cost factor in the print industry, OEPPA has been adjusting

“ The Omani press likes to keep abreast of technological developments as they accelerate internationally, profoundly affecting the media and communications ”



its communication formats and keeps pace, step for step, with developments in this area as they relate to the print media and advertising generally. As a consequence it has managed against the odds to achieve productivity breakthroughs, to increase output, including printed press supplements, and yet remain profitable in the face of slow advertising growth and other market limitations.

This exceptional performance by the OEPPA has been rewarded by higher readership figures across its list of publications, including daily newspapers, monthly and quarterly magazines, despite strong competition from other print publications and,

increasingly, electronic and satellite media and 24/7 radio broadcasts.

“The Oman Observer” is the first Omani newspaper to have made a front page appearance at the Newseum, the world’s largest press museum in Washington DC. The Newseum celebrates 500 years of newspaper publishing worldwide.

“Nizwa” magazine, the quarterly issued by OEPPA, held its leadership position in the pantheon of Arab cultural publications, with overseas distribution accounting for 88% of all sales. It continues to print and distribute its free supplement on Omani culture with every edition of the magazine.

The latest advances in printing technology have been incorporated at the Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising

“ The Sultanate’s audio-visual media made new strides in 2015. Acknowledging their many recent achievements, the Public Authority for Radio and Television launched a new identity, including new logos for its TV channels ”

Public Authority for Radio and Television

The Omani media maintains an intent focus on both individual and institutional performance. The Public Authority for Radio and Television was founded and refined under, respectively, Royal Decree No. 108/2010 of 19 October 2010 and Royal Decree No. 100/2011 of 22 October 2011, and is a legal entity with financial and administrative independence. It is affiliated to the Council of Ministers, but with free discharge of its own resources.

The Authority has accumulated multiple successes in the audio-visual media sector. It sees its mission as one of delivering a balanced reflection of the values of community participation and national belonging, offering a telegenic interpretation of State policies and projects. Its ambition is to attain leadership status in the field of audio-visual media, building its programming strategy on a foundation of Oman’s strong sense of its own history and identity. This is the perspective from which it views the story of the modern Renaissance and narrates this story using technology to best advantage. It is a combination that has assured the Authority consistent high listening and viewing ratings as evidence of public confidence.

The Authority’s success story continued undimmed in 2015, marked by a major image overhaul. TV channel logos were updated, as was the logo of its radio broadcasting



arm. These changes coincided with the launch of the new digital studio building and news centre.

In 2016, audio-visual content and delivery underwent a major across the board review. The bar was raised for both television and radio offerings, and the result was all-round more sophisticated programming, targeted



scheduling and sharper transmission quality, thanks to the best that technology has to offer in the field of broadcast radio and television production and transmission today.

The rebranding of the Public Authority for Radio and Television on the “era of identity” theme assumes it to be “a source of inspiration for

the people of Oman and the world beyond, by which we pledge to relay the narrative of our contemporary society in a manner that includes diversity of views and opens the door to dialogue. We will expand community participation and we will endeavour to reflect the dreams and aspirations of everyone living in the Sultanate of Oman.”

A marriage of technology and original ideas defines programming at the Sultanate’s state-supported television production studios



The Public Authority for Radio and Television brought home 14 gold and silver medals from the 14th GCC Radio and Television Festival in Manama in March 2016



The Public Authority has endeavoured to steadily increase the ratio of live programming on both radio and television. It is committed to the continuous development of media performance, particularly in radio and television. The digital studio complex has contributed in a major way to enhancing the sophistication of radio and television broadcasting operations, in terms of both its capacity and its potential, powered by digital technology for HDTV transmission.

The digital studio complex has four large digital studios for programme production, as well as a news centre featuring a state-of-the-

art main editorial section surrounding a central broadcast studio. In addition, it has three other digital studios used for visual news programme transmissions, three radio news studios and a viewing theatre.

The era of identity

The Public Authority for Radio and Television launched its new brand identity on 31 December 2015. The “era of identity” theme goes beyond image, represented in the change by new channel logos, to an overhaul of programming content in both its audio and visual arms. The change affects the Oman Direct Channel and the Sports Channel and coincided

“ The newly launched Oman Cultural Channel delivers a programme package that expresses Oman’s contemporary cultural identity and encourages the conservation of our moral and material heritage ”



with the launch of the Oman Cultural Channel logo and the revamped Sultanate of Oman Radio image. The new identity comes with a set of values underlying the programming philosophy that directs focus primarily towards Omani viewers and listeners, while engaging all sectors of the community at some level. The audio-visual media are important players in the furtherance of social cohesion, and “era of identity” content highlights Oman’s unique history in formats easily accessible to contemporary audiences, emphasising the wisdom of the Omani perspective on current issues and trends. The Omani character is

sanguine and tolerant, not given to hyperbole or passing fad, and this is reflected in the content and presentation of public broadcasting as befits its rebranded image.

The recently launched Oman Cultural Channel began life with unobstructed vision as to its message: to present and protect the cultural heritage of Oman in a meaningful way by offering a broad, diverse cultural viewing experience.

The Public Authority for Radio and Television won several awards at the 14th Gulf Radio and Television Festival held in the Bahraini capital, Manama, in March 2016. The Sultanate took home eight gold and

The Public Authority
for Radio and
Television unveiled
its new identity on 31
December 2015

الرياضية

عمان مباشر

إذاعة سلطنة عمان

“ The audio-visual sector is at the heart of the information process and has been a powerful instrument in disseminating the media message since its relatively recent establishment ”

nine silver medals, distributed over television and radio productions.

The “Tales of Zanzibar Houses” documentary won gold for Oman TV, as did “Scripts of an Immigrant” under the Cultural Programmes heading and “Talents” in the category Family Programmes for People with Special Needs. The short cartoon “Artificial Rain”, entered by the Public Authority for Radio and Television brought Oman its fourth gold medal, and the Authority won again for “The Podium” Sports programme, for “Youth Live on Air” (Variety) and for “Take Care of your Life (Radio Flashes). The final gold went to Wusool Radio’s “Muntada al-Wesal (Intercommunication Forum)”.

Silver medals were awarded for OmanTV’s “Asdaf wa Ahdaf (Shells and Goals)” children’s programme, “A Trip” (Quiz category) and “700 million years of Life in Oman” (Environment). The Public Authority earned silver for its documentary “Qalhat Archaeological City”, for “Me, My Uncle and Time” (Historical Drama), “Youth Values” (Talk Shows) and “Young Reader” (Children’s Programmes), as did Wusool Radio for “Football across the World” (Sports) and Radio Hala FM for its quiz programme “Alghaz Sha’biya (Folk Puzzles).

Another big victory awaited Oman TV in Tunis where its “Sho’oon al-Sa’a” (Topics of the Hour) discussion programme won first prize in the Current Affairs category

Highly professional Omani radio personnel connect with audiences across the country



at the 17th Arab Festival of Radio and Television (2-5 May 2016).

The Oman Cultural Channel won the Sultanate's national gold medal for its YouTube site in the Oman Technology Awards competition, announced on 2 May 2016.

Radio

Radio is vital to the process of communicating information, and it has fulfilled its mission responsibly and efficiently, explaining the many developments taking place across Omani society. Public service radio in the Sultanate provides a universally accessible narrative of the changing landscape in Oman by means of targeted radio programmes that

proclaim the values of citizenship, peace, tolerance, brotherhood and other social virtues. It also reaches out beyond the Sultanate's borders, participating actively in diverse audio broadcasting gatherings and competitions in the Gulf and Arab regions. Oman's public service radio encompasses five radio channels, ie Public Radio, Youth Radio, Holy Qur'an Radio, English Radio and the Classical Music Radio.

Television

The visual media sector has an enormous impact on public attitudes and oversees three main broadcasting channels within the Oman TV family, namely: the Public Channel, the Sports Channel and the

Live and direct transmissions take event coverage out of the studio and into the field



Oman Cultural Channel, and they broadcast around the clock via the cable service, which covers the entire territory of the Sultanate. Oman TV can also be picked up around the world via six satellites, or by way of live transmissions online.

The visual sector sees its basic mission as raising public awareness and disseminating the authentic, evolved values of Omani tradition, such as identification with homeland and heritage, and inculcating a willingness to contribute to the modern Renaissance. The overall goal is to serve and advance the development process, to celebrate the virtues of work, creativity, innovation and progress in all their forms. As such, personal achievement is encouraged, as is a broader familiarity with the outside world and with constantly interacting cross-currents.

To achieve its objectives, the sector has incentivised media, technical and administrative crews to raise performance levels constantly, following a structured approach to achieving success in all coverage of local and foreign events. Between them, Oman TV's three channels cover national, religious, social, cultural, economic and sports events within the Sultanate and abroad, and strive to catch events as they occur in the field, creating a 'breaking news' effect. The result is a stimulating armchair viewing experience which engages the viewer across a broad-spectrum package of cultural,

scientific, religious, youth, sports, social, economic, tourism, and health programmes, as well as programmes specific to families and children, including family entertainment.

Diversity and inclusiveness are two noticeable features of the programming package offered by Sultanate of Oman TV through its various channels, and this integrative approach has impacted positively on viewer satisfaction, cementing the social impact of television.

The Oman Cultural Channel

The Oman Cultural Channel helps clarify for viewers aspects of the cultural identity of Oman. In doing so, it ensures its lasting protection. The source of the channel's content is the Sultanate's rich archive of cultural, scientific, artistic and musical material, and it creates programmes that celebrate this heritage. Oman has a strong literary tradition and has many scientific and technical innovations to its credit. Meanwhile, the Omani identity is strongly bound up in the combination of geography and circumstance that were the foundation of its very long and successful history. The Cultural Channel in its programming has demonstrated a particular interest in the powerful historical events that impacted this unique history and culture, and that left its imprint on the Arab and larger worlds.

The Cultural Channel sees its mission as one of encouraging

“ Television is a high impact medium in the Public Authority’s mission to promote an evolved approach to social development that embraces the uniqueness of Omani values ”



Omanis to take interest and pride in their heritage and its programming reflects this mission. It is conscious of the need to address all age groups if they are all to partake of one common identity, and it tailors content and scheduling to this end. The Oman Cultural Channel is attracting a growing following beyond Oman’s borders, taking its message to an enthusiastic new audience. Visually, its productions are of the highest quality and present the Sultanate and its landscape, its cultural treasures and exotic past, to stunning effect.

The second most recent addition to the State visual offering was Oman Direct, launched in January 2014. Oman Direct provides direct

coverage of local and international political, social, cultural, artistic, religious and sports events.

Oman Sports Channel

The Oman Sports Channel was launched on 1st January 2013, replacing the Second Programme, which had been on the air since 2006. Since the beginning of 2015 it has been broadcasting round the clock, extended from its initial daily schedule of 19 hours.

The Sports Channel is operating out of a new video wall studio, which uses an optical technique gaining currency in the world of visual broadcasting. The technique is particularly effective in sports programming, where parallel

The Sports Channel was launched on 1 January 2013, replacing the Second Programme

☞ The Private Radio and Television Companies Law published in 2004 provided an opportunity for the private sector in Oman to own and manage radio and television broadcast channels ☞





displays of image and commentary are becoming increasingly popular.

Oman Sports does not restrict its coverage to football, but offers an extensive package of news and feature content covering all sports, tailored to local audience interest, although the emphasis is on local sports activity.

The private sector and Radio and Television Broadcasting

To stay ahead in the media race, given its powerful social influence, the Private Institutions Radio and Television Law was declared in 2004, providing opportunities for the Omani private sector to enter the broadcasting industry, enabling private institutions to own and manage radio and television channels. The principal beneficiaries of this broadening of scope are the Sultanate's listeners and viewers.

The result has been several new radio channels offering programmes on the FM wave band, operated by the Omani private sector. These channels are:

- Radio Hala in Arabic, which is owned by the Media Entertainment Network.
- Radio Hi FM in English, also owned by the Media Entertainment Network.
- Radio Al Wusool in Arabic - which is owned by Sabco Media .
- Radio Merge FM in English, also owned by Sabco.

The Magan Channel is the only television channel owned privately. It has been broadcasting around the clock since 2008.

Private radio programmes are offered on the FM wave band



Security



Security

Security and confidence in the interests of national development

As Oman's modern Renaissance continues along its appointed path, it has maintained its focus upon better living standards for its citizens, while at the same time upholding the security of the state, its people and its achievements.

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) are given the highest priority by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, their Supreme Commander. Equipped with advanced modern weaponry and trained in hi-tech defensive and offensive combat in a wide variety of different environmental and climatic conditions, they are constantly at the highest state of readiness. Their leaders obtain advanced scientific and technical qualifications from the Sultanate's numerous institutes and military academies, while their personnel and their families are provided with a full range of health, educational, social and other welfare services.

On 18th November 2015, His Majesty the Supreme Commander presided over the National Day military parade at the Hisn al Shumoukh parade ground in the wilayat of Manah in the Dakhiliyah Governorate which, as usual, demonstrated the positive state of the nation. Reaffirming their oath of loyalty to God, the Nation

and the Sultan, units of the SAF, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultan's Special Forces and the ROP committed themselves to safeguarding Oman's sovereignty and independence.

The Sultanate has been ranked as one of the safest countries in the region, coming fifth in the Middle East and North Africa on the 2016 Global Peace Index (GPI), which is published by the Institute for Economics and Peace in the United States in collaboration with Australia's Centre for Peace Studies.

With a total of 2,016 points, the Sultanate was ranked 74th globally on the GPI out of a total of 162 states, reflecting its role as a peacemaker and the measures it has taken to promote security and stability. The calculation is based on a range of factors including military spending levels, low crime and violence rates, improved living standards and social development, and safety, security and peace in the community.

The Sultan's Armed Forces: Defending the nation and supporting development

The Sultan's Armed Forces represent at once a crowning

“ Oman has retained its high ranking on the Global Peace Index as one of the safest countries in the Middle East and African regions ”

achievement and also a bulwark of Oman's modern Renaissance. They are constantly being upgraded, so as to maintain the level of readiness seen as crucial by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The Defence Ministry and SAF programmes are designed to produce fully integrated, proficient armed forces with outstanding material and moral capabilities and trained and equipped to the highest and most up-to-date standards. The SAF is constantly supplied with advanced weaponry including tanks, armoured personnel carriers,

missile and artillery systems, armoured vehicles, fighter aircraft and transport helicopters. They have also been provided with a naval fleet that includes landing craft, corvettes and advanced speedboats, in recognition of their critical function. The armed forces' support wings are regularly upgraded, while their personnel are maintained at peak performance by regular training in weaponry and the arts of defence, as well as in the most sophisticated technical equipment available to them, which they handle with confidence and professional ease.

The Sultan's Armed
Forces, defensive
bulwark of a proud
nation



The Royal Army of Oman

After many years of upgrading and modernisation over the course of the Renaissance, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) has become a strong military force, a source of pride for Oman. Its brigades, infantry formations, and manoeuvre and support wings have been supplied with high-tech weaponry. In the meantime, special training programmes are being conducted to enhance the combat capability of military personnel and introduce them to the latest systems applicable in war.

Army units and formations are

constantly monitored for combat fitness, and are at all times ready, equipped and able to meet their national obligations. Their equipment includes armoured personnel carriers, modern artillery and air defence systems, armoured vehicles, signals systems and transport vehicles. All RAO units and formations have their own specialised maintenance workshops, resulting in a highly integrated, high performance force, well trained in the methods of modern warfare, disciplined and tested, with efficient operational, administrative and technical systems in place; armed with the technical firepower and skilled manpower needed to meet

Continuous training to maintain and strengthen the competencies of the RAO



“ The Royal Air Force of Oman is an air power in command of the skies, disciplined, organised and with a sophisticated and combat-ready arsenal, including the latest fighter jets ”



all eventualities. The firqat forces have also undergone significant improvements in their organisation, training, installations, service facilities and telecommunications systems.

Its arsenal is constantly reviewed and restocked as the weapons industry advances towards new frontiers in defence, and upgrades are selected and adapted to the operational requirements of the fully integrated system favoured by Oman's military strategy. Combat units are streamlined for more efficient deployment, and new elite special-purpose units created and professionally trained.

The Royal Air Force of Oman

In addition to its highly trained personnel, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is a modern air force equipped with advanced fighters, helicopters, logistical transport aircraft, and air defence systems, including radars, anti-aircraft batteries, missile launchers and warfare simulation programmes.

RAFO has concluded several forward-looking agreements geared towards meeting challenges down the road, as well as at raising current technical capability. It operates air bases fitted with state-of-the-art systems capable of functioning in all circumstances and situations.

The Royal Air Force of Oman .. a sleek fighting force, contemporary in both armament and discipline

☞ The RNO maintains a permanent presence in the Sea of Oman, ever alert to the protection of the Sultanate's strategic, security and economic interests ☞

The air force maintains its ready alert status with regular weapons and equipment upgrades, as well as enhanced logistics and manpower skills. This includes efficiency and deployment tests to assess combat readiness, as a result of which Oman's skies are kept clear and free of intrusion. Because of its crucial national defence role, the air force is guaranteed all the fire power it needs. It has an additional civilian role to play in search and rescue operations, as well as transport and logistics services to far flung mountain communities as required.

The Royal Navy of Oman

Due to Oman's strategic location and the fact that the Sultanate supervises one of the most important waterways in the world – the Strait of Hormuz – the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has been playing a critical role in safeguarding the country's strategic security and economic interests through the RNO's permanent presence in Oman's territorial waters.

The RNO fleet boasts a range of sophisticated equipment and weapons, in addition to gunboats and fast missile vessels, including backup, training, cargo and hydrographical survey vessels. The flotilla lends support to the division's patrol boats in their mission of

securing Oman's coastline and territorial waters or monitoring the safe passage of ships and oil tankers through the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Besides providing security for sea transport of SAF units along the Omani coast, RNO vessels protect the Sultanate's precious fishing grounds and carry out joint amphibious and marine transport operations.



The RNO's highly trained personnel are more than capable of dealing with any challenges that may arise during the performance of their duties.

Among the RNO's installations is a hyperbaric medical unit with a recompression chamber for treating diving-related ailments and certain types of chronic illnesses; this service is available nationwide.

The Royal Navy of Oman also makes a significant contribution to various aspects of the country's development process.

The years 2015 and 2016 saw the delivery and replacement of a number of RNO vessels, including the launch of the RNOV Shinas and the new RNOV Sadah under the Al Ufuq (Horizon) project. The RNO also took delivery of the RNOV

The RNO .. security
shield of the homeland



Mubashshir under the Bahr 'Uman project.

The RNO also held ceremonies to mark the retirement from service of the RNOV Sharqiyyah, the old RNOV Sadah and the RNOV Khasab. The RNOV Al Nasir was named in the Australian city of Perth on 15th April 2016 under the Bahr 'Uman project.

The Royal Guard of Oman

Like other wings of the Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), which is an important component of the Sultanate's modern military system, has been

accorded top priority by His Majesty the Sultan, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The RGO enjoys a high level of combat proficiency and capability and has a full range of infantry and support units with advanced systems and equipment, as well as educational, technical and administrative units. It attaches special significance to training programmes, which are designed to keep personnel up to speed with handling the advanced equipment with which the RGO has been supplied.

The Royal Guard of Oman



☞ The Royal Guard of Oman is a vital component of Oman's overall military structure, well equipped and enjoying the special patronage of His Majesty ☞



Engineering Services

The Defence Ministry's Engineering Services division plays a vital role in providing technical and engineering backup during military exercises. It also provides essential services such as water and electricity supply, wastewater and infrastructure utilities at military camps, and other installations. The Engineering Services division is constantly increasing the output capacity of power supply stations at military sites.

The division also prepares plans and supervises construction projects and maintenance

works, including the upkeep of infrastructural facilities and utilities. In addition to planning and building roads within the military camps, as a contribution from the Ministry of Defence to the Sultanate's general development plans, the Engineering Services division also builds roads in various regions across the country.

Working closely with other government departments and authorities, the SAF also has an important role in several other aspects of the country's development. These include defending the achievements of the Renaissance and promoting

A superior level of efficiency and combat capability

a suitable climate for growth and prosperity by reinforcing security and stability. This enables Oman’s citizens to contribute more effectively to the process, while establishing confidence and attracting foreign investment.

The SAF plays a leading role as a participant in the nation’s modernisation and development.

The National Survey Authority

The National Survey Authority (NSA) is the central body for the production of military and civilian maps. It also carries out aerial photography operations in every part of the Sultanate, sets the criteria for topographical surveys, maintains the National Geographical Archive, and supplies aerial charts and geographical data. It has an extensive range of modern printing and programming equipment for the production of maps, charts and photographs, as well as ultra-high precision satellite survey systems and standard and analytical graphic drawing facilities. The NSA maintains survey networks and provides geographical support and training in mapping and production.

The Institute of Survey Sciences and Map Production, which is one of the NSA’s newer facilities, confers national diplomas in surveying and mapping to military and civilian

personnel qualified in those fields. It also holds specialist courses in the subjects.

Military Medical and Social Services

The SAF Medical Services division offers first-class medical services to members of the armed forces and their families and – in addition to contributing to the development of the country’s health sector – SAF Medical Services also provide medical care and support for evacuation operations, as well as for general emergency cases through their Flying Doctor service. With state-of-the-art medical equipment, the SAF Medical Services are well qualified to carry out medical diagnoses and examinations, laboratory analyses, surgical operations and other forms of treatment.

The SAF Medical Services School supplies the SAF with qualified medical and technical personnel. In addition, SAF units and formations at different sites have direct access to military hospitals and health centres which are manned by qualified medical teams, lending support to the overall modernization and improvement of the country’s health sector.

The Social Services division at SAF Staff HQ provides social welfare for officers and men of the SAF and

their families in the form of housing loans and supervised building works, as well as care and rehabilitation services for disabled former military personnel, arrangements for Umrah pilgrimages and visits to veterans at Eid and on official occasions. They also organise visits to the sick, injured and the families of deceased ex-servicemen.

Morale Guidance and Information Technology

The Morale Guidance department is responsible for maintaining morale and highlighting the patriotic role of the SAF. Its duties cover running the military media, as well as national media coverage of social, cultural & sporting events and activities in the media, e.g. publications, radio and TV services. It also organises visits to sick SAF members and their families who are undergoing treatment at the military hospitals.

The Morale Guidance department also coordinates the annual Military Hajj Mission and organizes cultural competitions for personnel of the Ministry of Defence, the SAF and the RGO, in addition to public awareness events to mark GCC Traffic Week.

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum at Bait al Falaj chronicles Oman's military history and the formidable contribution it has made

to stability, past and present. The Museum has sections devoted to the SAF's armaments and major events in the history of the armed forces over the centuries and is a treasure-house for history buffs with a special interest in military matters.

Information Technology Services have seen impressive progress, thanks to an effective programme of personnel training. There has been significant expansion in the data systems used in e-administration, particularly in vital areas such as human resources management, supplies, purchases, finance etc. This has helped improve productivity and speed up operations, while providing decision-makers with easy access to the information they require.

The Ministry of Defence and SAF together launched the Ministry's Sahab (Cloud) Project on 28th January 2015. The portal will offer personnel a raft of electronic services, and will also be available online to citizens, residents, visitors and other interested persons, as well as government and private institutions.

Training

Numerous facilities for the training and education of officers and men have been set up on site at units and bases and branches of the military. All military service

Educational and training facilities for officers and individuals include weapons handling, drill formations and rules of command

categories are covered - scientific, technical and technological. The SAF also provides opportunities for its personnel to complete their higher education in relevant military, administrative and technical disciplines, either within the Sultanate or at universities and colleges abroad.

The Command and Staff College, meanwhile, is a beacon of

military education in the Sultanate. Graduates earn a bachelor's degree in military science, and keep the SAF and other security services supplied with personnel well qualified in leadership skills. In a reflection of the Sultanate's good relations with states around the world, and its reputation for educational excellence, the College also operates courses for officer



“ The Military Technical College has been afforded the means to provide cadets with the finest facilities available, enabling them to focus fully on the carefully designed curriculum ”

trainees from other Arab and friendly countries.

The Technical Military College is an outstanding facility and benefits from the finest academic instruments available today to enable it to meet its curriculum needs fully and adequately. The College is planning to establish a scientific research centre for the Ministry of Defence that will

also offer its services to other government departments and the private sector. On 10th January 2016 it was granted a certificate of accreditation for training in aircraft maintenance.

The National Defence College received its third batch of students on 2nd September 2015. They included senior officers from the SAF, RGO, ROP, Royal Court Affairs and other military and security services. Senior officials from various civil ministries and organisations also attended.

Under the constant theme of raising combat efficiency through continual training and field testing of army units, the SAF takes part in regular land, sea and air exercises, both separately and in the form of joint exercises with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members and other Arab and friendly countries.

The Maritime Security Centre

The Maritime Security Centre was set up to deal with all potential security issues that might pose a threat to the Sultanate's territorial waters and economic area, including its coasts, ports, marine installations and projects, and to protect its natural marine resources. In addition to ensuring safety and security at sea, it also seeks to integrate the operations of all the





The Maritime Security Centre serves as the administrative and command unit for naval security operations against all potential seaborne threats to the ports, marine facilities and coasts of the Sultanate



ممثل وزارة النفط والغاز
Oil and Gas Representative



Omani services and departments involved in this sector.

The Centre has a range of facilities and equipment available to combat dangerous illegal activities in Oman's seas, including reconnaissance aircraft, coastal radar, ships, patrol boats and the automatic identification system (AIS), all of which keep a close eye on maritime activities and shipping movements and ensure that there is a prompt response in the event of a crisis or natural or man-made disaster.

In addition to the above functions, the centre also raises awareness among members of the public and civil and non-government institutions about the importance of maritime security and the need for co-operation in order to protect the Sultanate's marine resources.

Regional and International events

The Sultan's Armed Forces attach great importance to sports as a means of ensuring their personnel maintain a high level of physical fitness and combat capability. Their sports facilities are constantly being upgraded and their teams perform with distinction at Arab and international sporting events and competitions. Along with the armed forces bands, the Shooting, Frefall Parachuting and other sports teams



also perform at local and national military events.

The RAO and RAFO bands took part in the Military Tattoo in Basel, Switzerland, from 13th to 25th July 2015 and the International Pipes and Drums Championship in Scotland from 27th July to 15th August 2015. The RAO cycling team came third in the Trans Hajar Mountain Bike Race, which was held from 22nd to 25th February 2016.

“ Sport is an important and popular activity within the Sultan’s Armed Forces. It serves a necessary purpose in maintaining physical fitness among serving officers and men, a factor crucial to the high level of combat efficiency required ”



The National Freefall Parachuting Team took part in the Italian Air Sports Championship during the period from 6th to 9th August 2015, while the Military Sports Mission performed at the Military Games in South Korea from 29th September to 17th October 2015.

The National Shooting Team came top in the 12th Arab Shooting Championship in Egypt, which

began on 24th March 2016. A SAF team took part in the Armed Forces’ Holy Qur’an and Tajwid Memorisation Competition in Iran on 16th May 2016.

On 15th February 2016 details were revealed on Oman’s hosting of the 2nd CISM Military World Cup, which will be held in Muscat in mid-January 2017.

Members of the Sultan’s Armed Forces have a constant succession of achievements to their credit in regional and international sporting competitions & events

“ The Police General Command believes in the importance of providing police stations with integrated services and in bringing the security services within reach of every citizen of the Sultanate ”

THE ROYAL OMAN POLICE

Cornerstone of the nation's security

Over recent years the Royal Oman Police (ROP) premises have been rebuilt and extended on the instructions of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander of the Police, in a reflection of His Majesty's belief that security is the cornerstone of the nation's development and prosperity and an essential precondition for protecting its gains. New police headquarters have been built in all the governorates, police stations and other facilities have been set up to provide security and other services for the public, new border crossing points have been built and existing ones upgraded, and Special Task Force units have been established.

The new buildings aim to provide a suitable working environment for ROP employees and their up-to-date electronic equipment is designed to simplify procedures and improve the quality of services on offer.

Several new projects were inaugurated in 2016 including the al Mudaibi police station in the North Sharqiyah Governorate, the new Salalah police station in the Governorate of Dhofar, the police services building in the wilayat of Masirah, the Police Special Task Force unit in the wilayat of Liwa in

The ROP ... leaders in the community serving security and social peace





the North Batinah Governorate, the Police Special Task Force unit in the wilayat of Ibra in the North Sharqiyah Governorate and the Police Special Task Force unit in the wilayat of Quriyat.

