



Nurturing Renaissance

A 12-page supplement on anniversary of accession to throne with today's issue



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A NEW PROMISE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave first speech after 40-day mourning period. In his speech he assured the nation that Oman will continue its peaceful stance and stated his strategies to improve the local economy

His Majesty presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers. The meeting began with an oath-taking ceremony during which members of the Council of Ministers were sworn in before His Majesty the Sultan

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree 111/2020 on the formation of the Council of Ministers. Article 1 structures the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan



His Majesty visited Kuwait during which he offered condolences to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait on the death of late Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, hosted a dinner on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day. The ceremony was attended by the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and others

His Majesty approved the launching of Oman Future Vision 2040 to be applied from the beginning of 2021 till 2040. The vision, His Majesty noted, has been the outcome of national and harmonious societal efforts

SAMUEL KUTTY
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The past one year, since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik ascended to the throne, will be remembered in the history as a period marked by reforms aimed bringing in far-reaching economic and social benefits in the Sultanate.

In all his speeches, His Majesty

the Sultan vowed to upgrade the march of nation building and enhance the pace of progress, striking a high note in Omani people's enthusiasm for an ambitious renaissance that covers all spheres of life.

"To reaffirm the attention that we accord to the protection of citizens, we gave directives to establish a Social Security Scheme

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to ensure that the State honours its duty to provide decent living for citizens and spare them the impacts of measures entailed by financial policies. We will also accord attention to channeling some of the output of financial policies to the Social Security Scheme so that it becomes, God willing, an overarching canopy of

social protection", he said during his address to the nation on the occasion the 50th National Day.

To provide means of decent living for citizens amid adverse global economic conditions, a Job Security System Law has been promulgated by Royal decree. His Majesty donated RO 10 million as a personal contribution towards

the foundation of the fund.

He also issued directives to speed up the establishment of a comprehensive national Social Security Scheme that provides protection to low-income groups and Social Security Fund beneficiary families against expected impacts of the medium-term Fiscal Balance Plan. **SEE P23**



New banknotes

The Central Bank of Oman has issued new banknote denominations RO 20, RO 10, RO 5, RO 1, ½ rial and 100 baisa for circulation in the market. This issuance is a completion of the sixth issue. **DETAILS ON P3**