Training

The ROP attaches great importance to training. At the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences and other training centres, police cadets undergo basic training on joining the force; this is then extended to additional on-the-job on-site training courses.

After completing their training at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences, the new police officers join their respective units. Their courses include theoretical as well as practical input, since this is regarded as an essential part of the training of an effective, competent police officer.

The opening of the new ROP Officers' Institute campus building in al Wattayah added needed capacity amid a rising trend in the number of trainees applying and needed to serve current and future requirements in the ROP ranks nationwide.

The ROP is fully committed to regular skills training and review



“ The establishment of the Police Academy stimulated a qualitative advance in efficiency levels within the ranks of the ROP, which is constantly upgrading and refining personnel knowledge and abilities ”

E-services

The ROP websites provide a wide range of services including traffic fine payments, enquiries about lost documents and smart e-forms for sponsored and non-sponsored visa applicants and tourist visas, as well as customs clearance (the Bayan portal); this last is part of the customs computerisation project designed to enable the importer/exporter (or accredited agent) to obtain a goods permit and clearance from the Directorate-General of Customs. All customs declarations can be submitted via a single portal – www.customs.gov.om.

These websites provide access to all the services provided by the different branches of the ROP, as well as details of police-related laws. An SMS service launched in cooperation with the local telecommunications companies offers services such as notifications about traffic violations, expiry dates of driving licences/vehicle registration/civil ID or residence cards, and passports (for Omanis) or residence visas (for expatriates), as well as acknowledgements of receipt of visa applications. It also enables members of the public to text queries about their visa applications or traffic violations.

Keeping pace with technological advances and benefiting from the services made available to all citizens



“ The Royal Oman Police have launched new service centres throughout Oman, reaching almost all provincial districts. The centres offer three online services under one roof ”

E-visa and e-passport projects are some of the Sultanate's most significant technical initiatives. Other services include the computerisation of the police stations - which will give ROP staff instant access to the police databases while they perform their daily duties. The ROP is also exploring the potential of GIS technology in supporting criminal investigations work and developing fingerprint identification systems.

The ROP has also introduced an unsponsored tourist visa for foreign visitors to the Sultanate from certain countries specified by the competent authorities. Applications can be made through the website www.rop.gov.om.

In its contribution to the trend towards e-government, the Royal Oman Police has opened a passenger information centre at Muscat International Airport to facilitate the movement of passengers. The latest technology available in this field was acquired and the centre operates round-the-clock, receiving and analysing the data of all passengers and aircraft crew entering and leaving or transiting the Sultanate through its international airports, as well as tourists arriving in the Sultanate by cruise ship through its seaports. Data is processed prior to arrival, using the advanced passenger information system.

New e-services now available in most of the Sultanate's wilayats include the issue of ID cards and e-passports, as well as the issue and renewal of vehicle owners' log books, driving licences etc. These measures enable members of the public to complete their police business under one roof in their own areas.

The police stations have been computerised with the introduction of an integrated system that links them with the Public Prosecutor's Office, enabling case files to be transferred electronically. The system also enables paper reports and notifications about burglaries and other crimes, accidents etc. to be converted into a single, standard e-format.

In response to the global trend towards the use of smartphone apps, the ROP has developed a range of apps to deal with queries such as the payment of Omani or Gulf traffic fines, municipal violations, vehicle registration renewal, or procedures to be followed in case of emergencies. These apps ensure that police services are easily accessible to the public and save considerable time and effort on all sides.

E-services available for ROP employees through fixed or portable appliances enable them to deal with matters such as queries about



vehicles or people, and to record traffic violations and monitor motor vehicles on hand-held devices.

In a new initiative aimed at simplifying customs clearance procedures and promoting trade, in April 2016 the ROP's Directorate-General of Customs launched its automatic direct transfer service to the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

The Directorate-General of Customs also launched its single-window, one-stop service – Bayan – at Sohar Industrial Port, Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and several other customs facilities in various parts of the country.

In mid-February 2016 the ROP began providing a number of services through its Bayan window.

The Bayan system initiative is focused on the implementation of a Single Electronic Window for import and export reporting and an Integrated Customs Management System as a means of boosting productivity and reducing the time and cost involved with import and export activities. The system is aimed at improving the key elements of international trade management, including pre-arrival reporting, improved targeting of government intervention, enhanced coordination between

Police service centres are today established in most districts throughout the Sultanate

Ministries, and faster clearance with greater consistency and transparency.

The ROP is recognized as being among the Sultanate's most advanced e-government departments and it has won several awards in this connection both at home and abroad. On 10th February 2016 it won a prize at the World Government Summit in Dubai for the Arab world's best telephone facility offered by a government safety and security authority. It also won an award at the Gulf Co-operation Council e-government conference and exhibition in Bahrain in 2015 for the Best Whole of Government National E-project. Also in 2015, the ROP won the Best Integrated E-service prize at the 20th Middle East Award for Smart E-service Excellence in Dubai.

Specialised police units

The ROP has set up a number of directorates-general and specialist police units to keep abreast of economic, social and demographic growth in the Sultanate. These include the Police Coastguard division, which prevents smuggling and illegal immigration in Oman's territorial waters.

The Coast Guard have been supplied with fully equipped

speedboats to boost their efficiency in monitoring the long Omani coast and preventing smuggling, as well as responding rapidly to SOS calls from fishermen stranded at sea. The new Coast Guard headquarters, which is currently under construction in Sidab, Muscat Governorate, is one of the most important projects yet undertaken in support of the



“ The ROP’s Police Coast Guard maintains an active presence in all industrial, commercial and fishing ports along the Omani coastline, providing secure surveillance and control ”

work of the Coast Guard in the Sultanate.

The ROP’s Ports Security Directorate was established to protect marine transport routes and the Sultanate’s seaports. Police coastguard stations have also been built in all the industrial and commercial ports and fishing harbours along the Omani coast.

The ROP has given new powers to the Directorate-General of Police Aviation to strengthen it in its supportive role to other police units. In addition to patrolling the Sultanate’s coastal strip, monitoring ships in transit through the country’s territorial waters and pursuing suspect vessels, it also transports police, scene of crime teams and special medical

The Police Coast Guard has at its disposal a fleet of modern and fast surveillance craft and intervention vessels operating a full schedule of patrols to protect the coastline from smuggling activity



“ The ROP enact strict measures to prevent the entry of drugs into the country and prosecute all persons who promote or abuse illicit drugs, given the severity of the social problems and tragedies that result from drug abuse ”

The Royal Oman Police are strongly committed to reducing traffic accidents

units to remote areas with rugged terrain in which crimes have been committed, provides support for regional commands in their security duties, and carries out search and rescue and fire-fighting operations and medical evacuations in inaccessible areas. It also transports food supplies and other essential provisions to inhabitants of

mountain areas, particularly during rainy weather.

The new helicopter hangar was opened at the Directorate-General of Police Aviation in 2016.

In a move to reduce the human and material damage narcotics cause to society, branches of the Directorate-General for Combating



Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances have been set up in all the Sultanate's governorates to tackle the problem of drug trafficking and the sale and use of narcotics. This has enabled the police to record a significant increase in detection rates.

The ROP has adopted the strongest possible measures to

prevent narcotics from entering the country and pursue drug dealers and users, because it recognizes that they constitute a global problem which has a seriously damaging effect not only on those directly involved in them, since they also pose a threat to society as a whole, as well as the economy, public health and security.

Road Safety

The road accident figures for 2015 showed a drop of 48% in the number of fatalities, 14% in the number of injuries and 26% in the number of accidents. This represents a steady trend over the three years since 2012 and reflects the ROP's efforts to reduce traffic accidents. In March 2016 the ROP launched an awareness campaign which focused on the dangers of using mobile telephones while driving, under the slogan "Driving without a telephone". This year-long campaign follows the success of last year's "Thank you for reducing speed" campaign and the road safety competition.

Health care for police employees

The new Royal Oman Police Hospital is currently being built on the Airport Heights under the





The ROP offers healthcare and treatment services to members of the police force and their families

ROP's programme to upgrade medical services for its employees and their families. By catering for the growing numbers of police force members and offering a wide range of specialist medical treatment facilities, it will add an important new component to the Sultanate's health care services.

The ROP provides healthcare and treatment services for all employees of the police force and their families. These services are provided through the Police Hospital and its associated clinics at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for

Police Sciences, the Special Task Force units and the mobile hospital. An Emergency Wing, which has been added to the Police Hospital to treat urgent cases, is equipped with a basic emergency operating theatre.

The Directorate-General of Civil Defence

Royal Decree No. 3/2013, issued on 8th January 2013, merged the Directorate-General of Civil Defence with the Ambulance Unit and established the Public

“ The Directorate General of Civil Defence serves to protect life, property and public safety and to minimise risk and mitigate effects associated with natural and industrial disasters ”

Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA). Royal Decree No. 76/2014 on the Authority's Regulations, issued on 30th November 2014, defined the PACDA's prerogatives and responsibilities.

The PACDA's remit is to protect lives and property, safeguard public safety, deal with the consequences of natural and industrial disasters, and implement civil defence and ambulance regulations and procedures.

Fire-fighting is one of the most

important services provided by the Authority. According to the 2015 figures, firemen dealt with 3,500 fires nationwide. Land rescue operations totalled 771 – a fall of 213 compared with 2014 – while water rescues, at 81, showed a drop of 69 from the previous year's total. The majority of these incidents (47) involved rescues from wadis. First Aid teams responded to 11,100 cases in 2015 – a rise of 583 compared with 2014.

The Directorate General of Civil Defence participated successfully in relief operations in Nepal following the earthquake there in 2015





Human Resources



Human Resources *People as the basis for development*

Across the decades of Oman's modern Renaissance, people and their needs have been at the centre of the process. The Omani citizen has been the focus and preoccupation of all of the development strategies rolled out since 1970. For his and her benefit have the means and circumstances been adapted, opportunities made available and policies devised, so as to build confidence and enhance academic and technical skills. A steady advance to higher levels of awareness and capability has been the consistent goal.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said prioritised human development from the outset, promising Omanis greater prosperity and progress. In his ground breaking inaugural address to the nation on 23 July 1970, he pledged to work as quickly as possible to achieve a better future for Omanis, and the echo of these words resonated in every achievement and project that followed, and in all of the progress achieved.

Always solicitous for the welfare of his people, His Majesty's vision for

their future saw them living active and capable lives in a constantly developing environment. He saw Omanis participating energetically in the formulation and guidance of the national development strategy in each of its aspects, its destination a thoroughly modern state in which every citizen might achieve his or her highest aspirations.

The Sultanate has had to take radical measures to offset the impact of lower oil prices on the global market, with all of their implications for the state budget. However the state is keen to maintain a constant standard of living for citizens and to ensure the continuity of vital services. Addressing the Council of Ministers at Bait Al Barakah on 26 April 2016 on preserving the gains of recent decades and continuing to develop capacity, he spoke of the need for Omanis in the labour market to achieve breakthrough productivity in all sectors, capitalising on the unique geographical location of Oman. This was a time when greater domestic and foreign investment in public interest projects would drive growth in the creation of sustainable job opportunities.

“ From the beginning of the Blessed Renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has attached particular importance to developing the Omani individual and ensuring his progress and prosperity ”



His Majesty reminded the gathering that all development plans were ultimately intended to benefit the public by providing valuable needed services.

The Council responded to this encouragement with a statement issued on 19 June 2016 announcing retention of the number of third level places allocated to General Education Diploma graduates for the 2016/17 academic year. The decision applies throughout the institutions of the public and private education sector in the Sultanate at large, as well as in relation to overseas study opportunities.

If the year 2016 is a significant one on Oman's development path, as the first in the Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), the plan itself is focused on the need to preserve the achievements nurtured and expanded over the 45 years of the Renaissance. The vision for 2020 sees a flourishing of productive, well-paid employment objectives for Oman's young labour force, along with advances in the drive towards full social inclusion through expanded education and training opportunities, better health and human resource development services. The ultimate goal is full employment of the national workforce, with further economic diversification through the development of promising sectors such as manufacturing industry and services, transport, tourism, fisheries and mining.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan prioritises urban development through optimisation of resources and investment opportunities as appropriate to the separate governorates of the Sultanate. A particular focus will be development in the provinces, so as to spread the benefit and move towards a more balanced distribution of the fruits of progress across the country. It should be possible to achieve comparable levels across the Sultanate insofar as concerns education, health and social services, while creating jobs in the upgrading of infrastructure and public utility services.

Education

From the earliest days of the modern Renaissance, Oman has maintained its intense focus on education. It is both a goal and a driver of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' vision for Oman.

The sector has seen visible, concrete advances, both quantitatively and qualitatively, reflecting the government's serious commitment to education as the true basis of sustainable development. Every human and material resource has been placed at its disposal with a view to producing school-leavers and graduates fully at ease in the high-tech information age.

Several international and regional organisations, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the Arab Bureau of Education for the



Gulf States and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, have paid tribute to these efforts, in particular to the Sultanate's determination to provide education for all, to achieve gender equality in education, as well as to its initiatives in introducing modern materials to the classroom. Oman has made major strides in upgrading the post-primary curriculum, which carries an ethos supportive of peace and tolerance, children's rights, human rights, road safety and the environment. These modules refine the educational model of the well-rounded human being, competent and well qualified to adopt the challenges of the contemporary workplace and broader society in the twenty first century.

The Ministry of Education has paced the development of the system in line with the quickly evolving changes of the present day. Its primary target is to establish a basic foundation for all Omanis, young and old, to benefit from the educational experience, and therefore better equip them to contribute to the advancement of Omani society. This must of necessity involve full engagement with technology and information if school-leavers and graduates are to cope with the challenges of the day, although not at the expense of undermining their inherited social traditions or Islamic faith or ignoring the realities of Oman's place in the world.

In 2015/2016, Oman had 551,867 pupils attending school, an increase

The quality and reach of education has been phenomenal since the revolutionary changes that accompanied the modern Renaissance, and this success continues to manifest at every level



Modern education addresses the requirements of the culture and information age



“ The Ministry of Education affords pre-school education particular attention. It has worked to raise the pre-school enrolment rate by encouraging the private sector to participate at this crucial level ”

of 28,345 over the 2014/2015 academic year. Of this total, 278 411 were male and 273,456 female. There were 1,077 public schools in the Sultanate.

The same year saw also the introduction of the successfully completed Basic Education system into 973 public schools throughout Oman. In addition there were 60 Post-Basic Education schools covering the Class years 10-12 and an additional 44 covering the two Post-Basic years 11-12. A total of 56,600 male and female teachers served the system at these schools, backed up by 11,606 administrators and technicians.

The Ministry pays great attention to pre-school education, and has worked to raise the pre-school enrolment level by encouraging private sector participation in the provision of this service. As a result of this encouragement, 2016 figures show that 53.6% of all children of school-starting age (4-5 years) are enrolled in kindergartens representing the various denominations. In addition, stage one pre-school classes (Basic Education Class years 1-4) were introduced at state schools located in remote areas lacking the presence of kindergarten schools. As of mid-2016, there were 99 such pre-school

The private sector continues to become more involved in education, including pre-school education



facilities distributed throughout the Sultanate, extending early education to 2,528 boys and girls, served by 71 teaching graduates and 126 volunteers, all General Education Diploma holders who had undergone special training in kindergarten teaching skills.

Confirmation of the Sultanate's serious intent in pledging comprehensive and accessible education to all is its commitment to children with special needs, who require and deserve a quality education. The system has made ample provision for these as for all school-goers, with specialised teachers, equipment & educational aids, as well as schools and classrooms designed to meet their needs.

Continuing education

Continuing education activity now extends to all provinces, assisted by new developments and aids that enhance the quality of the various programmes and courses on offer.

Full literacy has been a fundamental policy objective of the Sultanate from the outset of the Renaissance. The path to literacy has progressed alongside the development and spread of education to all of Oman's young people, its guiding light the philosophy of providing opportunity for all in an equal society, equal rights and equal obligations for all citizens.

From the start of the literacy project in 1973/1974 up to the end of the 2013/2014 academic year, 87,208 male and female students in the 15-44 age group have emerged from illiteracy, bringing the residual level in this group down to 2.2% in 2015.

The 2014/2015 academic year had 25,771 adults enrolled in adult education centres throughout the Sultanate, of whom 24,142 were in the free system and 1,629 in structured study programmes.

Private schools

The Ministry of Education supervises technical and administrative aspects of the private schools. The Ministry prepares projects and plans for the development of these schools. A follow-up programme is in place to ensure that private schools adhere to the guidelines laid down by the Ministry.

According to the statistics for the 2014/2015 academic year, the Sultanate had 480 private schools, of which 42 were international.

The Ministry has espoused a special project that assesses the performance of private schools. The project seeks to maintain an ideal standard within all components of a private school education (administration, teaching staff, students and the technical assistance staff).

Private schools in the Sultanate fall into the following categories:

kindergartens (nurseries), Qur'anic schools, bilingual schools, monolingual schools & international schools of the various levels.

The Ministry has established a website to serve the purpose of administrative oversight. It has also commissioned a study on how to instil a culture of quality at private schools, and established activities around 'days of cultural exchange' designed to stimulate the Sultanate's policy of peaceful coexistence, and mutual and constructive dialogue between different cultures. It has worked on completing the strategic planning project, and completing the programme to screen for science and maths subjects in the educational stages, along with English as a second language; ultimately to draft a curriculum framework for Grades 1-6.

Knowledge and skills

The strategy of the Ministry of Education in its desire to provide a high quality educational service is based on its conviction that the cognitive development of the learner is the overriding specific goal of the educational system. In this conviction, the curriculum is designed to support the positive existing values of society, while developing and promoting creative skills and empathic sensibilities. It emphasises the commonalities between peoples, endorsing respect for the rights of others. It has as a core

premise the concept of equal access to education and, consequently, opportunity, and a closer merging of educational goals to the needs of the individual and the community.

The Ministry of Education provides scholarships for professionals in all educational disciplines, supporting their training in the development of cognitive skills in the young and upgrading their professional competence. This provides cadres capable and qualified to keep pace with modern educational developments. The year 2015 saw the retraining of a number of the Ministry's staff, equipping them with diploma, bachelor, master and doctoral qualifications. Personnel adding new qualifications to their expertise included 53 diploma holders in vocational guidance, 27 in learning difficulties and 45 doctoral postgraduates. In addition, 458 new applicants were approved for master degree programmes, and 210 for undergraduate studies.

The energy and vigilance the Ministry puts behind this drive to improve constantly the work of education extends to the provision of opportunities for all of its personnel, with the emphasis on teaching staff themselves. This is accomplished by a system of identifying and creating conditions that favour the goals of professional development. As an example, it can cite such pioneering projects as its establishment of a specialised vocational training centre

“ Citizenship occupies a prominent position in the priority goals of education and a strong sense of citizenship is encouraged in all aspects of the curriculum, in educational activities and objectives and in teaching methods ”

for teachers in 2014, the mission of which is to add new competencies to the profession. Teachers can attend courses at the centre which help them refine their skills and acquire the training means and mechanisms to monitor and analyse their performance in the field. In this way, academic standards are constantly evolving, thanks to advances in the quality of the methodologies practised in the classroom. The result of better teaching methods is a more dynamic and participative learning community in all schools and the building of a body of hands-on research into the operation of the educational system in the Sultanate.

The Centre has defined certain pivotal issues around which educational field training programmes should revolve, based on important national priorities, such as the basics of literacy and numeracy, along with subject material of particular relevance to the Omani economy. One example of such subject material is international studies, and the Centre is active in making its courses attractive to teachers and schools with the goal of bringing about a broader outlook among staff and pupils.

The Centre runs seven long-term strategic programmes, of two-year duration, with participants obtaining

There is an emphasis on developing cognitive skills among educators to enable them better to keep pace with developments in the profession



an accredited diploma from an academic institution on successfully meeting the course requirements.

Statistics for 2015 show a total of 2,949 aspirants in the scheme.

Civics occupies an important place in the Sultanate's educational system and is given prominence in the curriculum, in classroom activities and in the objectives and methods of teaching, the goal being to turn out school-leavers who will be a credit to their respective communities. The focus of the Omani curriculum on civics, a major modern day concern, is seen as encouraging awareness of citizen rights and duties in the national context. In order for civics to become embedded in awareness, it is essential that it be a deliberate element of the educational system designed and overseen by the state.

The educational strategy unrolled for the period 2016-2020 includes five areas of emphasis: disseminating a culture of citizenship; teaching methodology; teacher preparation; activities, projects and programmes; and partnership with state and civil society.

In pursuit of this emphasis, the Citizenship Department was created, where the general criteria for fostering citizenship in the curriculum are drafted and overseen. In addition, the curriculum is comprehensively and regularly reviewed insofar as concerns the communication of civic values in

the hearts of pupils. The department cooperates with the competent authorities in the specifics of teacher preparation, pre-service and beyond, with a view to nurturing a generation of teachers who contribute more effectively to promoting the values of citizenship among young people.

The Ministry is in a constant quest to improve the educational process, as the knowledge-based society of the twentieth century advances and interest grows in the development of creativity and innovation among students. Amongst its responses has been the introduction to the curriculum of a project-based learning approach that values creativity. Another is the educational innovation programme, with its 'innovation incubators', that promotes initiative among students, supported by research capabilities. The pioneering educational innovation programme is being piloted at four schools in the Muscat governorate, the innovation incubators that have given the scheme its popular name.

Oman is now a participant in the International Chemistry Olympiad, with its own national competitive programme enthusiastically supported. Meanwhile information technology has arrived in the primary school, with educational aids derived from modern technology contributing to the development of learning and equipping school-leavers to deal with life's problems and challenges using the tools and skills of the age.

The Cognitive Development Programme for Students in Science, Mathematics and the Concepts of Environmental Geography is one of the standout educational projects in which the Ministry has engaged since the academic year 2007/2008, building on the guidance of His Majesty the Sultan. It belongs among a range of new departures supportive of the development process initiated by the Ministry across the educational system, always with a view to upgrading the practical and scientific skills of students.

The objective of the Cognitive Development programme is to motivate students to study science,

mathematics, and the fundamentals of environmental geography; to encourage them to adopt a rigorous and disciplined approach to research and investigation and thought; to develop their innovative abilities and raise the success figures for student participation in science and mathematics and concepts of environmental geography; and to stimulate the practical and applied aspects of their course studies.

Scouts and Guides

The continuing support of the Sultanate's Chief Scout, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, has enabled the Scouts and Guides Directorate to

Scouts provide many services to the community



pursue an active programme of activities that targets scouts and guides of all ages and stages and strengthen its position at local, regional and international levels. The activities logs of both scouts and guides are fully booked with participant events taking place both locally and in the Gulf, Arab and international arenas.

The Ministry of Education continues to promote the growth of Scout and Guide services and to develop the community so as to ensure its active participation in the sustainable development of society. It aspires to draw the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements into working within civil society organisations and government agency programmes; to develop specialised cadres of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides in managing crises and handling disasters related to climate change, coordinating their actions with those of the relevant State authorities. The objective is to achieve an integrated strategy for Oman's Scouts and Guides in the volunteer support area, where they would work in harmony with the principles and generally accepted standards of the movement.

Higher Education

Education is the cornerstone of sustainable development on every front: environmental, economic, social. It is an overriding priority of the Sultanate in its determination to build human resources, so vital

in the competitive ethos of today's free-for-all global economy.

This would be reason enough for the government to pay attention to education in its policy of upskilling the national labour force so that it may contribute more efficiently to the country's overall development. Education is always a high priority in the Five-Year plans. It is seen as a sector well deserving of funding, given the



“ The government’s attention to education comes from the conviction that it is key to the human development that will raise prospects for contemporary and future society ”

obstacles it has to overcome & the advances it must attain. The Sultanate has an unusually high number of higher education institutions, and record student enrolments. A broad range of academic programmes is on offer, supported by the tools and mechanisms necessary to ensure they are readily accessible.

Confirming the personal interest taken by the leadership in the

progress of the education sector and in the evolution of Oman’s human resources, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos regularly encourages young people to avail of open horizons and opt to extend their education to third level. Advanced level studies or training creates capabilities and opportunities like no other of life’s privileges. Education helps build generations who are fully conscious and well

Private universities
and colleges
provide training
and instruction in all
disciplines



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has encouraged school-leavers to pursue their education to third level to positive effect, greatly incentivised by the provision of 1,500 overseas scholarships and 7,000 internal scholarships

versed and capable of occupying the highest places in the workforce and academic life of the nation. His Majesty urges young people to make that quantum leap towards higher achievement in education. A Council of Ministers statement issued on 18 June 2016 responded to this appeal by retaining the number of scholarships allocated to graduates of the General Education Diploma for the academic year 2016/2017, offering places at both government and private institutions of higher education, both inside Oman and overseas, to school-leavers who have demonstrated particular merit.

The Council of Ministers is keen to promote effective national programmes and support for third level participation by increasing scholarships in the technical, technological, medical and industrial specialties, and has urged leading private sector companies to contribute to the provision of overseas scholarships.

There were 124,291 students enrolled in higher education at undergraduate level both inside and outside the Sultanate in the academic year 2013/2014, as compared with 72,117 in 2006/2007, an increase of 72% in just half a dozen years. Of the figure for 2013/2014, 117,804 were studying in Oman, representing 94.8% of the total. And over half of this number (57%) were female.

Since 2011 there has been a sharp rise in the numbers entering

higher education at government expense. This is an unprecedented expansion and it has helped to raise the proportion of new students in higher education from the pool of successful public education diplomates to 89% for the academic year 2013/2014. This more than doubles the figure of 35% for the academic year 2010/2011.

Access to higher education in the 18-24 age group continues to increase, reaching 35.2% in 2013/2014, as against 24.8% in 2006/2007.

Accompanying the increase in the number of students enrolled at institutes of higher education is an increase in the number of higher education institutions themselves. In 2013/2014, the country had 57 third level institutes, comprising eight universities, 36 colleges and university-level institutes, and 13 specialist institutes. Of these, 30 were state-sponsored and 27 were privately funded institutions.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has sought an increase in the provision of scholarships to 1,500 foreign and 7,000 local bursaries to encourage the growth of third level education among Omanis and offer more places to holders of the General Education Diploma interested in continuing their studies.

He has also requested the allocation of 1,000 overseas scholarships at master and doctoral

degree level in the scientific disciplines currently in short supply on the Omani labour market. Having identified the disciplines appropriate to the specialisation shortfall in Oman, the figure of 1,000 scholarships, distributed over the various disciplines, was assessed for allocation over a five-year period at the rate of 200 per year.

Colleges of Applied Science

The Ministry of Higher Education has responded enthusiastically to the recommendation of His Majesty, delivered in his 12/11/2012 speech to the annual convening of the Council of Oman, in which he stipulated

the importance of expanding the opportunities made available to young scholars to enable them to realise their full potential; and of encouraging their participation in international scientific forums. The Ministry supports the process in many ways. The Directorate oversees six Colleges of Applied Sciences distributed over various provinces (Sohar, Nizwa, Sur, Ibri, Salalah, Rustaq).

The 2015/2016 academic year had 6,655 students studying in various programmes (IT, business administration, communication studies, design, engineering, and applied bio-technology). There were

Access to
opportunity
promotes aspiration
among young people
and stimulates them
to upgrade their skills



387 students studying specialised English on the Education programme at the College of Applied Science in Rustaq, and this figure is growing annually in line with an expanding interest in the study of foreign languages.

Since the academic programmes are the basic system component at the Colleges of Applied Science, the Academic Programmes Department at the General Directorate of the Colleges collaborates with programme managers and the Colleges' academic departments to standardise the planning, design, evaluation and development of the programmes and courses of study. They then follow up the rollout of the programmes in the classroom, while monitoring the introduction and upgrading of teaching instruments and overseeing the teaching calendar. The Department's oversight also ensures that students are receiving adequate training in the practical skillsets associated with their specific study courses.

During the academic year 2014/2015, several of the Colleges' academic programmes were revised, as were some of the decisions involving general requirements of the academic programmes offered. The goal of the review was to bring the programmes more in line with the current and upcoming needs of the labour sector and the requirements of sustainable development, and to streamline the

skills being offered to students with the demands of the job market.

Private Higher Education

The private higher education sector has witnessed steady growth and the private third level institutions have evolved steadily in both quantity and quality. The Sultanate now has a total of 20 private colleges and seven private universities distributed around the provinces. On offer to students at these 27 institutions is a range of study courses in the various disciplines at diploma, bachelor and master degree levels.

Student intake at these institutions is increasing annually, with the latest statistics showing a grand total for the academic year 2014/2015 of 68,350 students.

The Sultanate's commitment to the development of private higher education, to ensuring its quality and the long-term stability of the institutions established with a view to protecting the national development process, is backed up by state funding, which comes in many direct and indirect forms. The state believes that its subsidising of the sector will benefit the overall development of education, raise standards and enhance the level of services provided to the student body.

Support takes the form of provision of suitable land for the construction of campus facilities and equity funding up to 50%

Private institutions of higher education have evolved in quantity and quality, with twenty private colleges and seven private universities operating today in governorates throughout the Sultanate



of the share capital, to a ceiling of three million RO. In addition, several private universities (Sohar University, Dhofar University, Nizwa University, Buraimi University, Sharqiyah University, and Muscat University) have benefited from generous grants, of 17 million OR apiece, as specific directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Private universities are also facilitated by special tax and customs exemptions which would otherwise burden their academic budgets.

Scholarships and grants funded by the government and benefiting private institutions of higher education constitute another form

of public support. Some 7,000 internal scholarships are made available annually and distributed across the private third level sector by reference to specific principles and controls.

In its task of ensuring quality across the sector, the Ministry has been rigorous in its oversight, from the commissioning of Oman's first private college to monitoring the educational process on an ongoing basis at all private third level institutions. The quality assurance process takes place by various means and by close coordination and integration with the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority.

High quality education prepares cadres qualified with the skills in demand in the job market

☞ In the 2015/2016 academic year 25,469 students from a total of 33,366 successful school-leavers (holders of the General Education Diploma Certificate) were accepted into higher education ☞

Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC)

There is no doubt that the technology of information and communication is crucially important to the development of societies. The changeover from traditional to electronic systems marked a major turning point for government services in the Sultanate. It had a significant impact on the process of registration for and admission to colleges of higher education.

This is the context in which was created the HEAC, which serves the purposes of coordinating and executing admission procedures for school leavers who have completed their General Education Diploma and are seeking admission to third level institutions both within the Sultanate and abroad through registration with the electronic admissions system. This system ensures equal opportunity for all applications, and serves the community by facilitating the process of accessing higher education. Applications to third level institutions are managed efficiently, using modern technology to closely match the preferences and points scores of student applicants with the entry requirements of respective institutions and the admission quotas available for each course.

In the ten years since its establishment, the HEAC has grown exponentially and today uses

multiple electronic systems. The electronic admissions system for the first undergraduate stage and the higher education statistical system are the two principal systems managed by the Centre. Other computerised registration and admission systems are overseen by the centre in coordination with the Directorate General of Scholarships, including the system of acceptance into undergraduate studies and the system of acceptance of the output of previous years.

In 2015/2015, third level institutions admitted 25,469 students out of a total of 33,366 applicants who had passed the General Education Diploma, an acceptance level of 76.3%. This figure included the numbers accepted at government third level institutions, recipients of scholarships and grants inside the Sultanate at private third level institutions, and beneficiaries of overseas scholarships and grants.

In all, a total of 63 higher education institutions and other government agencies benefit from the system. Acceptance numbers for undergraduate study are drawn from holders of all relevant certificates, including the General Education Diploma, earned by graduates of the state school system and private schools under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education; along with the internationally recognised baccalaureat (IB) and A level certificates, the certificates

awarded by the GCC, individual Arab countries and other overseas school-leaving qualifications. The assessments are followed up by an analysis across these certifications to establish equivalence.

Graduate Survey Department

In order to monitor the graduate output of the higher education system and keep abreast of the extent to which this output has been equipped to meet the requirements of the labour market in terms of the disciplines, skills and competencies possessed by graduates, the Graduate Survey Department was established to survey the status of this segment of the community. It constitutes

one of the most important tools for measuring the match between graduate skills and labour market needs. Moreover, it serves as a means to monitor trends through the data and compare this with data from other countries. In this way the Department in its calculations can take advantage of specific international experiences, and evaluate local performance in terms of the harmonisation of higher education with the needs of the labour market.

Following on from the task undertaken in previous experimental surveys of higher education graduates, the Department implemented a survey in 2015 which was the first national survey of its kind to include graduates of both public and private

The Graduate Survey Department was created to link educational outcomes to labour market needs



higher education institutions, as well as graduates of foreign exchange and higher studies programmes. It has, meanwhile established a schedule for implementation of a survey of higher education graduates which was begun in September 2014.

Early indications gleaned from the results of the survey in May 2015, in which 12,551 graduates participated, a response rate of 51%, suggest that 53.4% of graduates from batch 2009/2010 and batch 2012/2013 are working.

Sultan Qaboos University

Sultan Qaboos University was a major landmark in the development of the Sultanate's higher education project and indeed its overall development project. A beacon of the Renaissance culture of progress through learning, its graduates and the products of its research and expertise have impacted all sectors of national development since its foundation in 1986. Thirty years on, it has a well-established academic and research reputation that has shown itself capable of substantial and remarkable achievement. It has done so with the help of state-of-the-art laboratories, five academic libraries housing the latest specialist publications, and a regular schedule of academic events. The University hosts conferences, seminars and international forums, offers workshops on general and specialist topics, and aspires to, and earns,

accreditation for its departments and disciplines from world-class institutions.

The University's open ethos enriches the educational and intellectual aspirations of the student cohort occupying its three-level qualification system. Its degree-certified undergraduate, master level and doctoral level courses are distributed over nine



☞ Sultan Qaboos University, inaugurated in 1986, has been keen to maintain a research and academic environment conducive to the achievement of remarkable academic work ☞

Colleges: the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the College of Economics and Political Science, the College of Education, the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, the College of Nursing, the College of Law, the College of Engineering and the College of Science. The University has also enhanced its reputation for serious

scientific research, as well as public service in the community, and international cooperation.

There were 171 doctoral students engaged in original research at the University in the 2015/2016 academic year, along with 1,312 master's degree students and 31,411 undergraduates. Seven students were attending the diploma programme in translation.

The intellectual and scientific development of curious minds is the strategic goal all higher education institutions work to achieve



60 master programmes and 32 doctoral programmes were on offer in 2015/2016.

The university also provides a number of full and partial grants annually for students who want to pursue master and doctoral studies; 14 full and two partial grants for doctoral students and 54 full and 27 partial grants for master degree candidates.

Scientific research is the foundation on which Sultan Qaboos University will build the edifice of its future success. Offering a solid basis and generous support for scientific research, thanks to the wisdom and insight of His Majesty the Sultan, the university has achieved ground breaking success in research studies of a strategic nature and which address many of the issues facing Oman today in the fields of environment, energy, health sciences, humanities and social sciences, communications, industry and resources.

For the years 2015 and 2016, the university funded 63 grants in various areas of research from internal resources. Leading areas of research emphasis were health, materials, agriculture, engineering and educational sciences. The University budget allocated RO 490,000 for this purpose.

An important goal of University policy is the forging of research partnerships with local, regional and international universities and academic and research institutions.

The International Cooperation Office at SQU has an active function to fulfil in this process, establishing memoranda of understanding and bilateral agreements with other institutions. At the time of writing, SQU has 43 agreements with academic institutions widely distributed around the world.

The University is a strong promoter of innovation. In 2015/2016 alone, six patent applications were filed with the US Patent and Trademark Office based on original research carried out at SQU in the fields of nanotechnology, communications engineering, electronics and food technology.

During the academic year 2015/2016 a number of conferences, seminars and workshops were held. Examples are: the 3rd International Conference of the Faculty of Literature and Social Sciences; the International Symposium on Mitigating the Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture, Water and the Environment; the 2nd International Conference on Advances in Obstetrics & Gynaecology; the 3rd International Conference on Language, Linguistics, Literature & Translation; the 16th International ELT Conference; the Conference on Civil Transactions Law in Oman: Reality and Expectation; and the seminar on Water Resources in Arid Areas: the Way Forward. These and many other events contributed to the active academic cultural and social dynamism of the campus.



Health

The careful planning pursued by the Sultanate by a sequence of health development plans running consecutively every 5 years since 1976 have created a health system consisting of targeted health programmes and services that have raised the overall health of the population to unprecedented levels.

The 9th Five-Year Health Development Plan (2016-2020) was launched in 2016 and it marks a new departure in methodology compatible with demographic and population changes and with new

global paradigms in medical care and technology. The new Five-Year Plan takes a results-based and long-term approach, with a 30-year health planning perspective (Health 2050). It represents a quantum leap in the process of future health planning.

The 9th Five-Year Plan defined outstanding aspects of future health needs in determining its overall strategy & goals: governance, leadership and delivery of health services, human health resources, health information & research, health products and vaccines, medical technology, health funding and cooperation & partnership between the sectors.

The Ministry of Health recognises the value of the health workforce as the backbone of the health services

The Ministry of Health attaches great importance to the health workforce as the backbone of the healthcare provision system. It has trained and upgraded the skills of the Omani healthcare workforce with a view to them becoming the future pillars of the system. The Ministry relies on statistical information and data in drafting its five-year plans and working out strategic objectives, for which it has garnered the respect and admiration of the international community for the Sultanate's approach to social progress.

Intensive input continues apace on the long-term plan, namely the outlook for the health system up to 2050. This plan represents merely a transitional phase to support the health system in coping with medical and technical developments worldwide. It is expected that a harvest of benefit will accrue to all aspects of health and healthcare in the not too distant future.

The healthcare system consists of three integrated components: primary healthcare, secondary healthcare and tertiary healthcare. Primary healthcare is provided at health centres and local hospitals in all governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate. Secondary care is provided by referral hospitals in the Sultanate's main wilayats. These hospitals offer more skilled and specialised levels of healthcare. Tertiary care encompasses high-level technical healthcare. This is

provided in the major hospitals in the governorate of Muscat, namely the Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital and Al Nahda Hospital. All of these hospitals provide comprehensive medical treatment and act as referral hospitals to all parts of the Sultanate. Al Masarra Hospital in the Governorate of Muscat provides tertiary-level care, and specialises in the treatment of psychiatric and neurological diseases.

The Sultanate has a total of 69 hospitals, 49 of which are owned by the Ministry of Health. These hospitals provide 6,468 beds, which is a ratio of 15.5 beds for every 10,000 members of the population. Of these beds, 4,998 belong to Health Ministry hospitals, constituting 77% of the total of all hospitals in the Sultanate.

This is in addition to the health services rendered to the employees and relatives by the Diwan of Royal Court, the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Oman Police, Petroleum Development Oman and Sultan Qaboos University. The University Hospital (SQUH) offers all three levels of healthcare (primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare) to all citizens.

Visits to outpatient clinics in 2015 stood at more than 15 million. The increase in the number of visits to clinics and patient admissions followed an increase in other services, such as medical laboratory, x-ray and dentistry services.

The number of patients treated at hospital internal departments stood at approximately 326,000 inpatients in 2015. More than 102,000 surgical operations were conducted in 2015.

The logic behind the Health Ministry's emphasis on primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare stems from a conviction that progress in these areas will bring down the rates of communicable diseases, raise the average life expectancy and allow for more focus on problems arising from non-communicable diseases, which typically require continuous and advanced healthcare.

As for primary healthcare, the Ministry of Health, in its successive five-year plans, focuses on ensuring support for the development of health services that provide highly effective and low-cost primary healthcare. This includes an expansion in the number of establishments providing primary healthcare to people throughout the Sultanate, as well as regular support and upgrading of those institutions so that they can provide a service of high quality. These efforts have had a tangible and remarkable outcome - a significant improvement in health status of the Omani population.

By the end of 2015 there were 233 health centres, polyclinics and local hospitals, of which 232 were run by the Health Ministry. These include 65 health centres with beds, 117 health centres without beds, 23 polyclinics and 30 local hospitals.

The Sultanate maintains its high ratings in global indices of overall living standards and in particular its protection of children. In 1970, infant mortality was high, at 118 out of every 1,000 live births within the first year of life. This figure had fallen to 45 by 1985 and to 7.9 by 2014. Moreover, in 1970 mortality in the first five years of life was 181 out of every 1,000 live births. This had dropped to 52 by 1985 and to 9.7 by 2014. The remarkable progress in child survival and health improvement achieved by the Sultanate is widely acknowledged and documented internationally.

The improvements attained are a direct outcome of the Sultanate's sustained offensive against dangerous childhood diseases by means of extensive vaccination campaigns. Successive campaigns have targeted tuberculosis (TB), acute spinal poliomyelitis (polio), diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus & measles. Supplementary immunisation campaigns covering viral hepatitis, rubella, mumps and type B (haemophilus) influenza followed. Since July 2003 the 5-in-1 vaccine has been in use in line with international developments in immunisation against dangerous diseases. In 2008, the vaccine against pneumococcal disease was added, along with vaccinations against polio and others. Because of the high penetration, approaching 100%, of its immunisation campaigns, the Sultanate has



Modern hospitals provide a world class healthcare service



remained free of polio for the 16th consecutive year.

The Sultanate has not registered a case of tetanus in newborns since 1995 or diphtheria since 1992. No cases of measles were recorded in 2015. Sixty eight cases were recorded in 1995.

Due to the rapid spread of a number of infectious diseases, cases of acute respiratory disease in children under five years of age rose in 2015 from 239 to 383 per thousand by comparison with 2010. Meanwhile diarrhoea infection rates among children under five had fallen in 2015 from 239 per thousand in 2010 to 203, while the number of confirmed cases of malaria was down from 32,000 in 1990 to 1,193 in 2010. This figure continued its decline, to 822 in 2015, and with the observation that most of the cases of infection registered were imported.

The Ministry of Health is acutely aware that the quality of healthcare is heavily dependent on the availability of a qualified and adequate workforce. As such it has given particular attention to strategies that support the development of the workforce in its pursuit of a superior health service contributing to the better overall health of the population. In 2015, 553 medical and paramedical graduates from Ministry of Health institutes joined the workforce, making for a total of 12,809 graduates in recent years. This is in addition to 2,799

medical and paramedical graduates who graduated from higher education institutions in 2015, all contributing to the rise in Omanisation ratios in the health service. A growing cohort of qualified Omani doctors is emerging yearly from Sultan Qaboos University and private third level medical colleges, while nursing and technical institutes affiliated to the Ministry of Health are turning out highly trained medical and paramedical personnel to swell the ranks of an increasingly competent and sophisticated health system.

The private health sector is an additional source of health services in the Sultanate and it is experiencing steady growth. By the end of 2015, the Sultanate's private health institutions included 15 hospitals, 448 general clinics, 288 specialised clinics, a polyclinic, 233 dental clinics, 49 clinics specialised in Chinese and Indian traditional medicine, 21 laboratory centres, 6 MRI centres and 604 pharmacies.

Civil Service

The Ministry of Civil Service was established to manage the execution of the State's employment strategy. Its principle function is to secure the staffing and integration of public service departments to ensure the smooth running of the State apparatus. This involves the regular review and retraining of public employees, as well as monitoring motivation levels and maintaining

“ The Ministry of Civil Service has effected major internal reform in its approach to public service work, turning its employees into valuable servants of the community, well trained and well informed and enthusiastic participants in the development process ”

these by providing opportunities for career development. The goal is to bring about a paradigm shift in the public service ethos, incentivising advancement in the civil service and equipping personnel with administrative skills and knowledge of benefit to their own development and the development of the service.

This is the vision that His Majesty the Sultan has espoused and promoted from the outset: the civil service no longer as a passive force, but rather as a dynamic and committed engine of development, taking its responsibilities seriously in its service to the diverse agencies of State and government, always

upgrading its expertise and abilities in step with the scientific and administrative advances of the age.

Royal Decree No. 142/2008 directed the Ministry of Civil Service to propose policies and plans amounting to an overhaul of all units of the state administration, organisationally, procedurally, legislatively, informationally and in terms of its human resources, and to coordinate efforts to create a system making optimal use of all available human and financial components.

Today the Ministry is the primary reference agency for the civil service sector, which comprises 37 government units, with a total

On-the-job training is essential to the creation of an efficient, dynamic civil service



“ The Ministry of Civil Service is the primary reference authority for the civil service sector, which operates 37 separate government units ”

personnel at the end of 2015 of 180,386 male and female employees, and an Omanisation level of 86.3%. Of the 155,761 Omanis engaged by the service at the end of 2015, 53% were male and 47% female.

In 2015, 66,780 male and female civil service employees were able to benefit from training opportunities inside the Sultanate. A further 1,001 received training abroad. There were 435 employees on study scholarships, while a further 709 were on part-scholarship during the school holiday period. Twenty one were on part-time leave, 489 were on study grants and 296 were engaged in evening study courses.

On-the-job training is hugely beneficial to personnel. It stretches the abilities of participants and motivates them to greater efficiencies and better overall performance levels in keeping with the goal of civil service reform. The Ministry of Civil Service establishes the general framework for individual training programmes, often seconding personnel from certain units of the administration to on-the-job training in the private sector, in positions appropriate to their existing administrative functions and skills.

The Ministry of Civil Service is one of the arms of government where enormous strides have been made in the exploitation and application of information technology. The result has reflected positively on the level of organisation within the Ministry

itself and in the services it provides. ‘Mawrid,’ the software system introduced to manage the vast human resource data base covering all units of the civil service, greatly facilitates the work of establishing and harmonising procedures throughout the government sector. The result is better work practices and a better service rendered. Technology supports easy access to, and ability to update data, which in turn enables the creation of a modern, unified and comprehensive information system to support decision-making. It facilitates the preparation of necessary analytical studies. It marshalls workplace and employee data to streamline the process of allocating personnel in the various units of the administrative apparatus. It assists career planning and staff allocation planning, as well as the rationalisation of public spending on employee wages and salaries and other material benefits accruing to personnel in the service.

The system has an administrative and a financial application. The administrative application has been in a process of gradual adoption and is now running in most branches of the civil service, a total of 37 branches at the end of 2015. The financial application is up and running in 24 government units.

The Ministry has been something of a pioneer in the government’s ambitious ‘e-government’ strategy to digitalise the administration, and

has completed the establishment of a database of regulatory studies of all types and linked these into the Mawrid system, simplifying the procedures provided by the Ministry serving the diverse units of the state administration.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has taken a particular interest in the challenge to raise the level of government performance and has urged the speedy commissioning of the e-government project with a view to expediting the processing of government transactions. The Council of Ministers responded with proposals which include an aligning of the aspirations of individual government units with the overall vision of the central administration, which views as a primary objective the roll out of government services efficiently and effectively. Another proposal involved the development of a services guide for all governmental entities which would document the public services provided and define the parameters of these services, complete with timetables for implementation. In 2015, the Civil Service Ministry was able to offer technical support to all parties by way of targeted workshops. It also trained a number of specialist staff in the creation of the services guide. It provides ongoing technical support to the teams assigned to prepare the guide in the various government units. By the end of May 2016, 39 government ministries and units had laid out their mission

statement and vision and 26 Ministry and government units had drafted a directory of their services, with a grand total of 1,764 government services documented.

The Ministry continues its Omanisation endeavour in the civil service sector and completed its contribution to implementation of the 8th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) involving the Omanisation of permanent jobs in the civil service sector. The sector succeeded in Omanising 405 jobs distributed across the various units of government. This brings the ratio of Omani employees to 86.3% within the service, with non-Omanis filling 13.7% of positions. The 9th Five-Year plan (2016-2020) envisages the Omanisation of 678 permanent jobs, in application of the Civil Service Act and its executive enactments. These positions are currently occupied by expatriates.

Manpower

The changing realities and demands of the labour market in the Sultanate mean that the Ministry of Manpower is constantly pursuing and reviewing modernisation programmes and developing services in the various business sectors linked to the goal of full employment for the national workforce. It also oversees technical education and vocational training projects. It is availing of the digitalisation of government services to achieve what amounts to a quantum leap in improved

performance and better roll out of services in these areas. Technology and the efficiencies created in the processing of transactions is sustaining growth in the national economy, and strengthening the national labour force by facilitating the development of supplementary competencies and skills beneficial in the workplace.

The Sultanate had a total workforce of 223,620 nationals employed in the private sector at the end of February 2016. All professions and sectors were represented. In addition, it arranged and signed numerous work-training agreements such as have benefited more than forty thousand applicants since the scheme was launched in 2005. The work-training schemes have fulfilled their promise in preparing newcomers for subsequent full integration into the job market.

The Ministry of Manpower is in constant contact with private sector enterprises, encouraging the sector to provide more job opportunities for the national workforce in line with the Omanisation strategy. The goal is to see more job vacancies accessible to Omani nationals and an overall qualitative and quantitative realignment of the national workforce away from the public sector and into the private sector, achieved through education and training. Young job seekers are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills with a focus on the disciplines in short

supply or rising need in the labour market. Omanisation rates in the various sectors of the economy need to be consistent and in tandem with the output of the relevant education and training systems. The productive sectors have a participatory role to fulfil in the development of the national workforce, and an obligation to provide such care and protection of workers as will enhance their productivity and their technical abilities.

In the context of its reorganisation of the labour market, the Ministry of Manpower has issued directives to discontinue the issuance of work permits to expatriate personnel in certain occupations and economic activities and to reduce the ratio of expatriate to local manpower in other areas of the private sector. The cessation of work permits is applicable on a temporary basis in some instances, often for periods of 3-6 months, extendable for longer periods as conforms with the actual needs of the labour market. In other cases the cessation is permanent, the goal being full Omanisation in certain activities and professions. The total ban has been successfully implemented in the case of clerical activity. In addition, Ministerial Decree No. 550/2013 instructed a cessation of labour recruitment of non-Omanis for 6-month periods in portions of the construction and cleaning sectors. Excluded from the ban

“ As of the end of February 2016, there were 223,620 Omani employees working in private sector enterprises, distributed across all occupations and sectors ”

were certain global-class facilities offering a particularly distinct level of service and establishments operating in the implementation of government projects. Ministerial Decree No. 617/2013 instructed a discontinuation of work permits for non-nationals at private sector enterprises operating in the following areas of activity: carpentry, aluminium and metal workshops and brick factories.

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Manpower, is especially supportive of small and medium enterprises and expresses this support through services

rendered to both proprietors and employees. One initiative involved the upskilling of 193 Ministry employees who deal with SMEs on an ongoing basis by coordination with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Businesses. Another initiative emerged from one of the recommendations of the 2013 Saih Al-Shamekhat seminar on training public sector employees to deal with SMEs and optimising the services provided to them. SMEs were exempted under Ministerial Decree No. 75/2014 of 7 April 2014 from the 6-month ban on recruitment of non-Omanis to the construction and cleaning sectors.

Young Omanis have demonstrated energy and competence in taking up positions in the workforce



An exemption was also allowed for SMEs, under Ministerial Decree No. 122/2014 of 18 May 2014, to the temporary 6-month ban on expatriate work permits for the carpentry, aluminium and metal workshop sectors and brick factories.

From the beginning of 2003 up to the end of August 2015 the number of trainees enrolled in institutes and training centres as part of the Ministry's drive to establish employment opportunities for unskilled job-seekers grew steadily. The Ministry strategy is focused on providing access to vocational training programmes at specialist institutes and training centres that offer advanced training, thanks to government funding at rates approved by the Tender board. The training helps job seekers take advantage of vacancies that arise in the private sector.

The work-training scheme is one of the most important and scientifically focused programmes coordinated between the Ministry of Manpower and the private sector. Its ongoing success is ensuring and will continue to ensure more opportunities for job seekers to enter the labour market and ultimately hopes to attain the goal of full national employment. It has benefited more than forty five thousand citizens to date.

Technical Education

Technical education is a critical component of the system of higher education in the Sultanate, where almost ten thousand holders of the General Diploma in Education are absorbed annually. The technical education sector accounts for a total enrolment of almost forty thousand students at any one time, extending their education and training in a range of courses and disciplines suited to the needs of the labour market. Diploma courses cover the spectrum from various engineering disciplines to information technology, business, applied science, pharmacy, photography and fashion design.

The Ministry of Manpower, as represented in the Council of Trustees of the Colleges of Technology, oversees and reviews the development of curricula and programmes of technical education by coordination with labour market requirements. It follows up the progress of work at the seven existing colleges of technology in the Sultanate, namely: The Higher College of Technology in Muscat, the Al Musanna College of Technology, the Nizwa College of Technology, the Ibra College of Technology, the Salalah College of Technology, the Shinas College of Technology and the Ibri College of Technology.

All of the seven Colleges award the Diploma in Technology and the



Advanced Diploma in Technology, while the Higher College of Technology in Muscat, having university standing, offers in addition to these two diplomas a bachelor degree in technology.

There has been a major growth spurt in the numbers enrolling in the Colleges of Technology, and in the courses offered. Students are admitted through the HEAC system, as well as from the Royal Guard schools, the social welfare system and student scholarship, bridging and part-time schemes, so that new admissions had almost doubled from 6,584 students in the 2009/2010 academic year to more than 11,000

in 2011/2013, before retreating somewhat to 9,546 in 2015/2016. Overall, student admissions to third level technical education represent 34.4% of total school-leaver admissions to institutions of higher education. The decline in the number of admissions is a combined consequence of a declining number of General Diploma graduates and increase in government scholarship missions, both internal and external, along with a drive by the Ministry of Manpower to raise admission standards to technical colleges so that the acceptance rate does not exceed 60% of the General Diploma cohort in any academic year.

Young Omanis are eager to learn the skills that will qualify them for rewarding opportunities in the job market

Total student enrolment in the seven Colleges of Technology across the various disciplines and class years rose from 23,527 in 2009/2010 to 39,752 in 2015/2016. Graduate figures are also rising, from 3,648 in 2011/2012 to 5,155 in 2014/2015. The Ministry operates a gender quota in its admissions policy of 30% female to 70% male admissions. The figure is consistent with the courses on offer, with engineering, as an example, viewed as a discipline more appropriate to male students.

The various technological institutions currently offer 38 different specialised and accredited courses, in engineering, business studies, information technology, applied sciences and other disciplines; of these, 28 were taught in the 2015/2016 academic year.

Attendance at fishing institutes and training centres in 2015/2016 stood at 3,937 students, of whom 444 graduates successfully completed their studies in the same academic year.

Social development

People are both the drivers and beneficiaries of social development, the focus of social habilitation and care programmes. Anyone can attain social and career mobility by taking advantage of these schemes. Greater productivity and a more optimal investment of energy can pave the way to superior lifestyles and better standards of living. Education holds

out all the possibilities associated with better standing in the community and the chance to make a contribution to society. Societies are greatly benefited by volunteer activity conducted by members of the community, which creates and cements bonds across class and ability. Moreover volunteering is a humanitarian endeavour that flowers in a climate where profit is not a motivating factor.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Voluntary Work was a key incentive in promoting the generous culture of volunteerism, with all of its positive impacts on both giver and receiver. Disadvantaged members of society all benefit from the work of individuals and groups of individuals engaged in a variety of goodwill projects. The Award serves as a form of recognition for these endeavours and encourages the noble values of compassion and unselfish service to others.

On 5 December 2015, the Ministry of Social Development honoured for the fourth year the individual and group winners of the Sultan Qaboos Award, which included institutions, associations, individuals and companies engaged in volunteer work.

The drive to encourage social responsibility and to foster partnership with the private sector in obtaining funding for social programmes and projects that empower the disadvantaged

☞ The Sultan Qaboos Award for Voluntary Work became a key incentive in service to others insofar as it gives prominence and value to the tireless efforts of volunteers ☞



continues. A practical objective is to achieve sustainability and visible impact in the projects selected, so that both community and partnership are rewarded. The work of certain institutions stands out in terms of both public perception and benefit, such as the project to establish the National Centre for Autism in Muscat, along with two other autism centres, in Sur and Sohar respectively. Another major endeavour was funding for the 'Istikrar' project, which supports low-income and social welfare families, providing packages of basic necessities where needed, and the 'Kadr' scheme, which funds student scholarships and small

projects for welfare families, as well as an awareness campaign around the subject of social dialogue.

The various social welfare programmes are designed to improve circumstances for families subsisting on social welfare, offering a variety of home, income or social supports. In the 2015/2016 academic year, 2,989 students from welfare families were able to proceed to third level education on government scholarship grants at universities and government and private colleges inside and outside the Sultanate.

In 2015 also, maintenance, restoration and other works were completed on 38 homes, and

Qualified Omani carers specialised in looking after the needs of children with disabilities and encouraging them to pursue every avenue of knowledge

“ Social welfare programmes are designed to improve the circumstances of marginal families by helping them with accommodation, financial assistance and social opportunity ”

jobs found for 393 unemployed individuals. In addition, emergency aid was extended to individuals or families facing difficult and unforeseen circumstances beyond their means to cope. Specific support is allocated to families subsisting on social welfare to meet basic necessities such as electricity or water supply, or to help out in the event of certain chronic or acute health conditions, such as kidney failure or similar, by covering the costs of travel to hospitals for treatment.

The state pursues a policy of supporting the development of persons of disability through drama as a medium of expression. An important and exciting forum to showcase this talent with a competitive dimension is the GCC Theatre Festival for Persons with Disabilities. Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, hosted the Fourth Theatre Festival for Persons with Disabilities in the week of 27 December 2015 to 2 January 2016.

The Festival offers an opportunity for participants to stretch their boundaries and gain confidence in a competitive setting, as well as to demonstrate their abilities and talents publicly. It has revitalised special needs theatres in the GCC countries. It has both raised the standard of entertainment for persons of disability, while giving them a platform to air their issues as a social group facing specific

challenges or simply their often unheard views on issues of broad public concern. Most of all it allows them to rise above their disadvantage and see themselves as a fully participating social group equal in all respects to all other social groups, notwithstanding their separate abilities and/or needs. The empowerment and social integration of persons with disabilities through the arts, especially the theatre, is a positive social trend that is contributing towards changing prevalent negative images of the physically or mentally challenged.

The Sultanate came away from the 2015 Festival with the lion's share of major accolades, including awards for Best Overall Production for its play "Al-Mazar" (The Shrine), Best Actor, the Special Jury Award, Best Script, Best Production and Best Costume Design.

The Sultanate offers a broad range of programmes and social services for persons with special needs, promoting self-empowerment and independence in the disabled community. The Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre evaluates persons with mental disabilities but who are suitable for vocational rehabilitation, when they may be accepted at the Centre. Subsequent, more rigorous, assessments ensue, after which candidates can be assigned to appropriate rehabilitation programmes based on the relevant indicators arising from a case by case

evaluation. By the end of 2015, 55 candidates had been successfully assigned, of whom 30 were male and 25 female.

The Dar Al Aman (House of Security) Rehabilitation Centre also offers a raft of social, health, rehabilitation and psychological services and treatments, as well as general inpatient and day care. It sponsors activities to raise awareness within the community to disability issues and to upgrade the quality of interactions with persons suffering from disability so as to better integrate them into broader society. The Centre had 161 boys and girls under the age of 15 enrolled at the end of 2015, of whom 98 were male and 63 female. In the over-15 age group, the Centre was looking after 119 male and female adults, 71 male and 48 female.

The Al Wafa Centres for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Children cover the 2-14 year age bracket for children of both sexes suffering from mild or medium mental disabilities, as well as hearing or mobility issues. They are provided with rehabilitation and training appropriate to their condition. Counselling is also available for the families of disabled children. The 26 branches of the Centre distributed throughout the Sultanate had 2,060 boys and girls registered at the end of 2015.

At the Seventh session of the Women's Committee affiliated to the UN Economic and Social Commission

for Western Asia (ESCWA), which was hosted by the Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, in late January 2016, a number of recommendations were made, notably on the need to ensure that women participate fully in the economic, social, cultural, civil and political affairs of the community at every level; and on marshalling the resources of state to secure the engagement of women in the implementation of the sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030.

The Ministry attaches particular importance to research and regularly publishes studies and findings for the benefit of concerned specialists and the broader public and with a view to examining proposals for practicality and adopting them as necessary. Three recent study titles are representative of the type of research material in which the Ministry frequently finds the seed of progressive initiatives: The Problem of Student Dropouts in Families on Social Welfare; Managing the Family Budget: Realities and Challenges from an Omani Social Perspective; and Child Workers in Omani Society.

The Ministry oversees many social programmes and services in support of the family and family cohesion, so that the family environment is as supportive as possible of individual members, socially and economically, and so that the status of women in the family is respected, both in terms of their involvement in society and as

Specially assigned centres assist the rehabilitation of persons challenged by disability and help integrate them into society

carers and nurturers in the domestic context.

Counselling and guidance are available to families suffering from circumstances of a social, economic or psychological nature. Solutions are sought and proposed that can best restore stability and cohesion to family life. In 2015, 1,256 cases were handled by the relevant services.

The Ministry, through the

Childcare Centre, assumes the care of children whose stable upbringing is being negatively impacted by irregular social circumstances. The Centre provides these children with full residential care, along with a stimulating programme of educational, social, cultural and recreational activities. There were 143 children, 103 boys and 40 girls, in the care of the Centre at the end of 2015.



“ The progress achieved by women is a source of pride to all Omanis. His Majesty has decreed that 17 October be dedicated annually to the celebration of the women of Oman ”

The Ministry also conducts the necessary background checks into families offering to foster children, to assess their ability to take good care of the child and provide for his or her education and personal development in keeping with the guidelines referenced in the regulations on fostering. A national total of 349 boys and girls were in foster care in 2015.

To protect children from violence, exploitation or abuse, the Ministry has established a network of protection units throughout the Sultanate. The Child Protection Committees represented in all governorates are composed of representatives from the following agencies: the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, the Royal Oman Police, the Public Prosecutor's Office, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, the Omani Women's Association, as well as of relevant NGOs with experience in the field. The latter are selected by the local governorate committee chairperson.

The achievements made by the women's movement in Oman are a source of pride to all Omanis. Women's Day, celebrated nationally on 17 October every year, acknowledges and celebrates these achievements. Branches of the Omani Women's Association work steadily to encourage women to participate in voluntary social work and to play a more active role within the development programmes in the Sultanate. The Association had 60 branches at the end of 2015, encompassing 10,433 members. Relevant government directorates and departments oversee the works undertaken by the Association and assist it in its functioning. The Association is responsible for carrying out important work and implementing projects for the



“ The Sultanate has performed with distinction across a range of sports, encouraging sports federations to aim ever higher and heralding a bright future for sport in Oman ”

betterment of women throughout Oman. It also sponsors lectures, seminars and workshops, training sessions, marketing exhibitions and other family-related activities.

As an indication of increasing participation by members of the public and a growing interest in specialist volunteerism as a spinoff of the social tradition of performing acts of charity, the number of professional associations had grown to 28 nationwide at the end of 2015, incorporating 7,656 members. In addition there were 15 social clubs with a combined membership of 1,881 serving the expatriate community.

The Ministry operates a number of children's crèches and childcare centres that are affiliated to branches of the Omani Women's Association. These centres provide social, recreational and educational services to children aged from 3½ years up to the age of school admittance. There were 35 such facilities at the end of 2015, offering care to 7,074 boys & girls and staffed by 2,030 administrative staff and 279 teachers.

SPORTS

The Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Social Affairs are constantly improving the sporting ethos, providing new facilities and urging on the ambitions of local and national sportsmen and women. Numerous summer season programmes and competitive club

events are organized such as the Youth Innovations competition which is now in its third year.

Many noteworthy achievements were logged in individual and team sports in 2015/2016 in Arab, Asian and GCC competitions. These credible results bode well for the future of sport in Oman.

It was particularly encouraging to witness the achievements made by Omani teams in beach sports, ie beach soccer, beach handball, beach volleyball and beach athletics. The Sultanate's sportspersons struck a rich haul of medals at the second edition of the GCC Beach Games, which were held in Doha, Qatar from April 2nd to 9th, 2015. Oman clinched a total of 13 medals that included 7 gold. The national beach soccer team provided one of the biggest cheers for the Sultanate when the side, coached by Talib Hilal won the Asian Beach Championship title. The title led Oman to qualify for the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup which was held in Espinho, Portugal in July 2015. Oman came third in Group 2, achieving a victory over Costa Rica for a first-ever win in a World Cup contest. Oman finished 9th among 16 competing nations.

The beach handball team was not far behind earning laurels for the Sultanate as it finished runner-up at the Asian Beach handball Championship which was hosted by Oman in May 2015. Therefore the team booked a spot

in the 2016 World Beach Handball Championship held in Budapest, Hungary in July when it finished 7th among 12 participating teams.

The beach volleyball pair of Haitham al Shuraiki and Ahmed al Hosni bagged the silver at the GCC Beach Games and went on to win silver at the 25th Arab Beach Volleyball Championship held in the Moroccan city of El Jadida in September 2016.

In swimming Mohammed al Habsi and Mussalam al Khadoluri won the gold and silver in both the 5km and 10km open water events.

In athletics star sprinter Barakat al Harthy claimed the gold medal in the 60m event at the 5th Asian Beach Games in Da Nang, Vietnam on 27th September 2016. Oman also won silver medals in relay running, football and handball.

In football the U-16s qualified for the Asian Football Confederation Championship in India in 2016 reaching the quarter finals but narrowly missed a chance for a spot in the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2017.

In the inaugural edition of the GCC Youth Cup Football Championship in Qatar, Oman

Summer programmes provide opportunities for young people to get active and to identify particular sporting strengths.



took the silver medal. At the World Military Games in South Korea in October 2015, Oman's football team clinched the silver, losing to Algeria.

At the 26th GCC Swimming Championships held in Dammam, Saudi Arabia from 24th to 27th August Oman's 17-year old Issa Al Adawi spearheaded the nation's challenge taking 6 medals including four gold and two silver. Oman won a total of 23 medals. Issa has been rewarded with a 4-year scholarship to study at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan in preparation for a place at the Olympic Games in 2020.

The national power lifters did well at the 2015 Asian Bench Press Championships held in Oman in October 2015. Oman won a total of 13 medals which included four gold

At the Asian Powerlifting Championships held in Hong Kong in August 2015, Oman bagged nine medals and claimed the overall title in the sub-juniors class. Oman took the third place in the men's category at the West Asia Weightlifting Championships which were held in Jordan from 23rd to 30th April, 2015.

At the 49th Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championships, organized by the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness held in Kitakyushu, Japan in June 2015 Oman's Abdullah al Jabri claimed a gold in the 70kg category, while Ahmed al Maskari (85kg) & Faisal al Mataani (75) clinched silver medals.

Athletics: Olympic Games in Rio 2016 – Oman sent a four-member team of athletes which included Barakat al Harthi who qualified in the 100 metres race. The other three athletes were given wild card entries by the Oman Olympic Committee. Oman has been a regular participant at the Summer Olympic Games since 1984.

The Oman cricket team made history when it qualified for the ICC World Twenty20 in India after finishing sixth in the 14-team event in Scotland and Ireland in July 2015. It was promoted to Division Four of the 50-over ICC World Cricket League Division in May 2016.

Golf saw Fahad al Kitani emerge as champion in the second GCC U-15 Golf Championship held in Dubai, UAE in March 2015. Meanwhile, the National Bank of Oman successfully organized the European Tour Challenge Tour final in Muscat for the first time in November 2015. Oman now has four 18-hole green golf courses.

Motor sports star Ahmed al Harthy clinched a Pro-Am class runner-up spot in the prestigious 2016 Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup at the Silverstone circuit in England in May 2016.

Oman Sail

Oman Sail's ground-breaking national initiative, which since it was established in 2008 has used

“ Oman clocked up multiple sporting victories in 2015, raising its profile in the region and internationally ”

sailing to promote Oman and inspire its youth, has resulted in Oman becoming one of the leading nations in the sport.

In 2016, Oman Sail delivered the first ever America's Cup event to be hosted in the Middle East, when Muscat became host to the 2016 Louis Vuitton America's Cup World Series Oman. On the global stage the importance of this renowned sporting event is considerable; in Oman, Muscat's hosting of sailing's most distinguished trophy was prestigious & economically significant.

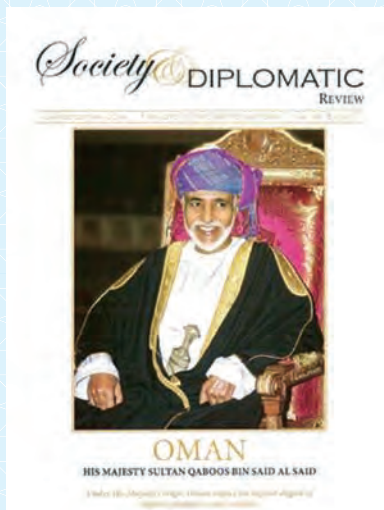
This year, Oman Sail's sailing teams have continued to win international medals, trophies and titles. Oman Sail's new GC32 foiling

catamaran Oman Air was the boat to beat in the 2016 Extreme Sailing Series, continuing Oman Sail's outstanding success in winning the title five times between 2009 & 2015. The Omani youth sailing team is now the best in the GCC and 6th in Asia. *Musandam-Oman Sail*, the Ministry of Tourism's flagship MOD70 boat, set a new world record for sailing around Ireland when they won the 2016 Volvo Round Ireland Race. Also, Oman's leading offshore sailor Fahad Al Hasni was voted Seahorse magazine's Sailor of the Month for September 2016, one of the most coveted awards in world sailing.

The Beach Soccer team participated in the World Cup in Portugal



OMAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS



In June 2016, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said became the latest in a select coterie of heads of state to have been chosen to feature on the cover of Society and Diplomatic Review. The New York-based publication is the leading diplomatic society magazine and is published by the United Nations.

Explaining their reasons for the selection in their accompanying remarks, the editorial team said they had been particularly impressed by the harmonious nature of the political and social systems in the Sultanate and by the level of genuine love and loyalty that existed between His Majesty and the Omani people.

The article noted that under the enlightened leadership of Sultan Qaboos, Oman had achieved an unprecedented level of success, prosperity and stability.

It credited the modern Renaissance masterminded by His Majesty for the momentum which propelled the country forward to attain its ambitious goals.



Al-Watan journalist Faisal bin Said Al Alawi has earned major kudos after seeing off competition at the 15th Arab Journalism Awards award to win in the Press Interviews category. The Awards are organised annually by the Dubai Press Club.

Faisal won for an interview he conducted with the Algerian novelist Waciny Laredj. The Interviews category was hotly contested, but Faisal's selection was deemed well deserved. The interview raised issues that touched on aspects of literary competitions and awards in general and in the Gulf region in particular.



Teamwork by urological and colon surgery specialists at Royal Hospital has resulted in a qualitative breakthrough in oncology treatment, the first of its kind in the Sultanate. Surgeons at the hospital used a technique to eradicate a stage four cancerous tumour metastasised in the pelvic area, and then succeeded in fabricating a bladder from a portion of the small intestine.

The surgical team that carried out the operation consisted of Dr. Mortadha Al Quptan, Dr. Rashid Al Alawi, and Dr. Salim Al Busaidi, Dr. Ahmed al Araiimi, Dr Sameh

Ibrahim & Dr. Mahmoud Shaaban, assisted by anesthesiologists and nursing staff.

The surgery involved removing the tumour from the rectal, bladder, prostate and parts of the pelvic & anal areas, after which the team constructed an artificial bladder from portions of the small intestine and then linked this on both sides to the ureters. The walls of the lower pelvis and abdomen were then restored. In the final part of the intervention, "hot chemotherapy" (HIPEC) was then applied to the patient's abdominal area for a full hour. The total surgical procedure took almost eight hours.



Omani poet Jamal Bin Abdulla Al Mulla is the first ever winner of the Katara prize for the Prophet's Poet, a newly instituted Qatari competition founded to promote Arab poetry and nurture young talent. Jamal won for his poem "The Prophet" and received his award at a ceremony held at the Opera Theatre in Doha's Katara Cultural Quarter on 14 April 2016. The project was entitled: "The beauty of Poetry blossoms when describing the Best of Mankind."

Jamal prevailed over a field of 828 poets from all over the Arab and Islamic world. An elimination process initially reduced the field to 30 qualifying entries, finally yielding the appreciative winner.

OMAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS



Dr. Yousef Al-Saidi was cited in first place for his participating research paper at the 13th Middle East Otolaryngology Conference and Exhibition (ME-OTO) held in Dubai in May 2016, becoming the first Omani to win this award.

The ME-OTO Conference is an annual event at which ENT specialists discuss the latest developments in Otorhinolaryngology. The Conference includes a scientific research competition open to researchers which in 2016 attracted 100 participating researchers from 23 countries, including Middle Eastern states, Britain, China & Austria.

The prize is awarded in three research categories: diseases of the nose, throat and ear.



Dr. Mahmoud bin Abdullah Al Kindi, Assistant Professor of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University, is the 2016 recipient of the award for Best Research Paper in the Field of Decision Science, delivered by the Sixth World Congress of Industrial Engineering and Operations Management in Malaysia.

The Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management

(IEOM) is one of the most important conferences in the field of industrial engineering, and this year's research paper competition saw more than 700 specialist entries from some seventy countries.

Dr Mahmoud won for a research paper entitled "Using Decision-Analysis Science in the Discussion of Higher Education Planning in the Admissions Field and Identifying Academic Staff in Oman."



Omani offshore sailor Fahad al Hasni has clocked up another significant professional milestone after being voted Sailor of the Month for September 2016 by the hugely popular British publication, Seahorse magazine. He joins an honours list of some of the finest contemporary sailors from around the world.

Fahad's nomination for the distinction came after he had proved his sailing mettle at Musandam Oman Sail, and complements successive gains logged by the Sultanate's sailing teams in recent years, in particular in the Sevenstar Round Britain and Ireland race and again when the crew of the MOD70 set a new world record in the Volvo Round Ireland race in June 2016.



The Arab Organisation for Administrative Development, an affiliate of the Arab League, has declared Dr. Adel bin Saeed Al Busaidi this year's winner of the 14th Sharjah Award for the Best PhD Thesis in Administrative Sciences in the Arab World.

Dr. Adel's thesis is entitled "Towards a Model for Challenging Institutional Silence: Defining the Concept, its Dimensions, Measurement and a Mechanism for its Verification". The 2016 Sharjah Prize received 61 entries for the Best Administrative Sciences PhD prize, submitted by researchers and experts from 11 Arab countries.



Heritage, Culture and The Arts..



Heritage, Culture and The Arts..

A Window on Oman's Civilisation

The idea of protecting Oman's heritage was a matter on which His Majesty Sultan Qaboos saw no need to compromise as he laid the groundwork for the modern Renaissance. Indeed, heritage was central to his vision of a nation unearthing the glory of its past and rediscovering its place of honour in the contemporary Arab world.

The unique process of rebuilding Oman, therefore, was one that shared the vocabulary of heritage, culture and the arts with that of science and technology. While the latter was vital to the advancements the country clearly needed, so was respect for the Sultanate's past. As the facilities of the modern state emerged to transform all aspects of life in Oman, its architectural and cultural traditions and its historical pursuit of exploration and scholarship were equally valued and nurtured. Omanis were as proud of their illustrious past as they were of the forward-looking achievements of development.

Early products of this close attention were the Ministry of

Heritage and Culture, the Office of His Majesty's Advisor for Cultural Affairs and the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. These and other targeted government institutions collaborated in the process of conserving Oman's culture and heritage. Meanwhile, academic chairs were established at several overseas universities and, as a tangible expression of this revived openness to culture and the arts and humanities, Muscat earned its magnificent Royal Opera House. The introduction of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature sealed the new Oman's respect for the more refined aspects of life. Moreover it distilled the personal value system of its leader, whose vision of the Renaissance was one in which culture and the humanities advanced hand in hand with material progress, as crucial elements without which the development endeavour would be soulless and ultimately futile.

These institutions have contributed in a concrete way to Oman's major investment in heritage

“ A passion for heritage, culture and the arts is not incompatible with the methods needed to build a modern state using the best that science and technology has to offer. Omanis are proud of their long, illustrious past ”

and culture. Together they continue to implement a monumental programme of restoration and conservation of the country's archaeology and architecture, and have revitalised culture and literature through a constantly unrolling schedule of events.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MOHC) is responsible for the overall project of preserving the Sultanate's material heritage, represented in the restoration of castles, forts and historic routes, the creation and stocking of museums and the excavation of archaeological sites. The MOHC is active within the country and also abroad, participating in shared objectives with Gulf and Arab states. It sponsors activities that enrich the Omani cultural scene, such as reproducing manuscripts for ease of circulation, hosting cultural weeks that enhance relations with neighbouring and other friendly countries and supporting talent in all areas that fall under the umbrella of culture.

For its part, the Office of His Majesty's Advisor for Cultural Affairs oversees such projects as the Land of Frankincense Museum in Dhofar and the Salut archaeological site in Al-Dakhiliyah.

Alongside these two major institutions, which collaborate in the heritage and culture endeavour, are a number of other official agencies, such as the Diwan of Royal Court, Sultan Qaboos University and the

Ministry of Tourism, the latter of which takes a particular interest in the rehabilitation of castles and forts for their tourist potential. The National Records and Archives Authority and the Public Authority for Craft Industries make specialist contributions to the many threads of Oman's overall cultural fabric.

Finally, the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences, through affiliated institutions or agencies under its broad supervision, is active in the development of aspects of cultural, literary, scientific and technical areas of work. Its areas of focus refine the definition of culture in Oman and encourage Omani youth to benefit from research and studies and all activities engaged in or sponsored by the Centre.

Archaeology

Oman's archaeological and heritage sites have benefited from exceptional care and attention. The Sultanate has pursued strategies and mechanisms adapted to the strictest scientific standards, guided by international specifications, in the execution of all works. Heritage sites are deemed to be of both cultural and tourist value and this is reflected in the many projects constantly being undertaken in all governorates of the Sultanate, where history and civilisation have left lasting, often spectacular, marks.

The fundamental objective of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture



Bahla Fort ... time-honoured majesty





Divers search a shipwrecked vessel, the Esmeralda, from Vasco de Gama's fleet

(MOHC) is to facilitate in every way the excavation and documentation of all archaeological and historical sites with a view to ensuring their lasting protection. In this quest it has collaborated with international universities and institutes, always ready to benefit from such expertise as these institutions have to offer in the field.

The MOHC has supervised the restoration and rehabilitation of many historic buildings throughout the Sultanate, and has been responsible for gaining the inclusion of several archaeological and historical sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List. In addition, it

has overseen the rehabilitation of a number of important archaeological sites, including Bat, Al-Khutm, Al-Ain and the city of Qalhat.

Restoration work is always ongoing, most recently on the fort in Wilayat Adam, as well as on the four towers in the same district. These projects began in February 2016. Also continuing is the work on Khaboura fort, which has entered its final stages. May 2016 saw completion of the project to rebuild Izki's tower and restore the wall and tower at Al Khamis in Wilayat Musann'ah. This project involved renovation of the entire fort and its ancillary buildings, towers and walls, along

“ The oldest falaj in Oman dates back to the third millennium BC and may be the oldest falaj in the entire Middle East ”

with an important mosque attached to the complex. Also completed was restoration of the Sheikh Saeed bin Ali Al-Saqri mosque in the village of Ezz in Wilayat Al-Qabil.

On 15 March 2016, the MOHC disclosed details of the discovery off the Omani coast, near the Halliniyat islands, of a shipwreck which is believed to be that of the Esmeralda from the fleet of the Portuguese explorer, Vasco de Gama. A full-scale archaeological survey and excavation, managed jointly by the MOHC and the UK's Blue Water Recoveries, began in 2013 and was one of the first underwater excavation projects undertaken by Oman.

This discovery is important for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that it is the first major submerged cultural heritage site to be barred to treasure hunters. It is, moreover, the first Indian Ocean site to be discovered and excavated systematically by a team of specialist archaeologists. And the site is in itself one of crucial historical interest, given its age, dating to the sixteenth century, and its association with Vasco da Gama. It has offered up a unique collection of artefacts to add to the body of knowledge of the era, a total of 2,800 items to date.

Another significant discovery was the caves of Natef in the vicinity of Hasek, Wilayat Sadah, Dhofar which revealed evidence of settlement dating back to the Neolithic period, or the tenth millennium BC. The

discovery was the outcome of an expedition undertaken by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in collaboration with a French mission from the Sorbonne to study and document human settlement across the millennia from 10,000-2000 BC. The overall objective was to learn more about the nature of human habitation along the shores of the Arabian Sea, which has evidence that dates as far back as prehistoric times, or to the onset of the mid-Holocene era.

At the Salut site near the village of Bisya in Wilayat Bahla, a British team uncovered several settlements, the earliest of which dated to the fourth millennium and the latest to the first millennium BC. The settlements included several large towers built on massive limestone bases arranged to a precise geometric pattern. The same team identified the oldest falaj in Oman, dating to the third millennium BC. This falaj may in fact be the oldest yet uncovered in the Middle Eastern region.

In Wadi Sahtan in Wilayat Rustaq, the Ministry, in collaboration with experts from Italy's Catholic University, undertook the survey and documentation of all of the depictions and inscriptions in this valley to save them from vanishing beneath the rapid advance of development projects.

The drawings in question depicted scenes from as early as the third millennium BC, prominent

among them is one of women seated on benches in an orderly manner, suggesting participants in a celebration or ritual. Also present were scenes of battles taking place on camelback and many drawings of animals, including lions, horses and camels. The walls of the valley were also used as a convenient backdrop for the recording of Musnad or verified Islamic Traditions, as well as for inscriptions in Arabic of events that had taken place in this valley and other parts of Oman.

At the Al-Ayoun archaeological site near Sinaw in Wilayat Al-Madhaibi, surveys and excavations are ongoing at several ancient tombs, the most important of which date to the third millennium BC and specifically to the transitional period between the Hafeet and the Umm Al Nar periods. Later tombs in the area were identified as dating to the first millennium BC. Recovered already have been many finds of material interest, including potsherds steatite vessels.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture is working in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Communications to schedule excavation work and to rescue burial sites of archaeological interest located in the path of the Batinah expressway. The fifth stage of this project has encountered significant finds in Sohar, specifically a group of Iron Age and pre-Islamic burials which yielded a substantial hoard of rare copper

seals and etched stone ornaments depicting animals. The seals are of Sassanid origin. A settlement dating to the early Islamic era was also uncovered, which included a mosque orientated towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

In the city of Qalhat, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture has set out a seasonal action plan for works involving the removal of rubble to reveal the old city wall, as well as to restore a number of buildings in the city. The Qalhat project will engage the assistance of foreign experts alongside a team of specialists from the Ministry. The overall vision for the scheme integrates the restoration works into a larger tourist development project, which will include the construction of a visitor centre.

The weapons trove unearthed at the Al-Mudhmar site in Wilayat Adam is one of the most important and most unique archaeological finds of modern times in the Sultanate. The copper arsenal consisted of five bows and two quivers, along with daggers and axes dating to the first millennium BC. All were in good condition. This was the first ever discovery of copper archery weapons, it being more customary to find either individual arrows or bunches of arrows fused together, and never accompanied by either bows or quivers.

The weapons hoard was unearthed by a collaborative mission between the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Paris Sorbonne



University, which has been working in Wilayat Adam since 2011. Its focus has been the identification of economic, social and political patterns shared by Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age human societies in Oman.

Museums - windows on past glories

The Sultanate is a country that is deeply invested in the value of its heritage. It understands the significance of museums as a lens through which to view the history and culture of the past. Today's visitors can acquaint themselves with the virtues of Omani civilisation through the ages and with its political, social and natural history and geology. A good museum uses the tools of language, culture, history and civilisation to reflect on

linguistic and cultural interactions with other communities and the way these interactions influenced and advanced society. Museums foster a thirst for knowledge of history, a desire to connect and to maintain a positive trajectory for the human race.

On 15 December 2015 the new National Museum of Oman launched an important museum campaign to disseminate the story of Oman's long history and contributions to civilisation.

The museum houses more than seven thousand rare and exceptional prehistoric relics, in addition to tens of thousands of artefacts chronicling historical periods in Oman from the earliest days of human settlement to the present. All of the display items were collected and documented in

The National Museum narrates the story of Oman and of a civilisation with deep roots in history

Heritage, Culture and The Arts..

Museums have educational value as a window on history, illustrated by their exhibits and clearly presented narrative

accordance with a systematic and integrated program of conservation and preservation.

The National Museum is the first museum in the Middle East to adopt Braille as a means to enable the blind to communicate with the museum and its collection. It is also the first museum in the Middle East to pioneer open storage as a system. Its Land and Man hall is one of the largest in the museum – and these two display units are the largest of their kind in the world. It opened to members of the public in July 2016.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture oversees a number of museums, including the Ministry of Heritage and Culture Museum, which opened in 1979, And the

Natural History Museum, opened in 1985 at the Ministry's premises in Al Khuwair, highlights the treasures of Oman's natural environment and the wildlife of its deserts and mountains, as well as a section on fossils. The Children's Museum, opened in 1990, is a cultural and educational project, which explains science through a series of simplified demonstrations.

Opened in 1992, the Omani-French Museum includes historical documents on Omani-French trade relations dating from the 19th Century, as well as traditional costumes, jewellery, artefacts and models of Omani and French ships.

In Sohar Fort, a museum was opened in 1993 and its contents



“ The National Museum is the first museum in the Middle Eastern region to adopt an open storage system. In addition, its Land and Man hall features the two largest display cases in the world ”

deal with the history of the city of Sohar and its cultural and economic relations. In 2008, the Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum was opened inside the building of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and it contains a section on traditional weapons.

The Ministry of Defence runs the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, which opened at Bait al Falaj Fort in Ruwi in 1988 and contains exhibits highlighting Oman's military history. These include traditional and modern weapons, as well as some documents and manuscripts. The Muscat Gate Museum, which takes the visitor on a tour of Muscat, highlights the city's growth from a commercial harbour to a prosperous capital city. It contains displays illustrating the city's development from ancient times. Muscat Municipality runs the Bait al Baranda Visitors Centre and Museum, which presents a potted history of the city of Muscat and is also a venue for exhibitions and training courses.

The Office of His Majesty the Sultan's Advisor on Cultural Affairs oversees the Land of Frankincense Museum, which opened on 23 July 2007 as part of Al Baleed Archaeological Park in the Governorate of Dhofar. It has a historical hall with six sections documenting Oman's history as a whole over the ages, and another hall which exclusively highlights Oman's maritime history.

The Oil and Gas Exhibition Centre portrays the history of the formation of oil over different periods and the stages of its extraction. It is a depiction of the journey of oil discovery in the Sultanate.

The Central Bank of Oman's Currency Museum, situated within the bank's premises, reviews the chronology of currency exchange in the Sultanate and showcases both old and modern currencies, including banknotes and coins which were exchanged during the early stages of the Islamic era.

The Maritime Museum in the Wilayat of Sur, established in 1987, features many aspects of the Sultanate's seafaring heritage. It showcases photographs and models of different types of Omani boats, as well as portraits of boat captains, sailors, shipbuilders and ports which the Omanis used to visit, sailing and navigation equipment, charts, maps and related manuscripts.

Also, there are privately-owned museums such as Bait al Zubair Museum in Muscat, which opened in 1998 and exhibits a collection of artefacts and costumes which represent different governorates of the Sultanate. Ghaliya's Museum of Modern Art, opened in 2011 on the Mutrah cornice, has rooms representing the concept of a modern house from the beginning of the 1950s to the mid-1970s.

“ The Sultanate organises many events and activities to encourage a flowering of high quality original artistic, literary and intellectual work by Omanis ”

Cultural programmes and relations

The role of Oman's cultural providers is to promote the dissemination and exchange of culture in the context of direct bilateral relations and in coordination with GCC, Arab and external organisations within an overarching vision of international cooperation and openness.

Official and unofficial bodies involved as partners in cultural activities such as the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences, the Literary Association, the Cultural Club, Omani cultural societies (e.g. the Oman Writers Society, Oman Theatre Society, Oman Cinema Society and the Omani Journalists Association) work to establish cultural ties with all countries.

They also participate in joint meetings of committees and organisations, sign international cultural agreements in cooperation with the Ministry of Legal Affairs and hold seminars and cultural weeks promoting Omani culture.

At local level, official and unofficial cultural providers participate in cultural events both within the Sultanate and beyond, while fostering links among Oman's intellectuals and writers and encouraging them to print and publish their writings and contribute to forums and other

activities nationally and regionally. Cultural weeks are also organised to further enhance these efforts.

The Sultanate also organises events and activities to foster the development of artistic and literary talent and creativity and to raise standards of creative output. This includes programmes that encourage the skills associated with artistic endeavour and promote the product of this work, including encouraging the publication and dissemination of the printed word at home and abroad.

Oman seeks to develop cultural links by means of joint cultural programmes with other GCC states. To this end, the GCC Cultural Committee holds periodic meetings to enhance the quality of input by citizens of member states in order to improve the level & success of their contributions to cultural events.

Given its long history as an outstanding centre of civilisation and culture, Nizwa was selected as Islamic Capital of Culture for the year 2015, for which an integrated programme of cultural and artistic events of local and international relevance was carefully chosen. The project was a successful demonstration of Oman's determination to extend the infrastructure of culture nationwide. The Nizwa Cultural Centre was inaugurated as part of the programme of events and would have been a major highlight of any

year, it being an important source of reference material for scholars and writers and one which will serve generations to come.

From 2-4 November 2015 the Sultanate hosted the Ninth Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers under the heading "Towards an Intermediate Developmental Culture of Renewal in Islamic Societies". Forty Islamic states took part, in addition to one observer country and seven international organisations.

Many aspects on the theme were addressed by the gathering, along with support strategies and plans to encourage moderate trends within the community of Islam and to promote

Islamic culture. The conference concluded with the adoption of the Muscat Declaration, which made a number of recommendations of benefit to the furtherance of dialogue between cultures.

Book fairs and cultural days

Book exhibitions and fairs in the Sultanate and abroad are considered an important aspect of depicting the diversity of Oman's culture. The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, takes part in the most important international book

Muscat International Book Fair .. ranked among the top ten book fairs in the Arab world



fairs and its pavilions have been a strong presence at these events, offering newly published material in all disciplines.

The Muscat International Book Fair is the Sultanate's largest book event, and enjoys a solid reputation in the Gulf region and Arab world generally, being ranked among the top ten book fairs in the Arab world and top three in the Gulf area. Oman also enjoys prestige internationally as a strong supporter of the publishing industry.

The 21st Fair took place in 2016, from 24 February to 5 March, and was the most ambitious to date in terms of the number of titles on display and of the number of publishing houses represented, in all 650 publishers from 27 countries. The Fair was accompanied by a varied programme of cultural activities in which celebrated figures from local and foreign literary circles took part. A separated area was allocated to children's activities of a cultural and educational nature and in which relevant civil society groups and youth initiatives played a role.

Among the most rewarding forums in disseminating awareness of Oman's cultural legacy and historical heritage are the Cultural Days and Weeks organised by Oman. The Brazilian cities of Sao Paolo and Rio de Janeiro hosted events in this category between 28 July and 10 August 2015, showcasing the heritage of the Sultanate, its culture and its civilised

past. The opportunities for positive exchange provided by these events are diverse and comprehensive, since they focus on the social life of Omanis, the customs and traditions practised by them in their daily lives. They are always received with great interest, by the public as well as the representatives of state, and they offer an understanding of the broad principles of openness to and tolerance of other cultures that is at the root of Oman's relations with the rest of the world.

Documents and Manuscripts

Documents and manuscripts are powerful repositories of the product of man's creativity over the ages, of science and knowledge in the various areas of human endeavour. The Sultanate, as other nations, carefully preserves important and rare historic documents and manuscripts, the works of scholars and poets and the experiences and conclusions of scientists on their respective journeys of discovery. Within these manuscripts resides the spirit and cultural knowledge of life as experienced by exceptional individuals throughout the ages.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture thus collects documents representing Oman's cultural and intellectual heritage, using the services of its National Records and Archives Authority. This body is a pillar of the heritage sector and exercises a crucial role in this

“ Muscat International Book Fair is the largest cultural celebration of the written word in the Sultanate, and enjoys great prestige in the Gulf and Arab regions ”



capacity, seeking out and collecting manuscripts, documents and items of historical interest, archiving and restoring these valuable artefacts and products of fertile and innovative minds.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture focuses on assembling these national and intellectual treasures from private collections and saving, studying and as necessary restoring them, where they have been torn or defiled, or separated from related papers arising from exposure to humidity or dust or improper storage.

In this manner, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture has succeeded in assembling a substantial collection totalling 4,600 manuscripts in the various sciences. Many of these manuscripts were in a

poor state of preservation and have been restored and then archived, photographed and published digitally, after being studied and their authenticity verified. In 2016, 21 new titles, on matters of broad and specific interest across the span of human knowledge, were verified, translated and published and 20 further documents prepared for publication.

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), meanwhile, has succeeded since its establishment in collecting documents and written material of direct concern to the Sultanate from countries with which it had sustained contact in the past and which have retained the records in their archives; as well as from private

The 4th conference organised by the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) examined “Oman in the International Press”

“ Oman has archived a significant collection of historic documents and manuscripts, including rare works by scholars and poets, as well as experimental records of scientists past and present ”

The important work of restoring and storing documents demands the best that technique and technology have to offer

citizens inside the Sultanate. The overriding purpose is to preserve the nation's historical legacy and the record of the most significant historical & cultural episodes of its past. This is accomplished in various ways, and through various activities, through research and study and by encouraging scientific and intellectual scholarship.

The NRAA has made significant progress in its assemblage of documents and archives referencing the Sultanate of Oman, to a total at the time of going to press of more than a million documents, as well as 36,226 manuscripts, 1,623

newspapers & magazines and 361 maps.

The Authority closely monitors all new developments capable of extending the life of the documents in its archive, always engaging the most forward-looking methods of restoration and storage available with an eye to the importance of the national memory and of the legacy it will leave to future generations. It has to date restored and maintained 15,162 documents constituting 60,128 individual pages. Its full archive is stored both electronically and on microfilm. On 463 reels of microfilm it has stored in this manner



1,419 files representing 242,000 pages of material. Additionally it has electronically stored 19,376 pages of material representing 579 individual documents.

The NRAA continues to expand its visual archive of events and achievements attained or experienced by Omanis. As at June 2016, 143 documentary interviews were on file involving 94 individuals representing various historical, religious, political, cultural and literary occasions or circumstances.

Documentary exhibitions add an important dimension to the rich canvas of Omani life past and

present, with value both to tourism and general culture. They constitute an impactful and easily accessible medium by which to view aspects of Oman's long history, a landscape of the events, developments and interactions that contributed to the politics and demographics of Oman over the centuries.

With this in mind, the Authority organised and participated in 8 local and 5 international documentary exhibitions during 2015.

The NRAA sponsored a number of seminars and international conferences in 2015, including the exhibition associated with the

Manuscripts and documents are restored, digitally photographed and archived, then published in hard copy replicas



'Oman in the French Documents' symposium that took place at the Institute of the Arab World in Paris in April 2015; the Oman Cultural Days presentation in Brazil that ran from 28 July to 9 August 2015; and documentary exhibits in Tunisia on 30 October- 1 November 2015 and at the Four Seasons Hotel in Moscow on 18 November 2015.

The Literary Forum and Cultural Club

The Cultural Club is a driver of the Sultanate's intellectual revival, with its mission to harmonise literary, cultural, intellectual and scientific events. The combined effect serves the advancement of intellectual

and cultural dialogue internally and enhances Oman's contribution to broader trends regionally and internationally.

Current policy in this sphere is to support publishing opportunities for all authors of work seen to possess genuine literary, intellectual or academic value, a policy which has given rise to a burgeoning list of original literary and intellectual works.

The Literary Forum, meanwhile, offers an annual programme of events, which include literary seminars, themed discussions and poetry evenings, all of which have helped breach new frontiers in Omani literature.

The 6th National
Records and Archives
Authority Exhibition



“ The national Publication Support Programme has created a publishing opportunity for anyone who has a genuine literary, intellectual or academic contribution to make. It has brought to the market a growing publisher’s list of original new titles, along with several literary and cultural periodicals ”

Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science

The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences (SQHCCS) is a cultural institution affiliated to the Diwan of Royal Court. It is a legal entity which seeks to foster ties and aspects of cooperation with cultural establishments in other countries. It works to clarify the definition of what represents Omani culture and encourages Omani youth to take advantage of research, studies & opportunities pioneered by the Centre.

Towards the achievement of these goals, the SQHCCS conducts studies and scientific research and organises conferences and seminars in areas related to culture and sciences. It also oversees the affairs of the Sultan Qaboos Mosques, Institutes of Islamic Sciences and Holy Quran Schools under the jurisdiction of the Centre. This is in addition to supervising Sultan Qaboos cultural centres and academic chairs abroad, the Omani Society for Fine Arts, the Oud Hobbyists Association, the Photographic Society, the Oman Traditional Music Centre and the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers and it administers the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Letters.

At a ceremony on 22 December 2015, the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature

was presented to 3 Arab authors, representing the 3 respective categories of the award. The Culture prize was won by Dr. Al-Tunisi Abdulsalam Al-Masdi for his scholarly essays on the Arabic language. Algerian calligrapher Sharifi Mohamed Belhadj took the award for calligraphy in the Arts category, and Tunisian writer and academic Dr Mohammad Hadi Gazan won the Literature award for his contribution to children’s literature. The three winners were honoured with the Order of Sultan Qaboos for Culture, Science, Arts and Literature, which comes with a cash incentive of 100,000 RO.

The Fifth 2016 season of the Award has now been launched, limited to Omani candidates in the three award categories, with the designated fields being Translation in the Culture category, Omani Traditional Arts in the Arts category & the Novel in the Literature category.

On 13 December 2015 the Centre celebrated the winners and contenders in the 25th Sultan Qaboos Competition for Memorisation of the Holy Quran. The contest had attracted 1,567 contenders of both sexes, of whom 24 had reached the final qualification stage, representing the four leading candidates in each of the Competition’s six categories.

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native

“ For the fifth year in a row, 14-17 February 2016 marked Harmony Week, an annual celebration of human co-existence that was initiated on the specific directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos ”

Speakers, which is located in Wilayat Manah in Dakhiliya Governorate, completed its third year, having processed 14 groups of students, a total of 342 individuals, or some 114 students for each of the three years of its existence.

The establishment of the College reflects His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's interest in promoting the Arabic language and Omani culture. Each group of students undergoes an eight-week course, which also includes a cultural programme and various social activities that give them the opportunity to experience Omani society at first hand.

On His Majesty the Sultan's instructions, the Centre held a "Human Rapprochement and Harmony Week" in the week of 14-17 February 2016 for the fifth consecutive year. The Week promotes His Majesty's vision of service to the cause of mutual understanding and rapport between religions and civilisations. It marks the particular respect paid by the Sultanate to the implementation of UN Resolution 65/5 of 2010, in its designation of the first week of February of every year as a week of harmony between religions.

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music (OCTM) has significant experience in the collection,

The 4th round of the coveted Sultan Qaboos Awards for Culture, Arts and Literature



documentation and study of traditional Omani music. It won UNESCO's International Music Council Prize in 2002 and the Arab Music Society Award in 2005.

The Centre has established an archive of traditional Omani music that now exceeds fifty thousand audio-visual records, as well as field inventory and documentation (audio, televisual and photo material) of most of the differentiated Omani traditional singing styles, their practitioners and festive and ritual occasions where they are performed. It also collects poetry and verse, folk melodies and drum performances, along with the names of notable practitioners and

their signature styles across the entire Sultanate, from Musandam to Dhofar.

The Omani Society for Fine Arts helps to support and develop the fine arts in the Sultanate and raise the level of awareness in the community about the visual arts and culture. As well as protecting the arts, it also seeks to enrich them by encouraging them to derive their inspiration from the Omani and Arab cultural heritage and the intellectual and aesthetic values of the society in which they have their roots. At the same time, it aims to ensure that the artists' innovative work enables them to enjoy the status they deserve in the community.

The Sultan Qaboos College in Manah, where non-native speakers can study Arabic, is another project of special interest to His Majesty, who believes in using all opportunities to introduce Oman, its language and its culture, to the world beyond its borders



The Society has sponsored many of the events and activities that serve arts by fostering the development of artistic and cultural awareness. Its goal is to highlight Oman's respect for its artists and the value of their creative output.

The Photography Society won laurels at several international competitive events, including the World Cup for Photography at the 38th FIAP Youth Print Biennial 2016, organised by the International Federation of Art Photography (FIAP), beating Germany and Russia into second and third place respectively.

The World Cup win capped two successive years of achievement for photographers, both at home and abroad. In 2015, the Society brought home two gold medals from the 37th FIAP Youth Digital Biennial, winning in both the under-16 and under-21 categories.

To date, individual members of Oman's Photography Society have won a staggering 1,185 international photography awards, including 258 gold, 103 silver & 96 bronze medals and trophies, as well as 700 honorary awards. Such distinction is a matter of national pride & is a major incentive in the increasing sophistication of art photography in Oman.

The Lute Players Association organises three-month training courses at the start of every calendar year for new members of both sexes, covering the basics of lute playing. In addition it furthers cross-communication between musicians through the many events and activities

it sponsors for Omani and overseas musicians. Its influence has given confidence and access to practitioners of this much-loved instrument. Lute players have today many openings for competitive and recreational musical participation both inside and outside the Sultanate.

Royal Opera House Muscat

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has earned a reputation far beyond Oman's borders since its



“ The Photography Society of Oman won many distinctions at international competitions and events ”

inauguration on 12 October 2011. Now in its Fifth Season, the ROHM programme is remarkable for its quality and variety. The Opera House has become in its short life a forum and catalyst for positive dialogue between the cultures within Omani society, and equally between Oman and the outside world. It manifests Sultan Qaboos' Renaissance view that Omani society will advance as a reflection of the Arab and Islamic values that underpin its identity. From

this solid ground can rise a generation confident enough to be open to the cultures of the world and aware of their great diversity and significance.

On 16 May 2016, the ROHM announced its programme for the coming season (September 2016-May 2017), under the appropriate heading "Excellence in Diversity". It features an eclectic mix of Omani, Arab and international performances, including opera, ballet and concerts of regional and international music.

The beautiful Royal Opera House in Muscat is now a world renowned forum for the performance arts



OMAN'S ACHIEVEMENT

The Photographic Society of Oman beat all its competitors at the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP)'s 38th Youth Print Biennial 2016, winning two world cups on behalf of the Sultanate.

The Sultanate also won the world cup for the under-21 category as well as six individual awards. Walaa bint Hamad al Hudhailiya won the FIAP gold medal and Ahmed bin Khalid al Hadhrami was awarded a PSO Diploma in the under-16s' category.

The other four awards were in the under-21 category. Loai bin Hilal al Jabri won the FIAP gold medal, Shatha bint Sulaiman al Ghammariyah won the FIAP silver medal, Abdullah bin Said al Ruzaiqi won the FIAP bronze medal and Reem bint Abdullah al Wahshi was awarded a PSO Diploma.









Ahmed Al Hadhrami



Economic Development



Economic Development

The Sultanate's strategy to offset the negative effects of falling oil prices is two-pronged: on the one hand, measures to protect the integrity of the State's financial resources; alongside this, a raft of policies focused on stimulating economic growth. Critical development spending has not been curtailed, with priority given to economic and social projects, in the belief that an environment conducive to private sector investment is the way forward. Equally important is a need to maintain a supportive structure of basic public and community services.

The General State Budget for 2016 set out a medium-term spending ceiling based on a scrutiny of public spending for areas of flexibility, efficiency and greater sustainability. Public resources are being restructured to increase the non-oil contribution to total revenue and thus gradually reduce dependence on oil resources. The review will involve a search for greater efficiencies in the performance of State-owned enterprises through the establishment of holding

companies which will develop plans and strategies and oversee their execution on principles of good governance and a more functioning contribution to the national economy.

Total revenue in the 2016 budget is expected to come in at 8.6 billion Omani Rials, including RO4.56 billion in net oil revenue, about RO1.6 billion from gas, and RO2.4 billion from aggregated other sources.

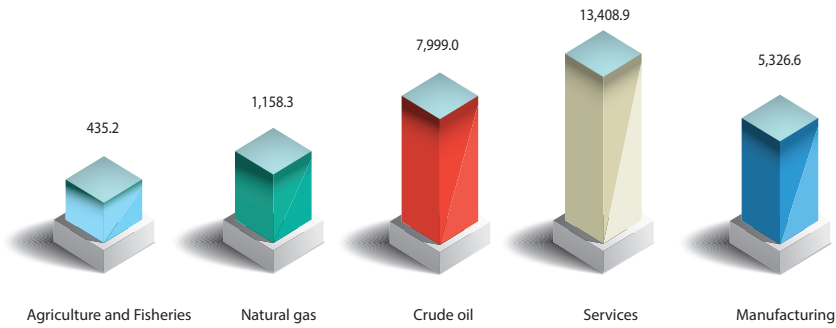
Expenditure is estimated at RO11.9 billion, including RO8.68 billion in recurring expenditure and RO2.67 billion in investment costs; RO550 million in subsidies and contributions to local, regional and overseas enterprise; leaving a budget deficit of approximately RO3.3 billion, to be financed through domestic and external borrowing and withdrawals from State reserves. This balance was achieved after an evaluation of all available options to ensure no negative impact on domestic liquidity and bank credit levels or any inability to serve the financing needs of the private sector.

Spending for the first five months of 2016 was contained at

“ The 2016 State Budget set out to streamline public finance planning with medium-range goals and a ceiling on spending ”

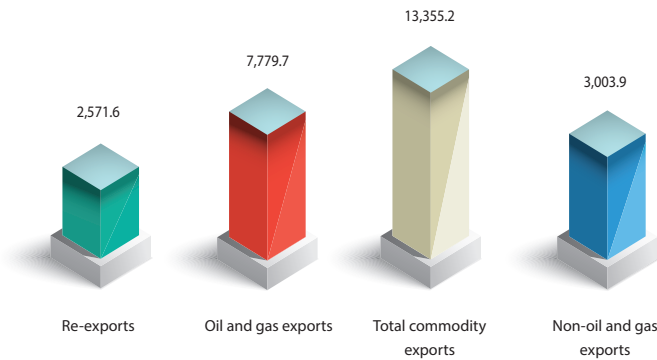
GDP breakdown at current prices (2015)

Sector	Million RO
Crude oil	7,999.0
Natural gas	1,158.3
Agriculture and Fisheries	435.2
Manufacturing	5,326.6
Services	13,408.9



Commodity Exports 2015

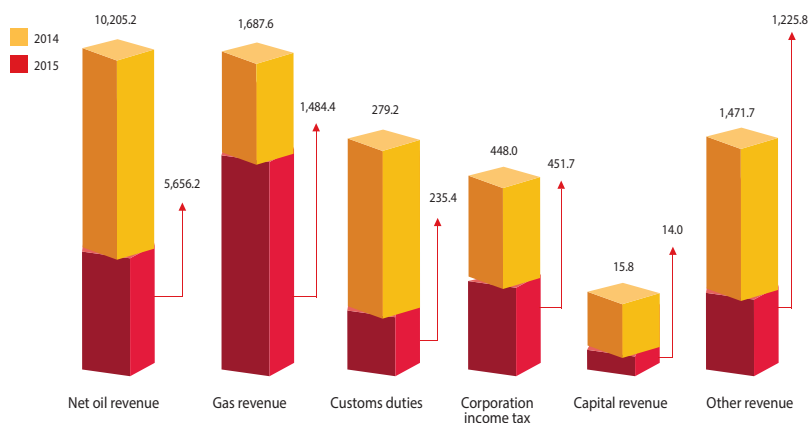
Sector	Million RO
Oil and gas exports	7,779.7
Non-oil and gas exports	3,003.9
Re-exports	2,571.6
Total commodity exports	13,355.2



“ In 2016, Oman began implementation of the Ninth Five-Year Plan, which runs until the end of 2020. This represents the final chapter in the Future Vision cycle of economic development (Oman 2020) ”

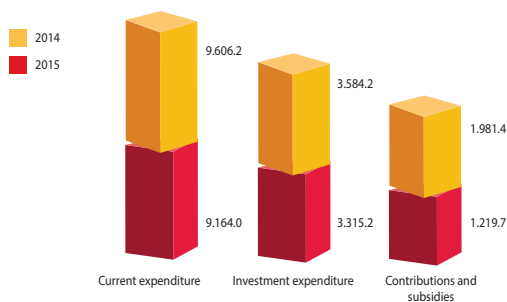
Total State Revenue 2014/2015

Sector	Million RO	
Item	2014	2015
Net oil revenue	10,205.2	5,656.2
Gas revenue	1,687.6	1,484.4
Customs duties	279.2	235.4
Corporation income tax	448.0	451.7
Capital revenue	15.8	14.0
Other revenue	1,471.7	1,225.8
Total	14,107.5	9,067.5



Government Spending 2014/2015

Sector	Million RO	
Item	2014	2015
Current expenditure	9,606.2	9,164.0
Investment expenditure	3,584.2	3,315.2
Contributions and subsidies	1,981.4	1,219.7
Total	15,171.8	13,698.9



RO5.3 billion, as compared with RO5.4 billion for the corresponding period of 2015. Total government revenues were RO2.8 billion, of which approximately RO1.3 billion was net oil revenue. These figures compare with RO3.8 billion income, of which RO2.3 came from oil, during the same period of 2015.

Economic performance in 2015

The Sultanate had total revenue of RO9.1 billion in 2015. The contribution of oil to this figure was RO5.6 billion, a significant drop from the RO14.1 billion total revenue of 2014, of which RO10.2 billion was oil-related.

Government spending dropped to RO13.7 billion, as compared with RO15.2 billion in 2014. Current spending was RO9.1 billion and a further RO3.3 billion was expended on investment and RO1.2 billion on support programmes.

The GDP for 2015 was RO27 billion, down from RO31.4 billion in 2014 and RO30 billion in 2013. At current prices, oil activities contributed RO9.1 billion, or 33.9%, of GDP.

Ninth Five Year Plan

In 2016, Oman entered its Ninth Five-Year Plan, which runs until the end of 2020. This represents the final chapter of Vision 2020, the government's long-term

development strategy, and its completion will pave the way for Oman 2040.

The orientation and general focus of the Plan is protection of the achievements of the last 46 years. Plan 2016-2020 drives forward the work of the modern Renaissance as defined in Vision 2020, ensuring that job creation keeps pace with population growth. An additional objective is enhanced social integration through education and training, along with health and human resources development. The overall goal is full employment of the national workforce, achievable only through economic diversification. Sectors specifically targeted in the diversification plan are industrial manufacturing, logistics, transport, tourism, fisheries and mining.

The development aspect of the Ninth Five-Year Plan builds urban development around the optimal exploitation of resources and investment opportunities offered by respective governorates. Indeed the provinces are the focus of a particular drive to spread the fruits of development equitably, to be able to offer advancement and opportunity to all of the country's citizens in their home environment.

The Plan has a net annual GDP growth target of around 3% for its 5-year duration, with a realistic total investment goal of RO8.2 billion,

growing annually at the rate of 5%. It also foresees a 4.3% expansion in non-oil activities, while oil activities are themselves expected to see a limited increase of 0.2%. At this rate, a conservative estimate for GDP, if prices remain constant, would be a mean RO28.6 billion over the period of the Plan, as compared with RO24.6 billion for the Eighth Five-Year Plan. The five years from 2016 to 2020 should see solid growth in non-oil activities in light of the actions and policies being developed in support of economic diversification.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan assumes an inflation rate that does not deviate excessively from the target of 2.9% per annum.

It was drafted on the 2016 oil price template of \$45 a barrel, expected to trend slowly upwards towards the region of \$60 a barrel by the end of this chapter, and with oil production stabilising at 990,000 bpd.

The Plan projects the strong emergence of the private sector as a more dominant force in the national economy, leading to growth and jobs. Policies that continue to improve the business environment and accelerate the implementation of the privatisation programme are highlighted, along with support for small and medium enterprises. Over the five years of the Plan, several promising sectors of the economy have been identified as the gateway



The Duqm dry dock provides services for vessels of every size and type

“ The Ninth Five-Year Plan addresses transport, storage and communications, with a goal for this sector of 5% annual growth at constant prices ”



“ The Sultanate has broadly achieved the objectives of the Eighth Five-Year Plan by a positive pairing of steady GDP growth and low inflation ”

to diversification. These are:

1. Manufacturing.
2. Transport and logistics.
3. Tourism.
4. Fisheries.
5. Mining.

These sectors constitute the most important focus areas of the Ninth Five-Year Plan to sustain growth in the Sultanate. Additional attention is given to support sectors that will underpin success in these five focus areas, such as education, health, the business environment, youth, environment, public service performance, communication, and information technology. The combination of more than 500 programmes and policies directly connected with the five focus sectors is expected to establish the Sultanate as an important logistical hub in the region, with a focus on support for the re-export and product assembly industries locally. Air transport, and the development of infrastructure for aviation sector services, will be of additional benefit to the tourism sector.

The Ninth Five-Year Plan expects the transport, storage and communications sector to achieve annual growth of 5% with stable pricing. The catering sector is growing at an average rate of 5.3%, fisheries at 6.5%, and manufacturing, mining and quarrying at 6% each. The outlook

is for the Sultanate to benefit

from available mineral resources efficiently by encouraging private investment in the development of mining potential, thereby increasing its percentage contribution and the ratio of national companies operating in the sector to 35% by the end of the Ninth Five-Year Plan. This would compare very favourable with the 20% figure for the Eighth Five-Year Plan.

Vision 2020 will see a reduction in the contribution of oil to GDP from the 44% of the 2011-2015 chapter of the Plan to 26% by its culmination in 2020. Also due to fall is activity in the natural gas industry, to 2.4% as compared with 3.6% at the end of 2015. These estimates are consistent with the main economic objective of the Sultanate, which is to achieve a major economic shift away from the oil sector.

The overall development strategy of the civil ministries and other government agencies for the first three years of the Ninth Five-Year Plan is to complete implementation of the phased projects of the Eighth Five-Year Plan at a cost of about RO8 billion, with a further RO2 billion going towards urgent service projects in the areas of education, citizen health and other essential services. New projects will be examined for selection at the end of the three-year period, in accordance with the new zero-based budgeting mechanism

adopted by the Supreme Council for Planning. Under the zero-based mechanism, new project funds are allocated only after the completion of detailed feasibility studies.

Also in the pipeline are major partnership projects combining the input of public and private sectors, and a study of large economically feasible projects that could be implemented by the private sector independently, leaving the government free to commit to public service projects involving education, health, housing and water. Projects will be assigned to categories for implementation by the public alone, by the private sector, or by public-private partnerships, including railroad works, and tourist facility projects at Port Sultan Qaboos, the Port Shinas and Khasab Port projects, the South Batinah Logistics Hub and the Al Dhahirah Economic Zone. Several tourism projects are in the planning stage, as are coastal fisheries expansion projects. The private sector, meanwhile, is looking to add value in the education and health sectors, with proposals for high quality services and facilities in the form of private schools and hospitals

Eighth Five-Year Plan

The Eighth Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) performed well, notwithstanding unfavourable external conditions, aggravated

after mid-2014 by the dramatic decline in world oil prices and a slowdown in global economic growth. The national economy nevertheless managed to achieve annual growth during the plan period averaging 3.7% at current prices, or 3.3% at constant prices, as compared with planned estimates of 6% at current prices and 4.6% at constant prices.

Non-oil activities recorded growth of almost 7.2% at current prices, or 5.8% at constant prices. This positive trend confirms that the national economy is heading in the right direction to gradually reduce dominance of the oil sector on overall economic activity.

The Sultanate's revenues rose in the Eighth Five-Year Plan to around RO61.5 billion, almost double the RO33.2 billion figure for the Seventh Five-Year Plan, while spending increased from RO33.8 billion to RO67.1 billion.

The years covered by the Eighth Plan saw low inflation, despite a significant increase in public service recruitments, combined with wage increases. Highest at 4.1% in 2011, the annual inflation rate in 2015 had retreated to just 0.5%, as compared with 1% in 2014. This success story was attributed to fiscal and monetary policies closely pursued by the government, which took action to monitor and control the market and enforce consumer protection guidelines. Assisting

this corrective action was a slight decline in commodity prices on the global market.

The Sultanate managed broadly to achieve the objectives of the Eighth Five-Year Plan by reconciling GDP growth with low inflation and raising the average per capita income. This resulted in overall improved living standards. Oman again performed well on the Human Development Index, ranking high (at 56) among the 187 nations covered in the Human Development Report for 2014.

Oil wealth accumulated during the years of the Eighth Five-Year Plan was expertly handled, being largely expended in the development of social infrastructure and in an ambitious and necessary extension of the country's network of roads, ports, airports, industrial zones and free zones. This investment in infrastructure is paying off in the Ninth Five-Year Plan, particularly insofar as concerns economic diversification. It has also given rise to significant improvements in the extent and quality of health, education and other social services.

The Business Environment

The Sultanate's business policies are based on economic principles of openness to global markets.

• Oman is a member of the World

Trade Organisation, as well as of numerous GCC, Arab, regional and international conventions.

Investment advantages offered by the Sultanate have enabled it to attract local and foreign interest, chief among these advantages being security, political stability and a climate of economic freedom that permits foreigners to own projects at rates up to 100%. Moreover there are no restrictions on the transfer of funds or profits abroad, and individual incomes are not taxed.

At the end of the second quarter of 2015, foreign direct investment stood at RO6.8 billion, including RO3.6 billion in the oil and gas sector and approximately RO1.2 billion in the financial brokerage sector, RO630.6 million in the manufacturing sector and RO542.8 million in real estate and associated activities.

In other moves to create a more attractive business climate the Sultanate has introduced further improvements and facilities in line with the recommendations of international institutions and the demands of the domestic and foreign private sectors. Several government departments have been involved, as well as the Council of Oman (comprising the State Council and the Consultation Council), the specialised committees and the municipal councils, the aim being to provide the basic needs and utilities required for economic activities, while at

“ Oman has multiple investment advantages that have enabled it to attract local and foreign investments. It is safe, politically stable and enjoys an open economy ”

the same time upgrading the legal framework for protecting investors' rights, implementing commercial regulations and controlling rising production costs. The legislation governing foreign capital investment is also amended from time to time to increase the Sultanate's attractiveness as a destination for foreign investment.

Oman's economic policies have gained recognition in step with its ascent in the ranks of international economies reviewed annually. In the annual report of the Global Competitiveness Index (2015-2016) issued by the World Economic Forum (Davos) in Switzerland, the

Sultanate earned sixth place in the Arab world and 62nd place globally. In the 2016 Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index, which uses three metrics to assess and rank emerging market countries, Size and Growth Attractiveness, Compatibility, and Connectedness, Oman came fourth in the Arab world and 14th globally. The Sultanate scored high for its facilitation of business and for its transportation structure and interdependence, including its ability to attract logistics providers and customs brokers, distributors and freight dispatchers of all types. China topped the Index, which investigated the experience of 45 competing countries.

The Tender Board
approved 61 tenders
worth a total of RO
575.5 million
during 2015



The Sultanate continues to enjoy low inflation. The consumer price index at the end of 2015 stood at 102.4 points, confirming little change since 2014.

Tender Board

The Tender Board awarded 61 tenders in 2015, valued at some RO575.5 million. The Tender Board, established in 1973, is responsible for inviting tenders, opening and analysing bids and awarding all government tenders valued at over RO3 million. It sees its role as one of improving performance levels at government agencies, guaranteeing the good and efficient use of public money in their functioning. The Tender Board ensures that in implementing government projects, or in the procurement of goods and services, the highest specifications are acquired at the lowest feasible cost. Its existence also ensures equal opportunity for all companies and institutions seeking to compete for the provision of services or execution of government projects. It supports opportunity and access for SMEs and maintains a bias towards local industry and towards solutions that benefit employment of the national workforce.

Among the most important tenders assigned by the Board in 2015 were: design, manufacture, supply, installation, operation and

training for the main works (No 6) of the central integrated system of Muscat and Salalah airports, an award valued at RO102 million; the setting up of infrastructure at the new residential area in wilayat Liwa in the Governorate of North Batinah (at a cost of RO82.4 million); provision of rail consultancy services (an RO57.4 million PMC contract); establishment of the third terminal at Sohar Airport (RO35.7 million); installation of gas pipelines at the Duqm gas line (RO35.6 million); and Stage 2 of the Ibri-Al Dariz-Miskin road dualisation work (RO26.4 million).

By sector, the services and public utilities sector issued 35 tenders worth RO392.7 million, roads and highways four tenders worth RO34.4 million, education and training nine tenders worth RO21 million, health seven tenders worth RO33.3 million, water and sanitation three tenders worth RO38 million, oil and gas two tenders worth RO45.2 million, and electrical and mechanical works one tender valued at RO10.7 million.

During the first half of 2016 the Tender Board awarded tenders worth RO265.6 million, covering projects affecting the lives of citizens in many sectors, with emphasis on electricity and water supply, education, health, airports and other vital sectors. Specific areas of interest were the operation and maintenance of major transportation lines, pumping stations and major reservoirs and their ancillary facilities, as managed

by the Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW); operation and maintenance of various PAEW assets distributed throughout the governorates; the installation of a water supply line from Boucher to Seeb in Muscat Governorate; and the construction of a water distribution network in the wilayat of Nakhal, Wadi Al Awabi and Wadi Al-Ma'awal in South Batinah.

Other tenders assigned in the first half of 2016 will provide a teaching structure for the technical colleges affiliated to the Ministry of Manpower and provide the Faculties of Applied Science at the Ministry of Higher Education with

English language teachers. Teaching and training contracts for the staff of vocational training centres and the institutes for retraining fishermen in Khabourah and Salalah will be renewed, and technicians recruited for the maintenance of medical devices and equipment at a number of health units. A major government tender will supply the Ministry of Health with volume quantities of medical drugs.

Oil and natural gas

The Sultanate ramped up its exploration and drilling efforts in 2015 for both oil and gas.

The oil and gas sector employs well qualified Omani personnel



Companies operating in the oil sector drilled 39 exploratory wells, and 16 were drilled in the gas sector. There were 16 exploration and production companies operating in 27 concession zones at the end of 2015. In September, the Ministry of Oil and Gas signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with Oman Lasso Exploration and Production Karawan covering Block 54.

The oil price average was down by 45.3% in 2015, representing a price for Omani production of around US\$56.45 per barrel, as compared with US\$103.23 per barrel in 2014. Offsetting this somewhat was an average daily production of crude and condensate that rose to 981,000 bpd from 943,000 bpd in 2014. Exports also increased from 292 million barrels to about 308 million barrels. The People's Republic of China was the top importer of Omani oil, representing 77.1% of the total.

Natural gas production during 2015 averaged 103.6 million cubic metres per day. Of total gas production, associated gas constituted 19%, or 19.2 million cubic metres per day. Non-associated gas was 81% of the total, at 84.4 million cubic metres per day. Supplementing this production in 2015 was a daily top-up of 5.4 million cubic metres of natural gas imported from Dolphin Energy. In the same year, Oman

exported 7.9 million metric tonnes of LNG.

At the end of 2015, the Sultanate's reserves of crude oil and condensates stood at approximately 5.4 billion barrels, and total estimated natural gas reserves at some 23 trillion cubic feet.

In the first half of 2016 the Sultanate's oil production was again stepped up, to one million barrels per day, as compared with 970,000 barrels per day for the corresponding 2015 period, bringing total six-month production of crude oil and condensate to 182 million barrels, as against 175.6 million barrels for the same period of 2015. Oil exports were up from 154.8 million barrels to 164.5 million barrels, while the average price for Omani oil dropped to US\$35 per barrel from US\$59.3 in the first half of 2015.

The Sultanate has two crude oil refineries, the first of which, the Mina al-Fahal, went into commission in 1982. Output at Al-Fahal for 2015 was 39.5 million barrels. The Sohar refinery opened in April 2007 and processed 46.5 million barrels of crude oil in 2015. A third facility is now under construction at Duqm and will have a refining capacity of 230,000 barrels per day.

The banking sector

The banking sector performed well in 2015, managing to boost overall commercial and traditional

☞ At the end of 2015, the Sultanate's reserves of crude oil and condensate stood at some 5.4 billion barrels ☞

banking assets by the end of December 2015 to RO28.2 billion. This compared with RO24.8 billion for the end of 2014 and represents a growth rate of 13.6%. Bank credit rose 8.4% to RO18.3 billion and deposits rose by 3.4% to RO17.9 billion.

Islamic banking demonstrated exceptional growth, with RO1.8 billion processed in financing by this sector in 2015, representing almost double the figure for 2014 (RO1 billion). Deposits were also up to RO1.5 billion, as against RO700 million for 2014, and this strong trend was reflected in an expansion of Islamic bank and window assets

to an aggregate RO2.3 billion at the end of December 2015, representing 7.5% of the country's overall banking activity.

As the country's monetary authority, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) provides a positive climate for financing in general, but particularly for the banking sector, so that it can play its vital part in promoting economic growth and diversifying the sources of that growth. The CBO is also responsible for maintaining the purchasing power of the national currency – the Omani Rial – at home and abroad.

The CBO has a capital base of RO 760 million and at the end of 2015

Positive growth rates achieved by the Sultanate's Islamic banking sector



☞ The Islamic banking sector is advised to staff banks and Islamic windows with experienced professionals and to provide innovative products that meet customer needs ☞

its assets/liabilities totalled around RO7.6 billion, an increase of RO950.1 million from the figure for the end of 2014. To enhance the flexibility of commercial banks in managing liquidity and investment and ensuring the availability of credit, the ratio of mandatory reserves that commercial banks are required to keep with the CBO was modified to 5%, subject to a maximum 2% investment ratio in government development bonds, treasury bills and sovereign debt instruments. As of 1 April 2016, the permitted ceiling for banks licensed to invest in government development bonds and sovereign debt instruments was raised from 30% to 45% of the total net worth of the bank, and this decision was made in order to provide more opportunities for banks to invest the cash at its disposal.

In an effort to promote Islamic banking operations in Oman, the CBO in June 2015 established a department with special jurisdiction to pursue and develop such activities within the organisational structure of the bank. Meanwhile Islamic banks and windows were given directives on the need to staff the Islamic banking sector with experienced professionals and to deliver innovative products to meet contemporary customer needs.

The Central Bank has circularised all banks operating in the Sultanate on the risk of fraud and electronic

piracy and urged vigilance and practical measures to protect the security and confidentiality of banking information. It also urged commercial banks to invest in acquiring effective technology and highly competent personnel, and to make available retraining opportunities for existing staff to enable them to upgrade their skills and keep pace with developments in their areas of expertise.

The CBO oversaw four government development bond issues between January 2015 and April 2016, for a total value of RO700 million.

The Capital Market

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) oversees the capital and insurance markets. The Authority has a legal personality and enjoys financial and administrative independence. The Sultanate uses the capital market to finance major projects. In 2015, RO2.5 billion in financing was provided in this manner, a 183% advance on the previous year. Projects funded spanned the oil, services, industry and transport sectors.

Further efforts were made in 2015 to achieve stability in the capital market, and in this context regulations on the sale of securities were introduced which mandated settlement on purchases. Moreover, a Charter governing the activities of

public joint stock companies was issued in July 2015, which included basic rules to improve company work practices and offer guarantees of greater scrutiny and precision so as to achieve optimum transparency and disclosure.

Muscat Securities Market

The continuing downward trend in oil prices in 2015 led to declines in many regional and international stock markets, including the Muscat Securities Market (MSM). The main index was down 937 points to close the year at 5406, a drop of 14.7% from the end of 2014. Total trading

volume was RO1.389 billion, as compared with RO2.268 in 2014, or a falloff of 38.7%.

Companies listed on the Muscat exchange at the end of 2015 were valued at RO15.7 billion, against RO14.5 billion in 2014. The rise was attributable to the RO1.3 billion value of new listings, spread among public and closed shareholding companies, funds and bond market instruments. The Phoenix Power Company, capitalised at RO146.2 million, completed its launch by offering 35% of its capital for public subscription. During 2015, 25 publicly traded companies expanded their capital base with

Commercial banks are encouraged to invest in the acquisition of new technology and to attract motivated and well qualified personnel



free share offerings to existing shareholders, as well as private placements and preferential stock issuance.

Al-Nahdha Services and Al-Omaniyah Financial Services both increased their common stock base by conversion of mandatory convertible bonds. The rise in the capital value of publicly traded companies of RO131.3 million came notably from the banking sector, representing RO86 million of the total.

Trading in debt securities in Oman underwent a paradigm shift in 2015 after the market descriptive was expanded from 'bond market' to 'bond and sukuk (sovereign Islamic bonds) market'. On 10 November 2015, the Sultanate announced its first ever RO250 million sukuk issue. In addition, 46 government development bonds were issued at an aggregate value of RO200 million, and 47 at an aggregate value of RO300million. Overall, the value of new bond and sukuk market listings rose by RO784.2 million.

The Muscat Securities Market made some advances in the first half of 2016, logging market gains in the region of RO1.2 billion, or a rise to total value of RO17 billion in June 2016 from RO15.8 billion at the close of 2015. Stock turnover of RO560.4 million was somewhat lower than for the equivalent period of 2015 (RO707.3 million). The index at the

end of June 2016 touched 5777 points, an increase of 371 points over its level (5406) at the close of 2015.

Insurance sector

The insurance sector had a good year in 2015. Total direct premiums gained 11% to achieve a value of RO442 million. Per capita spending on insurance rose to RO102.3, as against RO96.9 in 2014, an indication of increasing insurance awareness in Omani society.

The introduction of mutual insurance to the products on offer stimulated competition in the sector, with the mutual market alone growing by 64% in 2015 over the previous year. Indeed mutual products constituted 9% of total direct premiums for 2015 and 5% of total compensation paid out during the same year.

The insurance industry in Oman has a combined workforce of 2,525 employees, of whom 1,679 are Omanis, or 66% of the sector's total workforce.

The Capital Market Authority is seeking, through a review of legislative structures and the development of new tools and products in both the capital and insurance markets, to invigorate the performance of these sectors in the national economy and increase their contribution to GDP. The CMA strategy for development of the

☞ Internal trade saw good growth in 2015, with an uptick in overall business activity and services, and this growth is reflected in the GDP ☞

insurance sector involves providing technical support to insurance companies to ease their adjustment to recent amendments to the insurance companies law. Under the new amendments, insurance companies will be entitled to trade publicly as joint stock companies by the end of 2017.

Trade

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry works to expand and develop internal and external trade. It is responsible for initiatives designed to strengthen the role of the private sector, stimulating it to contribute more effectively and in diverse ways to the economy and the exchequer. It encourages the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Oman to serve the business community well. The Ministry is proactive in its trade policies, always promoting Oman's relations with overseas partners. It is a driving force in the pursuit of trade-friendly legislation and guidelines and an active participant in the enforcement of all regulations that have a bearing on commerce and industry.

Internal trade flourished across the board in 2015, and the positive growth registered in business and services was reflected in the GDP. Statistics confirm a contribution by service activities to GDP in 2015 that was 3.1% above the

previous year, at RO13.2 billion as compared with RO12.8 billion in 2014. The wholesale and retail sectors brought in RO2.03 billion, hotels and catering contributed RO266.5 million, and transport, storage and communication RO1.6 billion. A further RO1.3 billion came from real estate activities, rentals and commercial projects, financial brokerage services contributed RO1.3 billion, public administration and defence RO3.3 billion, and other services RO3.1 billion.

The Sultanate's external trade was valued at RO24.5 billion in 2015, of which RO13.3 billion was attributable to commodity exports and RO11.1 billion commodity imports. Oil and gas exports contributed RO7.7 billion, or 58.2% of all commodity export revenue. Non-oil exports contributed RO3 billion, and the re-export trade RO2.5 billion.

Food security

The Sultanate came in second in the Arab and Gulf world and 26th globally on the Global Food Security Index for 2016. The Index is compiled and published annually by the UK's 'The Economist' magazine and examines and ranks 113 countries. The Sultanate scored 73.6 points from a maximum 100.

The Sultanate's strategy for achieving full food security combines policies to increase

“ Oman came in second place for the Arab and Gulf regions and 26th globally on the 2016 Global Food Security Index, as reported annually by the British magazine The Economist ”

A strategy to increase domestic food production

domestic food production, extend strategic reserves of imported materials and goods, promote food processing and fish farming, and provide appropriate facilities to incentivise investment in agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries.

The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserves (PASFR) plays multiple roles in the management

of basic foodstuff reserves and safe storage within the Sultanate. It is particularly solicitous in the matter of storage, ensuring that facilities are sound and capable of preventing damage or deterioration of stored food. The PASFR administers and maintains storage facilities and warehouses and in 2015 completed the expansion of storage capacity in the Governorate of North Batinah.



The Authority is collaborating with the Duqm Special Economic Zone Authority, the Port Authority at Sohar and with Sohar Free Zone to arrive at a harmonised package of incentives to encourage investment in storage and food supply as a free zone activity.

The PASFR and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) are working together to upgrade

the Sultanate's food security data systems, research programmes and policies. The PASFR's Food Security Department is currently preparing a wide-ranging economic report on staple food prices and reserves around the world based on daily information and analysis taken from the reports issued by international organisations such as the FAO, the International Sugar Organisation and the International Grains Council.

In the decades of the modern Renaissance, Oman has been able to achieve near sufficiency in many plant and animal products, including full sufficiency in dates, 68% in vegetables, 51% in red meat, 43% in poultry, around 48% in eggs and 51% in milk.

In recognition of the efforts the Sultanate in this context, the Agricultural Cooperation Committee of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), at its meeting in March 2016, approved the establishment of a GCC Centre for Food Security Studies in the Sultanate.

Industry

After the oil sector, industry is one of the Sultanate's main engines of economic and social development. It is one of the most effective ways of achieving economic diversification and encouraging private sector investment, while attracting foreign



capital, creating job opportunities for Omani nationals and helping to meet a significant part of the local community's need for goods and commodities.

Industrial activity contributed RO5.7 billion, or 21.2%, to the of the Sultanate's RO27 billion GDP in 2015, a positive advance on last year's 18.1%. Credit volume directed towards this sector grew to RO1.4 billion, or RO27 million above the level at the end of 2014.

Exports generated by transformative industries grew substantially during the timeframe of the Eighth Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), rising from RO3.2 billion in 2012 to RO3.7 billion in 2014. The export figure for the first nine months of 2015 was RO2.1 billion. The Sultanate sees the transformative industrial sector as a vigorous and strategic component of the economy and has invested appropriate attention in this area in ongoing development plans. A variety of manufacturing projects hopes to bring the sector's contribution to GDP up to 15% by 2020. That figure stood at 10.9% at the end of 2015, for a value of RO2.9 billion.

HM the Sultan's Cup Competition for the Best Five Factories was created to encourage Omani manufacturing to advance its technical capabilities, to adhere to standard specifications and to support Omanisation in the workforce. The award was modified

in 2015, renamed the Sultan Qaboos Industrial Excellence Award, and the new structure redirects attention to the overall quality of a contestant's management system. Appropriate criteria and standards have been added to the assessment process in this popular annual contest, which has guided industrial standards and progress since its foundation in 1991 and which continues to adapt in line with the Sultanate's constantly adjusting industrial goals.

The Sultanate has eight industrial estates dedicated primarily to small and medium industries. They are overseen by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE) – a body which was granted additional powers and prerogatives under Royal Decree No. 32/2015 on the Promulgation of the PEIE's Regulations, issued on 21st July 2015. To enable the PEIE to attract investments, the Decree grants its board of directors the right to exempt some of the industrial estates under its jurisdiction – or some of their investment activities – from some or all of the provisions of the Foreign Capital Investment Law and the Commercial Companies Law, as well as from the Omanisation levels prescribed under the rules in force; according to the Decree such exemptions will be determined by a decision from the Council of Ministers and on the recommendation of the PEIE's board of directors.

“ The Sultanate has managed, since the start of the modern Renaissance, to achieve good sufficiency levels in many plant and animal products ”

The PEIE is working on an ambitious plan to expand the number of industrial zones under its umbrella supervision to all provinces. At present it oversees some 900 industrial zone investment projects, representing an aggregate value in excess of RO5 billion. An additional 242 projects are under construction and expected to be commissioned and fully operational by 2017 or 2018. These projects will provide 12,000 employment opportunities initially, including 4,500 jobs for Omanis. Further down the line will be the 500 projects for which land has been allocated, all expected

to become operational during the timeframe of the Ninth Five-Year plan (2016-2020). The latter will add approximately 25,000 jobs, of which 9,000 for Omani citizens.

“Omani” is an annual campaign during which marketing and other initiatives are launched to promote Omani goods and add value to the Omani economy. Among the marketing initiatives are demonstrations of Omani products at schools and major commercial centres and mobile exhibitions that visit the governorates. The mobile exhibition concept has now been expanded to overseas.

Oman's industrial development strategy focuses on heavy industry and the exploitation of the country's natural resources



“ The Sultanate has expanded the scope of the industrial sector by establishing free zones and economic zones designed to attract a range of investment projects ”

Economic and free zones

In a move designed to capitalise on Oman's geographical location, economic and free zones have been set up in various parts of the country to attract investment, particularly in the ports and heavy and petrochemical industries sectors. The Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD) – one of the leading zones - comprises the Port of al Duqm, a ship repair dry dock and an industrial complex, in addition to tourist, commercial and logistical areas.

In 2016 Ras Markaz was incorporated into the Duqm Special Economic Zone, expanding the overall area of the Zone from 1,745 sq km to 2,000 sq km. The Ras Markaz area will now be developed to accommodate oil storage activities, and the Oman Oil Company will be aspiring to turn Ras Markaz into a world class oil storage terminal. The terminal will be built in several stages, with stage one having a storage capacity of 6-10 million barrels. Sixteen hundred hectares of land have been allocated for the terminal, which will have a final storage capacity of 200 million barrels of crude oil. This enormous capacity will in turn facilitate future refining prospects at SEZAD, where refineries and petrochemical plants are projected in the future.

In 2016, SEZAD signed a usufruct agreement with China to

establish the China-Oman Industrial City in Duqm, a major initiative valued at US\$10.7 billion. The City when finished will incorporate 35 individual projects spread over a 1,172 hectare site.

The Zone offers a range of facilities and incentives for investors, including exemption from taxes for up to 30 solar years from the date of starting business; this exemption



will be renewable for similar periods. Investment in the Zone will be subject to the usufruct system; the usufruct right may continue for 50 years and be renewable for similar periods.

The project capital will be wholly owned by non-Omani investors. All applications for permits and other required approvals will be channelled through a one-stop-

shop, which will offer an attractive package of facilities to investors in the Zone.

Regulated by the Free Zones Law promulgated under Royal Decree No. 56/2002 in 2002, the free zones offer a package of investment incentives and facilities including tax exemptions, simplified procedures for obtaining licences and permits and the import of permitted

Ambitious plans to
add new industrial
zones



goods, exemption from minimum investment levels, the free use of currencies, income tax exemption on profits and other features.

To date three free zones have been set up in the Sultanate. The first - Al Mazyounah Free Zone - became operational in November 1999 and is in the Governorate of Dhofar near the Omani-Yemeni border. The second - Salalah Free Zone - was established in 2006 and is managed and operated by the Salalah Free Zone Company, while the third - the Sohar Free Zone - was set up under Royal Decree No. 123/2010, issued on 20th December 2010, and is managed by the Sohar Free Zone Company.

Small & medium enterprises

Riyada, the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises, was established under Royal Decree No. 36/2013 on the development, planning, coordination and deployment of SMEs. It facilitates a raft of financial services to SMEs and start-ups, by coordination with the government and with private agencies. At the end of 2015 Riyada had 18,600 SMEs on its books.

Riyada operates a one-stop system for entrepreneurs, with representatives of the relevant agencies facilitating issuance of the Entrepreneurs Card, a key instrument in accessing business privileges, including the exemption

from guest workforce restrictions that SMEs and start-ups may need. It offers consultancy services and helps with feasibility studies. In 2015, 5,460 applicants were granted the Entrepreneurs Card.

Riyada will also oversee the settlement of late payments to SMEs, guaranteeing action within 28 days of completion of the relevant documents.

Several new initiatives in support of SMEs were introduced in 2016, including the provision of usufruct land. This latest initiative is pivotal in allowing entrepreneurs to launch or expand their projects. Equally important is the Ministry of Civil Service decision to release public sector employees into self-employment running entrepreneurial projects. SMEs are also to benefit from incentive regulations allocating 10% of all government procurement tenders to businesses operating in this important and growing sector of the economy.

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as the official representative of the private sector, escalated its drive in 2016 to secure greater engagement of the sector in the national economy. The success of its strategy hinges on

its being able to attract foreign investment and to this end it embarked on several trade visits overseas. Investment delegations have been very successful overall, and brought home encouraging proposals for trade exchanges and joint commercial ventures.

The Chamber organised a series of economic forums, opening up prospects for economic cooperation between the Sultanate and countries around the world. In this context, it hosted the Omani-Sudanese Business Forum and the two sides discussed opportunities and areas of joint cooperation in food security and mining and

explored mechanisms to promote mutual investment in value added production projects.

The OCCI has always been supportive of small and medium enterprises, and recently founded an entrepreneurs club which will ease communication and interaction between business pioneers, the Chamber itself and other stakeholders. In its drive to simplify bureaucracy and logistics it is using digital technology to facilitate access by investors, enabling them to process documentation electronically with the Chamber without needing to be present in person.

The Committee on Women Entrepreneurs connect under the “Let’s meet and be inspired” initiative



“ The ITA sponsors initiatives and projects that promote the development of a digital society, and oversees implementation of the national e-government strategy ”

As a participating party in the Committee for the Promotion of Omani Products, the Chamber encourages the private sector to ensure a significant presence of Omani products at international exhibitions organised by the Committee around the world, so as to expand the consumer base for Omani products.

Information Technology

The Information Technology Authority (ITA) is the body responsible for implementing the national digital Oman and e-government strategy, which aims to transform the Sultanate into a knowledge-based economy through a raft of initiatives and projects.

The ITA trained upwards of 56,000 citizens in information technology between 2007 and the end of 2015 under the National Training and Education Initiative. The mission of the Initiative is to develop capacity and capability in computer and communication skills and to generate awareness of the information culture in government and society generally. Since 2009, under a related programme aimed specifically at the public sector workforce, 83,707 civil servants have received training in, basic computer skills.

The ITA is a key player in the drive towards e-government and serves a critical role in advancing

e-government services during the transition period and building digital content and skills capacity in the workforce. It has renewed its agreement with the Microsoft Corp. for the years 2005-2018 and is on course to meet its interim objective of fitting out 90 government institutions and agencies with Microsoft software. Meanwhile it continues to develop information and communication solutions using mobile and web-based applications. The overall goal is to develop Omani products in the information technology and marketing sector, for both local and international purpose, and for their expected positive impact on the Omani economy.

The Authority takes seriously its responsibility for guaranteeing a safe environment for computer users, both while browsing the Internet and while using communication devices for other purposes in the home. Secure internet access, including remote access, is vital to both users and providers of online services, including government service providers, and this is closely protected by the network security system. Several significant advances were made in 2015: finalisation of the government's policy on the safety of information, and drafting of the engineering framework for the safety of government networks.

Oman National CERT, meanwhile, continues to manage web-related



risks and cyber threats and maintain the security of computer users in Oman, providing protection for Oman's cyberspace and for the national infrastructure.

Agriculture and Fisheries

Agriculture, livestock and fisheries are prime sectors of focus for the Sultanate. Between them they contribute in a major way to food security and employment and generally to development of the national economy.

The combined production of the national agriculture and fishery sectors rose in 2015 to RO427.4

million, up from RO406.1 in 2014, or a respectable growth rate of 5.2%.

Agricultural census data for the year 2013/2014 logged agricultural holdings totalling 355,000 acres nationally, employing 237,000 family members of Omani farm owners and 18,522 permanent non-family members

The Sultanate has a long history of cultivating the date palm, and has some 7.5 million palms in production. It also has substantial lime, mango and coconut groves and is implementing a sustainable development strategy for the agricultural sector up the year 2040. The strategy was drafted

Government electronic services are evaluated by the ITA in the phased transition to e-government

by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and its goal is full, meaningful food security and a fall-off in urban migration, through encouraging interest in agriculture as a rewarding source of employment, with incentives for greater productivity and consequently stronger economic returns.

The fisheries sector is a key component of the economy and an important source of national and individual revenue, as well as being a major employer and contributor to food security. The Sultanate overlooks three separate

seas and, with 3,165 km of coastline, has rich fishing grounds stocked with pelagic coastal and deepwater species as well as bottom feeders.

The Sultanate's fish production reached a new peak in 2015, up 21.5% over 2014 to reach 257,000 tonnes valued at RO172 million.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is constantly developing the fisheries sector and operates long-term strategies for its advancement, with Stage One initially running to 2020 (from 2013). Stage Two will begin in 2020 and roll out for 20 years. It embraces four key development objectives: raising the efficiency of the fishing

The fisheries sector is a cornerstone of the national economy



fleet, improving infrastructure, introducing added-value fisheries projects, and developing farming activity.

The national fishing fleet is large and consists of a diverse mix ranging from the smallest traditional coastal skiffs to large ocean-going commercial trawlers. Oman has 22,237 small traditional fishing vessels in commission and 684 traditional trawlers. The sector employs 46,837 artisanal fishermen and 687 skilled technician crew. The daily catch is transported from pier to market by a fleet of 3,132 equipped trucks. The performance of the fishing fleet is under constant review and upgrade, recently assisted by almost 500 new coastal fishing vessels and 500 smaller upgraded fishing craft for the traditional fleet. These latter are capable of longer runs, extending the bounds of normal coastal fishing.

Any development designed to add value to the fishing sector has to revolve around fishing port infrastructure and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has to date upgraded 22 existing ports under previous five-year plans, building administration structures to manage activity out of the ports, as well as fish markets, fuel stations, ice factories and marine workshops, cafes and shaded areas for fishermen, storage units and outlets stocking fishing tools and

equipment. Meanwhile four new ports are under construction and nine others are being upgraded at the present time.

The Ministry is looking at improving existing marketing mechanisms, including an upgrade of wholesale and retail fish markets and introduction of new outlets. Oman has 51 smaller fish markets dispersed across the governorates in addition to the central fish market in Barka.

The Ministry is also encouraging investment in aquaculture, to include a fish farm sub-category turning out top quality fish products. Oman already has 10 integrated fish farms, where cumulative production rose from 5 tons in 2014 to 20 tonnes in 2015.

Livestock and poultry production rose from 214,000 tonnes in 2014 to 217,000 in 2015, attributable to Ministry incentives aimed at developing the sector. New projects on stream include fattening schemes for calves and goats, an increase in poultry meat output and in egg and milk production. Contributing to the higher figures are better housing and healthcare systems, including the provision of veterinary medicines and vaccines to livestock breeders. All of these moves are creating a renewed investment interest in the livestock sector.

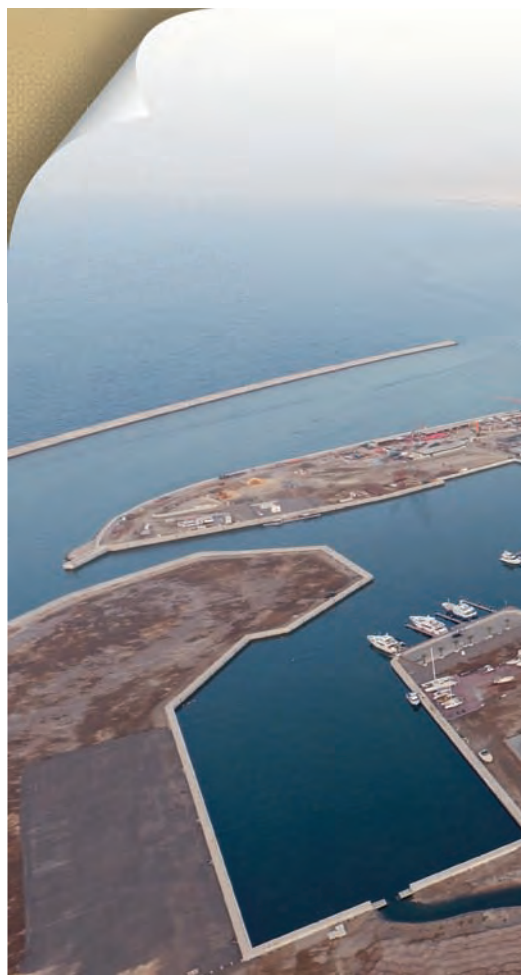
“ In 2016, Oman began the implementation of its tourism strategy 2016-2040, which expects to add as many as half a million jobs to the economy ”

Tourism

In 2016, Oman began to roll out its 2016-2040 tourism strategy, designed to generate more than 500,000 jobs and see the volume of tourist investment rise to RO19 billion, of which 12% will come from the public sector. If successful, this strategy will move tourism's contribution up to 10% of GDP by 2040, while incentivising developments in relevant sectors of the local economy and providing opportunity and advantage to small and medium enterprises.

The Sultanate expects to have become a top destination by 2040, sought out by holidaymakers, adventure tourists and business-cum-recreation visitors. The target is 11 million international and domestic tourists annually. The plan has selected 14 potential major tourism draws, notably some of the Sultanate's historic castles and forts, other heritage sites and spectacular landscapes. Themes such as the Bedouin lifestyle, coastal beauty spots, the multi-coloured desert, the Sindbad legend, Iron and Bronze Age settlements, upland valleys and springs and mountain villages, are highlighted in the strategy. So also will be the ultramodern Blue City with its traditional look, the contrasting Empty Quarter, the Frankincense Route, the Dhofar region and the western wilderness.

Tourism is one of the five main sectors of focus in the diversification strategy which is the economic centrepiece of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020). The sector has demonstrated positive growth in recent years and capacity has expanded accordingly. Last year the Sultanate had 16,700 functioning hotel rooms, up from 15,400 in 2014. The number of



accommodation facilities increased during the same period from 297 to 318 and 2015 revenue from the 3-5 star hotel category was RO192.1 million, up from RO191.5 million the previous year. The occupancy rate was 57.3%, representing 1.2 hotel guests.

The first four months of 2016 saw guest numbers at 3-5 star hotels rise to 480,000, from

441,000 for the same period of 2015. However, revenue fell from RO76.5 million to RO69 million, as the occupancy rate dropped from 66.1% to 65.5%.

Rising tourist interest saw Oman join the list of fastest growing tourist destinations in the UN World Tourism Index in 2015. At No. 16 on the global list, the Sultanate was the only GCC or Arab country to feature

The tourism sector is one of the five main sectors of focus in the plan for economic diversification





Majestic waterfalls show nature at its finest during the monsoon season in Dhofar Governorate



“ The 2016 Muscat Festival celebrated national identity and the cultural revival, offering a vision of the future in which authentic tradition could coexist comfortably with contemporary lifestyles and aspirations ”

and won points for the wealth of its monumental, historical, cultural and tourist offerings, as well as for services provided to tourists.

Muscat Festival

Muscat Festival 2016 drew its inspiration from the theme of national identity and the Omani heritage and culture revival as both treasured history and foundation for current and future aspirations.

The Festival ran from 14 January to 13 February 2016 under the banner “Esh Oman (Live Oman!)”, and events took place in locations throughout Muscat Governorate. The Omani Cultural Village in Amerat Park offered scenes from coastal, agricultural, rural and urban environments, including traditional craft and arts markets. An outstanding new event in 2016 was the exhibition on Islamic civilisation “1,001 Inventions”, which demonstrated the contributions to science, knowledge and technology of Muslim and Arab scholars and which proved to be a highlight. The Exhibition of Small and Medium Enterprises was popular with adults and the Dinosaur Village with children. A large trade exhibition at Naseem Park exhibited the products of 400 enterprises from around the world.

Other family activities in Naseem

Park drew crowds to the Family Village and Children’s Theatre, where children were encouraged to express their creativity. There was room for every interest in the programme of arts, science and cultural entertainment, as well as more educational programs on agricultural, sports and science themes; and there was something for young and old at the Entertainment



Park, now a regular Festival fixture for its success in bringing families together at one entertainment site to partake in the latest electronic games and/or in any of its 12 culture-themed activities.

As part of Muscat Municipality's efforts to promote tourism, the Sultanate hosted the Tour of Oman cycle race for the sixth consecutive

year in 2016. Between 16 and 21 February 2016, 144 international cyclists completed the 904 km, six-stage Tour, which took them through several governorates and a variety of landscapes. The spectacular event was covered by 189 media publications and received 19.8 million hits across social networking sites.

Muscat Festival 2016 lived up to its theme "Live Oman" with a packed programme of events



Salalah Tourism Festival

The Salalah Tourism Festival, which takes place in Dhofar Governorate in the timeframe between 15 July and 31 August every year, has established itself as a regional highlight, one of the major festivals of the Gulf region and beyond. It attracts visitors to Dhofar from Oman itself, as well as from the GCC and Arab countries and further afield, boosting revenue and tourism with an eclectic mix of activities and entertainments. The season that runs from 21 June to 21 September represents autumn in Dhofar, when the weather is pleasant, with cooler temperatures, light breezes and occasional rain.

This year's Festival, which was held under the banner "Oman: Love and Peace," drew the usual large crowds to avail of a programme of cultural, religious, sporting and other activities, as well as concerts, theatrical performances, exhibitions and competitive events.

The autumn season brought over half a million visitors to Dhofar in 2015, up from 431,000 in 2014 and 433,000 in 2013.



Over the years the Salalah Festival has become an established institution for visitors to the Governorate of Dhofar from other parts of the Sultanate, the GCC states, the Arab region and further afield





The Environment and Modern Utilities



The Environment and Modern Utilities

The Sultanate is firmly committed to the eco-friendly principles endorsed by the international community and stipulated in the regional and international agreements on the environment to which it is a signatory. Working closely with experts from the relevant organisations, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs is actively involved in a number of environmental programmes and projects.

The Ministry is also upgrading the relevant laws, regulations, statutes and decisions to ensure that they are in line with the National Strategy for the Conservation of the Omani Environment in helping to protect the ecosystem, prevent all types of pollution, conserve natural resources and reduce the impact of climate change.

Oman Environment Day is celebrated on 8th January each year to highlight the importance attached to the Sultanate's environment. In 2016 it was held

under the slogan "Our environment our country, so preserve it."

Particular priority is given to the marine environment in view of the role played by the seas and oceans in maintaining the world's biological balance. In addition to being a source of sweet water, energy and a range of mineral and plant resources, the marine environment is also important for trade, tourism and sea transport, and the Ministry has devised a number of programmes and strategies to safeguard it. They include a research project into the reasons for the massive decline in marine mammals, a programme to monitor the pollutants in our seas and a mangrove regeneration project; this last is particularly important because of the role mangrove trees play in ensuring a balanced environment and providing breeding grounds for numerous species of commercially viable fish and other sea creatures; this is quite apart from their aesthetic value. Between the launch of the project in the year 2000 and the end of March 2016, around

“ The Sultanate’s marine environment receives special attention in national policy, in the context of the ocean’s status in maintaining the planet’s biological balance, but also as a supplier of fresh water and a source of energy ”

630,000 mangrove seedlings were planted in 32 sites along the Omani coast.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation demonstrates the esteem in which His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said holds those people around the world who are concerned with the environment. Announced by His Majesty during a visit to UNESCO headquarters on 1st June 1989, the prize is awarded by UNESCO every two years for the best international efforts to protect the environment. Its Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) International Coordinating Council chooses the winning individuals, groups, institutes or organisations and the prize is presented at a ceremony at a UNESCO event.

Since its inauguration in 1991 the prize has been awarded to numerous individuals and organisations in various parts of the world. In 2015 it was won by Professors Fabio A. Kalesnik, Horacio Sirolli and Luciano Iribarren of the Wetlands Ecology Research Group, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, in recognition of their environmental conservation efforts, including their studies and research on wetlands ecosystems and their environmental education and training initiatives.

Climate change

Climate change is one of the most significant factors affecting the world’s natural and human systems, and it poses the greatest challenge to achieving the goals of sustainable development. Our planet’s growing population is a significant factor in accelerating the concentration of greenhouse gases in the earth’s atmosphere, thus increasing the impact of climate change, with the result that timely steps need to be taken to tackle the problem.

The Sultanate’s environment policy is designed to respond to climate change and the government has introduced a raft of legislation and programmes to ensure that existing plans take proper account of it. New initiatives include regulations on protecting the ozone layer, the management of climate affairs, and procedures for the approval of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects under the Kyoto Protocol.

Where projects and related activities are concerned, the Sultanate has established preventive measures against the negative effects of climate change and to counter the growing concentration of greenhouse gases. It also encourages the use of clean technology and renewable energy, as well as an expansion of the country’s green areas and



The Daymaniyat islands are characterised by fine sands and colonies of aquatic birds



“ The Sultanate has many nature reserves, a testament to its commitment to protecting wildlife and bio-diversity ”

field visits to monitor industrial installations.

The government is currently preparing a national strategy for adapting to climate change and reducing its effects, and it is expected that it will be completed during the last quarter of 2017. It will comprise three main elements: developing the climate affairs sector's institutions, adapting to climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Sultanate signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at the First Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 and ratified it under Royal Decree No. 119/1994 on 7th December 1994. It ratified the Kyoto Protocol attached to this Convention under Royal Decree 107/2004 on 10th October 2004, and in April 2016 it signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was approved at the 21st annual Conference of the Parties (COP 21).

The Sultanate joined the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer - and the Montreal Protocol and its amendments in London and Copenhagen - on 28th September 1998 under Royal Decree No. 73/98. It also ratified the Montreal 1997 and Beijing 1999 amendments under Royal Decree No. 106/2004 on 10th October 2004.

Nature reserves and biodiversity

Oman has 19 nature reserves that are administered by either the Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE) at the Diwan of Royal Court or the Ministry of Environment & Climate Affairs (MECA). These reserves seek to protect a wealth of terrestrial and marine biodiversity.

OCE was established in 1974 and is Oman's oldest institution with a remit for nature conservation. It is responsible for five reserves that include Wadi As Sareen (780 square kilometres) in the Eastern Hajar Mountains, home of the critically endangered Arabian tahr (*Arabtragus jayakari*), in the Governorate of Muscat. Further east in the Eastern Hajars, but also within the Governorate of Muscat, is Wadi Ras Al Shajar (94 square kilometres) where the Arabian tahr is also found plus one of Oman's last populations of Arabian gazelle (*Gazella gazella arabica*). The small Al Khuwair Reserve (60 hectares) in the capital area protects a last remnant of Acacia woodland.

In the Governorate of Al Wusta OCE manages the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve that is home to a diverse flora and fauna of the Jiddat al Harasis and adjacent Al Huqf Depression. The reserve covers 2,824 square kilometres and species include the reintroduced Arabian

oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*), Arabian gazelle and Nubian ibex (*Capra nubiana*). In Salalah, in the Governorate of Dhofar, OCE is responsible for Khawr Salalah (57 hectares) that includes mangrove wetland and seeks to protect a variety of birds, invertebrates and other wildlife. OCE is also responsible for the Oman Botanic Garden at Al Khod in greater Muscat.

MECA oversees the management of 14 nature reserves that include seven coastal lagoons or khawrs in the Governorate of Dhofar. Khawr Mughsayl and Khawr Taqa are amongst the best known of these

khawrs. Also in Dhofar is Jabal Samhan that is home to the Arabian leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*) and a range of arid-land fauna and flora that includes Oman's best frankincense woodlands.

Elsewhere in Oman MECA is responsible for the Jabal Qahwan Reserve and As Saleel Reserve in the Governorate of Ash Sharqiyah. The former protects populations of Arabian tahr while the latter is partially fenced and includes a large population of Arabian gazelle. Also in the Sharqiyah MECA looks after the Ra al Jinz Turtle Reserve. In the Governorate of Ad Dakhiliyah

A genuine
commitment to
conservation



is the Al Jabal Al Akhdar Landscapes Reserve that includes representative areas of juniper and olive woodlands. It also includes the traditional mountain oasis settlements of Wakan and Sawjarah.

Coastal and marine reserves under the management of MECA are Al Wusta Wetland Reserve and the Damaniyaats Islands just offshore of Muscat. The former protects the wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs and marine habitats of the Barr al Hikmann while the latter seeks to conserve reefs, ground nesting birds and turtles of the Damaniyaat Island

chain.

Both MECA and OCE have programmes for the conservation of ecosystems and species that are found within and outwith protected areas. OCE's flagship project is the study of the Arabian leopard in Dhofar but it also has other long-term studies that include research on the ecology of the Sooty falcon (*Falco concolor*) that arrives each summer from Madagascar to nest on the Damaniyaat and Fahal islands. Research, using satellite collars, has generated a wealth of information on the ecology of the Arabian tahr

Protecting the
Arabian leopard
(*Panthera pardus nimr*)



“ The Office for the Conservation of the Environment oversees a number of research projects with the aim of protecting the Sultanate’s unique flora and fauna ”



in the Wadi As Sareen Reserve. More recently OCE has commenced a study of the ecology, with emphasis on genetic variability, of the Nubian ibex in both the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve and the mountains of Dhofar.

Regional Municipalities

The regional municipalities represent one of the vital service sectors and play an important part in the Sultanate’s development. This is clearly reflected in the works that have been carried out in recent

years; these include infrastructure projects such as paved roads, street lighting and sewerage systems, as well as improvements to the aesthetic appearance of the country’s urban approach roads and the installation of public markets, parks and gardens. In 2015 the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources completed some 93 projects in these categories in various parts of the country. In addition to building new markets in places with high population density, it also

The endeavour to protect the Arabian ibex relies on information about its behaviour in the wild

☞ The agencies concerned with veterinary oversight have intensified monitoring activity in the field and upgraded slaughterhouse practices with a view to improving overall services to citizens and residents ☞



Food is subject to constant monitoring by safety authorities to ensure its suitability for human consumption

continues to renovate and maintain existing ones.

The Sultanate's unremitting urban development and rising population have inevitably been accompanied by an increase in food consumption and the Ministry has stepped up its monitoring and inspection programmes to protect public health. Consumer protection

is one of its main priorities and includes the prevention of fraud in the sale of foodstuffs, field inspections by the veterinary authorities and improvements to the standard of services provided by the municipal abattoirs.

The Food and Water Laboratories Centre continuously monitors foodstuffs and water in



order to guarantee their fitness for human consumption. It subjects selected food and water samples to a rigorous analysis under laboratory conditions in order to check their conformity to internationally approved standards. In 2015 18,382 food, drinking water, mineral and treated water and commercial samples were tested and microbiological analyses were

carried out in addition to analyses of organic, mineral and radioactive substances.

In order to monitor the pace of development, the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources operates a system to regulate building and construction activity. This is done through the issuing of building permits and the inspection of buildings under construction. The Ministry also issues certificates for electricity and water connection and other services. In 2015 22,340 building permits were issued; of these, 19,214 permits were for buildings in the housing sector.

In the Governorate of Muscat, Muscat Municipality issued 5,975 permits in 2015 for residential, commercial, government and other types of buildings.

In April 2016 Muscat Municipality added the “Baladiyati” smartphone app to its other e-services. This new app offers a range of interactive services including, among others, renewal of municipal licences, lease contracts and building permits, job applications, feedback comments, car parking services and payment of motor vehicle violations.

In 2016, in a reflection of its efforts to upgrade municipal services through the introduction of the latest technology with the

aim of simplifying procedures for the benefit of the public, Muscat Municipality came second in the first Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) prize competition (2015-2016) for its performance in the issue of building permits.

Housing

The Housing Sector plays a vitally important role since it is implicated in the distribution and planning of commercial and industrial as well as housing land in the Sultanate. It is also involved with transfer of land and real estate from one individual to another whether by sale, purchase, grant, inheritance or other legal transactions. In addition, it administers social housing programs for those on limited incomes and families on social security.

In 2015 the Ministry of Housing made over 48,000 plots of land available for various uses in the different governorates and distributed over 42,000 plots to citizens, including around 39,000 for residential purposes. Under the Sultanate's unique system of land grants, Omani men and women have equal access to housing land for a nominal fee. The Ministry also registered 52,672 plots of land on the Real Estate Register for the first time.



In 2015 the total value of traded real estate rose to RO4.1 billion, up from RO 2.9 billion in 2014, while legal fees rose from RO 40.1 million to RO 51.5 million. Some 223,000 title deeds were issued including 2,288 deeds to Gulf Co-operation Council citizens.

The first half of 2016 saw a rise of 176 per cent in the value of real estate transactions to RO 6.1 billion – up from RO 2.2 billion over the

“ The value of property traded in 2015 was RO4.1 billion, as compared with RO2.9 in 2014 ”



same period in 2015, while legal fees rose from RO 25.6 million to RO 36.9 million. Up to the end of June 2016 over 130,000 title deeds were issued, compared with 126,000 over the same period in 2015.

Social housing programmes

The Ministry of Housing operates three types of housing programmes

for those on limited incomes and families on social security benefits as part of its efforts to improve their living standards and enable them to enjoy a greater degree of social stability.

Between the beginning of 2015 and March 2016 1,875 families in various parts of the country received RO 45.7 million under the Housing Assistance Programme, while 713

Urban development and the provision of adequate housing for citizens are top priorities

“ Oman is managing to keep pace with rising demand for electricity by establishing power plants at locations throughout the country, while exploring and developing renewable energy options ”

An electricity production and water desalination plant in Wilayat Mirbat., Dhofar governorate

cases received RO21.1 million under the Housing Loans Programme. In 2015 the Ministry completed the construction of 106 residential units under its Housing Units Programme, complete with all utilities, with a value of RO3.5 million. Work is currently in progress on the construction of 421 residential units, mosques, public meeting halls and other facilities in various parts of

the country at a cost of over RO17 million.

Electricity

The electricity sector is constantly expanding to keep pace with rising demand as it responds to Oman's urban development and increasing population. Output in 2015 grew by 12.6 per cent to 32,758



gigawatts per hour compared with 29,094 gigawatts in 2014.

The Sultanate has established new power stations across the country and begun using renewable energy to generate electricity. In July 2015 contracts were signed for the construction of "Mirror", the largest solar energy plant in the world, between PDO (Petroleum Development Oman) and Glass Point

Solar Company. The plant will be located in the south of the Sultanate and will generate 1021 megawatts of solar energy. The sun's rays will be utilized to produce steam for the high-performance extraction of oil by means of thermal energy, as well as heavy viscous oil from the Amal (Hope) oil field. It is anticipated that steam generation will commence at the beginning of 2017.

Of the Sultanate's other power stations, the largest, which was opened in Sur in 2015, generates 2,000 megawatts. In 2016 the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company signed contracts for the construction of two natural gas-fired combined cycle power stations in the wilayats of Ibri and Sohar at an investment cost of around RO885 million. It is expected that they will begin operating commercially during the first quarter of 2019. The company is currently engaged on several other projects in the electricity sector. These include an interconnection with the PDO Power System via a 132 Kilovolt link between Thumrait and Harweel and the construction of the 120-megawatt Musandam power station, in addition to the 445-gigawatt Salalah power station (Phase Two), currently being constructed beside the existing power station by Dhofar Power Company, which is expected to go into operation in January 2018.



Seawater desalination is a major enterprise and growing contributor in the quest for adequate water supplies. Ghubrah desalination plant

The Sultanate's success in reducing the average gas consumption of its generating units is reflected in the fact that it was eight per cent lower in 2015 than in the previous year. Measures are currently being put in place for a spot electricity market. Operational trials are expected to begin in 2019 and commercial operations in 2020.

Water

Over recent years the Sultanate has been developing a water security strategy in which water sources are being diversified to comprise desalinated and purified

water as well as groundwater. The resulting high efficiency network will supply good quality drinking water to 98 per cent of the country by the year 2040.

The seawater desalination plants play a major role in helping to underpin the Sultanate's water security and the Public Authority for Electricity and Water is planning to expand the existing plants and establish new desalination facilities to meet the rising demand.

In 2015 a new desalination plant with a daily production capacity of 42 million gallons went into operation in al Ghubra



☞ The Sultanate has been implementing strategies to ensure water security that focus on source diversification, to include seawater desalination and purification and groundwater treatment facilities ☞

in the Governorate of Muscat. The expanded plant at Barka became operational and is capable of producing around 12.5 million gallons per day. It will supply water to the Muscat, Dakhiliyah and South Batinah Governorates.

Four new desalination projects with a total productive capacity of some 256,000 cubic metres per day are expected to become operational in 2019 and 2020 in Salalah, al Duqm, Khasab and the niyabat of al Ashkharah.

Approval has been given for several temporary desalination plants to be set up in various regions of the country as a stop-gap measure until the permanent plants currently under construction have been completed. A 125,000 cubic metre per day water purification plant is also being set up to treat water from the Wadi Dhayqah dam.

A number of new projects are currently in progress to supply drinking water to villages and residential areas, and existing supply systems are being expanded. Total output in 2015 was around 336.8 million cubic metres – up from 323.1 million cubic metres in 2014. During the first quarter of 2016 production totalled 82.4 million cubic metres, compared with 78.9 million cubic metres over the same period in 2015.

Oman's Ports

Since the start of the Sultanate's Renaissance numerous commercial and industrial ports and docking facilities have been established to help drive the engine of economic development and encourage the non-oil sectors to contribute to the diversification of the country's sources of income and attract investment.

The longest serving port is Port Sultan Qaboos which was established in 1974 as the country's main import/export hub and was continuously developed during the years of Oman's renaissance. At the beginning of 2015 it was converted from a commercial to a dedicated tourist port, with all import/export and container activities transferred to Sohar Industrial Port. Details of the future stages of this project were announced in January 2016. They include the construction of a four-phase, RO 500 million sea front over a period of between eight and ten years. Phase One, due for completion in 2019, will comprise a fishing harbour to complement the fish souq being built by Muscat Municipality, which will include fish and fruit and vegetable markets, as well as fish and seafood restaurants, shops, fishing boat and pleasure dhow jetties and multi-storey car parks. This phase will also include the construction

☞ The port of Salalah is positioned close to global shipping lanes, with all of the revenue opportunities this advantage offers ☞

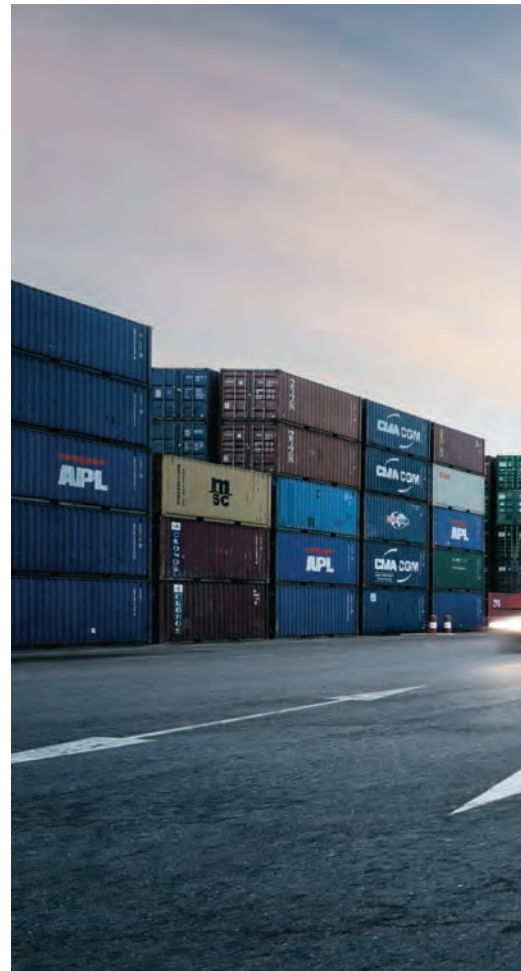
of a five-star hotel, a four-star hotel, hotel apartments, a commercial complex, a marina and an Omani craft market. In addition to other facilities and services suitable for family tourism, Phase One will also include the installation of the RNOV Shabab Oman 1 as a marine exhibition feature. All the building work will be carried out as a joint government-private sector operation.

In 2015 Port Sultan Qaboos received around 105 cruise liners, compared with 97 in 2014, while the number of tourists passing through the harbour rose from 152,000 to 176,000.

Port Salalah benefits from its contiguity to international shipping lanes, a factor which has enabled it to develop into a major container port in the region. Its current operational capacity is 5 million standard containers per annum, utilizing six container ship berths. The Sultanate plans to expand the port by the addition of commercial, service and tourist quays and the construction of new breakwaters in order to raise its handling capacity to 7 million standard containers per annum. In December 2015 two new quays were opened for liquid and general goods to serve industries in the Salalah Free Zone as well as local trade in the Governorate of Dhofar.

In 2015 Port Salalah received 1,981 ships compared with 2,691 in 2014. Around 12.5 million tonnes of general goods were handled compared with 10.2 million tonnes the previous year and 7.9 million tonnes in 2013.

Sohar Industrial Port has a dual commercial and industrial purpose due to its being located near the site of heavy industries



which are expected to enhance the Sultanate's commercial competitiveness in the region. The port is adjacent to industrial and commercial areas which has enabled it to attract heavy industry projects in the oil and gas sphere such as petrochemicals production and oil and mining industries.

At the beginning of September 2014, Sohar Industrial Port began to

process container and cargo ships as well as roll-on/roll-off vessels – designed to carry wheeled cargo – which were formerly handled at Port Sultan Qaboos. In 2015 the port handled 2,354 ships with a throughput of 536,000 standard containers, compared with 1,918 ships with a throughput of 330,000 in 2014. In 2013 it handled 215,000 standard containers.

Sohar Port is a project of national strategic importance, serving both trade and industrial goals



The most recent of the Sultanate's major ports is Duqm Port in the Wusta Governorate. Established under the Sultanate's economic diversification plan and the main component of the Duqm Special Economic Zone, it is of particular strategic importance in view of its proximity to the international shipping routes. It is expected to attract a significant volume of regional and international trade, while boosting marine transport, trade and tourism between Oman's ports. It began operations in 2013 after Quay No. 1's entry into service for commercial operations.

In 2016 an agreement was signed for the implementation of Duqm Port's third package; this provides for the construction of the commercial quay's terminal and several other buildings, as well as the provision of a range of support facilities. An agreement was also signed for the fourth package, which includes the infrastructure for the government quay – the first integrated services quay at an Omani port to be installed for use by the government authorities.

The Port of Khasab, which is uniquely situated in the northern tip of the Sultanate overlooking the Straits of Hormuz, has been earmarked by the government for a greater role in promoting

trade and commercial activity in the Musandam governorate. The government is currently working to upgrade Khasab Port as part of the comprehensive strategic vision for the economic development of the region, entitled Musandam 2040, currently under preparation. The port's operational and administrative capacities will be enhanced by the construction of docks and the creation of facilities for handling increased commercial and tourism activity.

In 2015 the port handled 918 commercial vessels and 51 cruise ships with a total of 99,000 cruise passengers, as well as around 57,000 smaller boats.

The Port of Shinas is an important hub of economic activity in the wilayats of North Batinah region with their traditional concerns of fisheries wealth, livestock and agricultural produce. The port has undergone significant development since its inception in 1996. From a small harbour catering to the needs of local fishermen, it has gradually evolved and, in 2013, the Ministry of Transport and Communications completed a comprehensive plan to upgrade it to a state-of-the-art facility handling local and regional commerce, as well as tourism and fishing. Floating jetties have been installed at the harbour for use by the dhow trade.

☞ **Duqm Port is the newest of the Sultanate's major ports. It was created under the plan for economic diversification and is a key component of the Duqm Special Economic Zone** ☞

In 2015 Shinas received 149 ships, up from 77 in 2014.

Of the other docking facilities, the harbour of Shannah on the Arabian Sea facilitates the passage of tourists and nationals to and from the island of Masirah. In 2014 the National Ferry Company put into operation two new ferries – Shannah and Jewel of Masirah – to run alongside the existing vessels in linking Masirah to the mainland. In 2015 the ferries completed 3,284 trips between Shannah and Masirah and carried around 44,000 passengers. This compares with 3,781 trips and some 56,000 passengers in 2014.

Work has been completed on the harbour and road network on the Hallaniyat Islands. The project includes the construction of breakwaters, fishing jetties, a commercial quay for small cargo vessels and coastguard jetties, as well as 19 Kilometres of asphalt roads.

Land Transport

The Sultanate's governorates and regions are linked by a growing network of asphalt and unpaved roads which enable citizens and residents to travel around the country with ease and help promote trade, industry and tourism. There are also road links between Oman and neighbouring states.

In June 2015 the Ministry of Transport and Communications was maintaining nearly 13,900 Km of asphalt roads within its remit and around 16,400 Km of unpaved roads.

The Ministry is currently engaged in a number of new projects. These include the Bidbid-Sur dual carriageway (Phases One and Two – 249 Km), the Batinah Expressway (Packages One to Six – 273 Km), the Jabrin-Ibri dual carriageway (Section Two – 90 Km) the Sinaw-Mahawt-Duqm road (Sections One and Two – 181 Km) the Ibri-Yanqul dual carriageway (Phase Two – 34 Km) the Nizwa-Thumrait dual carriageway (Sections One and Two – 240 Km) the Barka-Nakhl dual carriageway (39 Km), and the Mahdhah-al Rawdha dual carriageway (58 Km), as well as a number of other projects designed to ease the flow of traffic and improve road safety.

Some of these roads, or sections of them, were opened in 2015 & 2016.

In 2015 the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources paved 57 Km of urban roads, making a total of some 9,735 Km of roads in this category laid by the Ministry between 2001 and 2015. In 2015 the Ministry also installed 2,075 street lights; these included 200 lights along the urban roads in the wilayats of Khasab and Bukha in the Governorate of Musandam.

“ Muscat Municipality successfully completed many scheduled road projects throughout the governorate, raising the efficiency of traffic and reducing congestion via a network of relief roads ”



The Bidbid-Sur highway .. a major new artery in phased construction, and right on schedule

Meanwhile, Muscat Municipality completed several road projects designed to improve traffic flow and relieve congestion in the Governorate of Muscat. They included an upgrade of the Darseit-al Wadi al Kabir road, which entailed road widening and the construction of flyovers and intersections through a very busy part of the city including residential, commercial and financial districts. The al Mahj flyover and intersection project in the wilayat of al Amerat was also completed and a flyover and intersection were installed on 18th November Street to facilitate access

to the new Muscat International Airport. The new airport was also linked to the Muscat Expressway, with the result that road users will be able to drive directly between the Muscat Expressway, Sultan Qaboos Street, 18th November Street and the Grand Mosque Street.

Dhofar Municipality completed numerous road projects to cater for the Governorate of Dhofar's rising population and the expansion of its urban development. They included the paving of over 230 Km of roads within the city of Salalah. To relieve congestion and speed up the flow of traffic in the city, the Municipality



also converted 11 Km of 23rd July Street into a dual carriageway and carried out improvements along 33 Km of the ring road, Said bin Sultan Street, Umm al Ghawarif Street and the Central Market. Among other projects, al Ribat Street's dual carriageway was widened with the addition of a third lane.

A number of new flyovers were also built. The new Salalah Airport flyover was opened on the ring road in June 2015; then the opening of the Itin flyover to traffic in April 2016 offered easy access from Salalah city centre to Auqad, Raysut, Port Salalah and Mughsail. The main Umm al

Ghawarif flyover was opened in June 2016 to facilitate travel from Salalah city centre to the al Sa'adah district. A 20-metre-high overhead bridge has also been constructed to improve the traffic flow along the Salalah-Muscat highway.

Other road works completed by Dhofar Municipality include projects along the Salalah mountain strip and in a number of Dhofar's wilayats. Among these was a 91-Km-long network of roads in the wilayat of Salalah's mountain strip and a 20-Km-long road from Madinat al Haqq to the Nashib Roundabout; the road was surfaced

The Al-Mahaj-Amerat intersection.. one of many projects aimed at improving traffic flow and resolving bottlenecks

and asphalted in accordance with the specifications used in the construction of mountain roads with hairpin bends. Over 35 Km of village and urban roads were laid in the wilayat of Sadah, as well as a further 43 Km in the wilayat of Taqah and surrounding area, 7 Km in the mountainous Jibjat district, 32 Km in the mountainous Madinat al Haqq area, 50 Km in the niyabat of Tawi Atir in the wilayat of Mirbat, and 62 Km in the wilayat of Thumrait and surrounding areas. Work was also completed on the seafront promenade and other roads in the wilayat of Dhalkut (8 Km of asphalt roads) and similar work was carried out in the wilayat of Rakhyut (also 8 Km).

In 2015 work was completed on Phase One of the skeleton public transport plan for the Governorate of Muscat. The aim of the study is to produce an integrated, top quality public transport system that will serve every section of the community, thus reducing congestion and damage to the environment. The routes will be operated by the Oman National Transport Company "Mwasalat". From its relaunch under its new identity in November 2015 to the end of July 2016 Mwasalat carried over 2.1 million passengers – an average of 10,000 passengers per

day. The company is in the process of expanding and upgrading its operations to include cargo services, electronic ticketing reservations, a fully equipped telecommunications centre and a state of the art Wifi internet facility. It plans to expand its routes in Muscat Governorate as well as its services between Muscat and the rest of the country. Around 118 new buses are expected to join the fleet in 2017. Of these, 85 will operate in the Governorate of Muscat and 33 will serve other destinations.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications is preparing legislation to regulate land transport operations. This comes in the wake of the promulgation of the Land Transport Law under Royal Decree No. 10/2016, which seeks to ensure high quality services for the overland transport of people and goods in response to the country's economic development needs. Loads carried on the road network will also be controlled through the use of mobile weighbridges.

The Railway

The Oman railway project is an important plank in the government's strategy for sustainable economic and social development by linking the country's centres of production

“ Phase One of the public transport master plan for Muscat has been completed. The goal is an integrated public transport system that will serve all districts and meet all passenger needs ”

and growth. Rail is a form of transport, hitherto unused in the region in modern times, which has the capacity to transport massive quantities of goods and materials as well as large numbers of passengers over long distances.

The railway is designed to enable the Sultanate's transport sector to make a vital and effective contribution to the national economy in which Oman's seaports will enjoy global status – a status enhanced by the country's rail links. Phase One of the project - a nationwide rail system – will be followed by Phase Two as the Sultanate becomes part of a Gulf Co-operation Council railway network.

Ahead of the launch of Oman Railway Company ("Oman Rail")'s commercial brand in 2015, tenders had already been invited from eligible companies for the execution of Segment One (Buraimi-Sohar). Actual implementation of this segment has been deferred to a later date on account of the constrained fiscal environment linked to the oil price slump, and in light of a change in priorities that initially guided the selection of the network's original alignment. Planning is now focused on the Fahud – Duqm and Thamrait – Salalah segments, which if taken in hand for early implementation, are expected to generate early returns

on this investment, as well as drive mineral development and logistics based activities in the Wusta and Dhofar governments. The total length of the planned Omani railway system will be around 2,135 Kilometres.

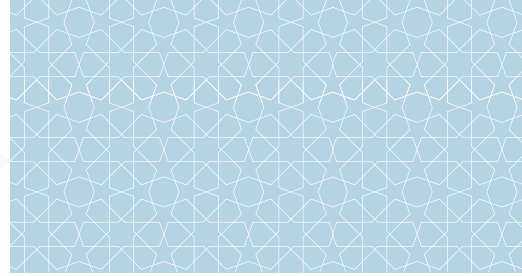
Tenders for formulating the Oman Railway Sector Regulatory Law have also been prepared and submitted for review to a specialised international company

Air Transport

The total number of passengers passing through Muscat International Airport rose to 8.4 million in 2015, up 15.9 per cent from the 2014 figure of 7.3 million. Over that period the number of flights increased by 15.5 per cent from around 68,000 to over 78,000.

This increase coincides with a drive by the Sultanate to upgrade its air transport sector and boost the operational capacities of Muscat International and Salalah Airports, as well as the regional airports that are currently under construction. In future, the airports are expected to have a combined annual capacity of 15 million passengers, some 12 million of whom will pass through Muscat's new airport which – after its fourth and final phase of expansion – will be able to handle up to 48 million passengers per year.

☞ The provision of domestic and regional airports at Sohar, Ras al Hadd and Duqm are part of the strategy to develop the civil aviation sector and provide all governorates of the Sultanate with air links ☞



Salalah's new airport will accommodate two million passengers annually

Salalah's new airport, which opened in 2015 with an annual capacity of two million passengers, saw a rise in its actual passenger numbers during that year to 865,000, compared with 714,000 in 2014. Over that period the number of flights handled by the airport rose from 7,346 to 8,551.

The establishment of domestic and regional airports in Sohar, Ras al Hadd and Duqm is part of a national strategy to upgrade the civil aviation

sector and provide the Sultanate's governorates with air links that will support their economic, tourist and social sectors. They will be able to handle jumbo aircraft.

As soon as their first phases had been completed in 2014, Duqm and Sohar Airports went into operation and temporary passenger terminals were set up for use until such time as the final phases should be completed.



The Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) oversees the regulation of the air transport sector and aims to upgrade its performance in line with the rapid developments taking place in that field. In 2016 the Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS) was granted a licence to set up the Sultanate's first budget airline. PACA also issued initial approval for the Salalah and al Sharqiyah Aviation Companies to be issued with a

Licence (B) (for aircraft operators that can accommodate nineteen seats or less, with a maximum takeoff weight of less than ten tons). This step is designed to encourage the private sector to invest in the development of the civil aviation sector by setting up aviation companies for the purposes of tourism, cargo transport and irrigation, as well as helicopter and flying doctor services.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications is currently setting up a civil aviation sector holding company comprising Oman Air, Oman Airports Management Co. and the Air Navigation Co. (under formation).

In 2015 Oman Air, the Sultanate's national carrier, achieved notably positive results. Revenues rose by 14.1 per cent to around RO 466 million and the company carried 6.3 million passengers – up from 5.1 million in 2014. It operated over 28,000 return flights and introduced new routes to Singapore, Goa & Dhaka.

In 2016 Oman Air began flying to the Iranian city of Mashhad and Najaf in Iraq and added a second flight to its London schedule. It now flies to 51 destinations in 28 countries. It is expected that by 2020 it will be serving a total of 75 destinations and that the number of aeroplanes in its fleet will rise to 70, comprising 25 wide-bodied aircraft and 45 with single aisles.

Sea Transport

Located on the Sea of Oman, the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, the Sultanate has a marine transport sector that is well placed to expand, whether for trade, industry or tourism, and the ports and harbour facilities along the Omani coast have enabled this sector to make a significant contribution to driving the national economy. In setting up the fully government-owned Oman Shipping Company (OSC) the Sultanate's aim was to give a boost to its economic diversification strategy by establishing a fleet for the transport of raw materials – whether Omani or imported by Omani companies – including oil, gas, iron ore, chemical products and liquefied petroleum gas. A further aim was to ensure that Oman took a slice of the global maritime transport sector. Over the years since it was set up OSC has succeeded in reinforcing its position in the marine transport markets by signing strategic agreements with several multinationals. Under an agreement to provide Shell International with ten ships to transport oil derivatives in 2015 and 2016, Shell will rent these ships for ten years. In 2015 OSC recorded profits estimated at US\$ 180 million. It has a fleet of around 50 vessels; of these, some 60 per cent are subject



to long-term lease contracts of up to 20 years with various major international and local companies.

OSC runs and provides the technical support operations for 33 tankers by one of its subsidiaries, the Oman Ship Management Company, while the rest of its tankers are operated by third parties.

While OSC's focus has been on setting up a fleet of oil and gas tankers and vessels for transporting

“ The many ports dispersed along the coast of the Sultanate serve an infrastructural role in growth across many sectors, contributing specifically to the revitalisation of local industries and broadly to the national economy ”



iron ore and petrochemical products, the National Ferries Company (NFC) seeks to create a sea transport fleet linking the Sultanate's ports and promoting trade and tourism. At present NFC operates regular routes (outward and return trips) between Muscat and Khasab, Khasab and Shinas, Shinas and Daba, Khasab and Daba, Khasab and Lima, Lima and Shinas, Lima and Daba, and Shannah and Masirah. In July 2016

it began operating two weekly trips from Khasab in the Governorate of Musandam to Port Bahman on Qeshm Island and Port Bahonar in Bandar Abbas in Iran. It also plans to run trips to Chahbar in Iran and Port Rashid in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

In 2015 NFC carried 205,579 passengers – up from 92,724 in 2014. This rise was largely due to the introduction of the Khasab-

Modern ferries operate between the Sultanate's domestic ports & those of neighbouring countries

“ The national broadband strategy represents a quantum leap in enhanced connectivity and will be a mainstay of the knowledge-based economy ”

Daba and Daba-Lima routes and the extra trips put on during religious and national holidays. The number of vehicles carried on the ferries rose from 21,048 in 2014 to 52,771 in 2015, while the cargoes carried by the fleet came to a total of 8,232 tonnes.

During the first seven months of 2016 the number of fast ferry passengers rose to 122,699 compared with 100,591 over the same period in 2015. The number of vehicles transported –around 30,000 - increased by 14 per cent and cargoes by 275 per cent (11,169 tonnes compared with 2,980 tonnes over the same period in 2015).

The Telecommunications sector

The introduction of the national broadband strategy marked a new departure for the telecommunications sector and ensured that it occupied centre stage in the knowledge-based economy. In 2015 several factors played a significant role in the sector's growth. They included a revision of the Telecommunications Regulatory Law and completion of the release of the mobile telephone frequency spectrum plan. Meanwhile, The National Broadband Company began upgrading the broadband network.

The National Broadband strategy's social and economic goals include providing access to the high-speed broadband network at affordable prices. A concomitant objective is to provide companies with a global broadband service in order to improve their international competitiveness. Last but not least is the rolling out of broadband services to rural communities with a view to reducing the digital divide. Taking population growth and economic expansion into account, it is expected that 80 per cent of Muscat Governorate will be covered by the fibre-optic network by the year 2020.

The National Broadband Company (a government company established in 2014) provides high speed broadband services to individuals, institutions and corporations in the Sultanate through the existing telecommunications service providers – Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), the Omani-Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo) and Awaser Oman, which was officially launched in March 2016 as the Sultanate's third broadband operator.

In 2015 the number of mobile telephone subscribers rose 7 per cent to 6.6 million – up from 6.1 million at the end of 2014.



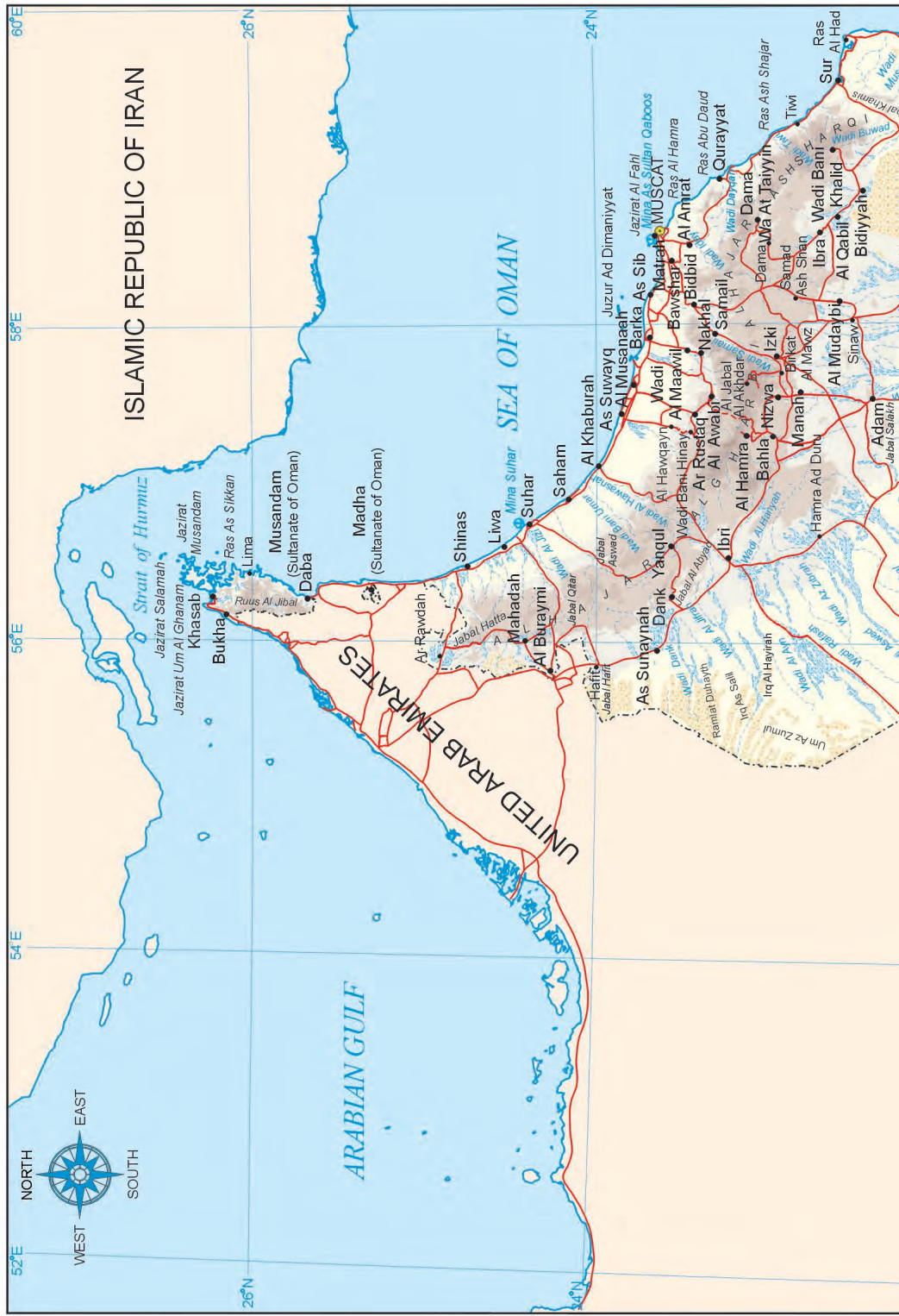
In response, the Sultanate is extending the length of its mobile telephone numbers in 2016 by placing a No. 7 before the 9 (as was previously the case). This will enable an additional 10 million subscribers to be added to the system.

The number of fixed telephone lines rose to 434,000 in 2015, compared with 375,000 at the end of 2014. By the end of June 2016 this figure stood at 450,000.

The total number of users of fixed internet services (including fixed telephone and home broadband subscribers) rose to 233,000 at the end of 2015 (compared with 177,000 at the end of 2014), and to 261,000 at the end of June 2016. In 2015 the number of active mobile broadband subscribers grew by 12.5 per cent to 3.2 million (compared with around 2.9 million at the end of 2014), and to around 3.5 million at the end of June 2016.

Work never ceases on the telecommunications grid – always undergoing upgrades to incorporate the latest advances in the sector

The map displays the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, situated along the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The UAE is shown in the center, with its seven emirates clearly delineated. To the north, the Islamic Republic of Iran is visible, and to the east, the Persian Gulf is shown. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Major cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah, and Muscat are marked. The map also shows the borders of the Sultanate of Oman and the Sultanate of Muscat. The Arabian Gulf is to the west, and the Sea of Oman is to the east. The map includes a compass rose in the bottom left corner, indicating North, South, East, and West. The map is oriented with North at the top.





KINGDOM
OF SAUDI ARABIA

REPUBLIC
OF YEMEN

Height above sea level in metres

2500	2000	1500	1000	500	250	0
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Capital ● Wilayat ● Mina (Port) ●

Metalled road — Graded road - - - Int. Boundary ······

Sand dunes Sabkha Wadi spread

Produced by the National Survey Authority, MOD, Sultanate of Oman, 2015.
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This map is not an authority on International Boundaries

0 50 100 150 200km

54°E 56°E

REL-Eng-NSA1

OMAN – FACTS AND FIGURES

Basic Information

Area	309,500 square Kilometres
Capital	Muscat
Religion	Islam
Official Language	Arabic (English widespread in the economic and education sectors)
Time	Four hours ahead of GMT
Currency	Omani Rial=US\$2.60 (387 baizas to the US dollar)
Climate	Hot and humid in summer, moderately cool in winter.

Economic Indicators

	Unit	2014	2015
GDP at Current Prices	RO million	31,450.8	26,850.3
Total Government Revenues	RO million	14,107.5	9,067.5
Total Government Expenditure	RO million	15,171.8	12,698.8
Average Daily Oil Production	1,000 bbls	943.5	981
Average Price of Oil over a Year	US\$/barrels	103.2	56.5
Total Commodity Exports	RO million	20,463.4	13,404.2
Including Non-oil Exports of Omani Origin	RO million	4,125.5	3,003.9
Total Commodity Imports	RO million	11,267.6	11,412.1
Net Electricity Production	Gigawatts/Hour	27,812	32,081.1
Total Electricity Production	Gigawatts/Hour	29,128	32,758.6
Water Production per distillation (Plants and Wells)	1000 cubic metres	319	336

Social Indicators

	Unit	2015
Total Population (Mid-year assessment)	No.	4,159,102
Omanis	No.	2,344,946
Expatriates	No.	1,814,156
Hospitals	No.	70
Hospital Beds	No.	6,468
Doctors per 1,000 patients	No.	2.1
Nurses (male and female) per 1,000 patients	No.	4.6
Schools	No.	1,647*
Students	No.	724,395*
Government Civil Service Employees	No.	229,467
Omanis Registered at the Public Authority For Social Insurance	No.	209,620
Expatriate Manpower in the Private Sector	No.	1,236,038**
Asphalted Roads	Km	35,522
Internet Subscribers	No.	236,004
Hotels and Accommodation	No.	318

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information

(*) Registered at the Directorate General of Civil Status

(**) Government Education includes Special Education schools

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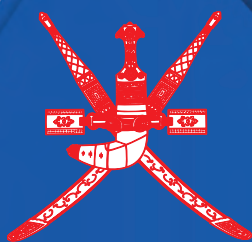
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REGISTRATION NO.: 690/2016

ISBN: 978-99969-0-840-8

Printed by Mazoon Press, Publication and Advertising



Published by
Ministry of Information
Sultanate of Oman
www.omaninfo.om