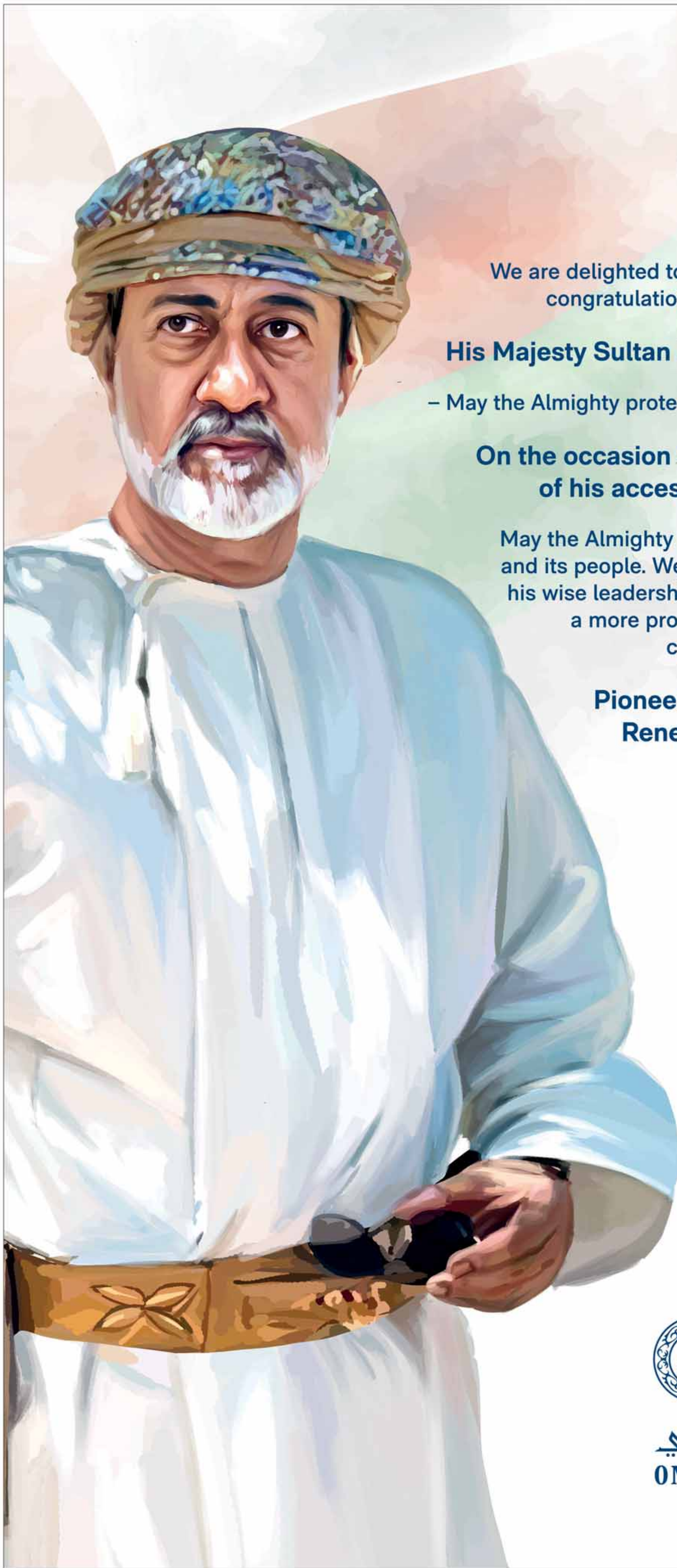
HM receives greetings from Sayyid Fahd

On the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's assuming leadership in the Sultanate, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, has sent a cable of greetings to His Majesty the Sultan. "I am honoured and delighted to express my most sincere greetings and heartfelt wishes to Your Majesty on the anniversary of assuming the reins of power in this country." **DETAILS ON P3**

Royal pardon for 285 prisoners

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, has issued a Royal pardon to a number of prisoners convicted of different cases.

They included 285 prisoners, 118 of them are foreign prisoners. The Royal pardon of His Majesty the Sultan coincides with the anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the throne and in consideration of families of the prisoners. — **ONA**



We are delighted to extend our sincerest
congratulations and best wishes to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

– May the Almighty protect and preserve him –

**On the occasion of the anniversary
of his accession to the throne**

May the Almighty protect him for Oman
and its people. We pledge loyalty under
his wise leadership as we look towards
a more prosperous future for the
country and its people.

**Pioneering Leadership ...
Renewed Renaissance**



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HM receives greetings from Sayyid Fahd



MUSCAT: On the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's assuming leadership in the Sultanate, His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, has sent a cable of greetings to His Majesty the Sultan reading as follows:

"I am honoured and delighted to express my most sincere greetings and heartfelt wishes to Your Majesty on the anniversary of assuming the

reins of power in this country, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant Your Majesty continuous success in leading the Omani benign march, along with all the ceaseless attention that Your Majesty has accorded towards promoting this march so that every citizen in this dear homeland could gain a role in the comprehensive rebuilding process, which Your Majesty has placed on top of priorities.

Happy Accession Day, Your Majesty." — ONA

HM thanked by Saudi King

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Prince Khalid Faisal Sa'ad I al Saud.

In the cable, King Salman expressed his thanks for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere feelings and prayers. He prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and protect His Majesty against all harms.

HM condolences to Indonesia

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Joko Widodo of Indonesia on victims of the Indonesian plane crash in Java sea. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathies to President Widodo, families of the victims and the friendly Indonesian people. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the souls of the deceased in peace and grant their families fortitude to bear the loss. — ONA



CBO issues new banknote denominations



MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued new banknote denominations: 20 Rials, 10 Rials, 5 Rials, 1 Rial, 1/2 Rial, and 100 Baisa for circulation in the market.

This issuance is the completion of the sixth issue of the Omani

banknotes (1441 H-2020G) which began by circulating the 50 Rials banknote as of July last year.

Notably, the new banknotes will be legal tender and circulate side by side with other banknotes currently in circulation starting

from January 11.

The CBO is currently working, in coordination with banks operating in the Sultanate, to make ATM, CDM, vending and all other withdrawal and deposit machines compatible with the new banknotes. — ONA

#11January_Renewed_Renaissance

Warm felicitations to
**His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik**
on the 1st Anniversary
of the renewed renaissance.

We take this opportunity to renew our
pledge to serve our great nation under
Your Majesty's leadership.

Committed to Oman 2040.

Proud to
Serve Oman

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On the anniversary of
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

Ascendancy to the throne

We offer our pledge of loyalty and stand behind his wise leadership as he guides our beloved country to further progress and prosperity.

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Forging ahead with fortitude

RAY PETERSEN
NIZWA, JAN 10

It is somewhat difficult to come to terms with the emotional maelstrom as we look back on 2020, and similarly demanding, of course, to acknowledge the mortality, and the passing, of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the father of the nation. However, as we reflect, we can take reassurance in the emergence of his successor, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Proving above all else a calm, effective leader, to forge ahead under the exceptional circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

Walt Whitman's elegant prose from 'O Captain, My Captain,' reflected the sombre mood of a people left bereft of their leader, saying "For you, the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills, for you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you a crowd, a swaying mass, their faces turning..." as they awaited a successor. Enter then, Oxford University educated, Foreign Service Programme graduate, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who initially served as an Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1986. Acceding to its leadership as Secretary-General until 2002, he was appointed Minister of Heritage and Culture and has frequently represented the Sultanate in global diplomacy. He is described in the influential Economist Magazine as "outward-looking, Western-oriented," thus with a positive international profile.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik appears to inspire confidence in those around him, and his confidence in his appointees is exemplified by that of the appointment, on March 10th, of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, as Head of The Supreme Committee tasked with Coronavirus (COVID-19) matters. Clearly, he has demonstrated trust in the appointment and been rewarded with policies, decisions and processes that have reflected the most effective and viable global options, with compassionate, yet



firm strategies and protocols implemented since the earliest of days. The pandemic is not at an end, but the signs could not be better.

We have seen a commitment to

social responsibility marked by the announcement on December 15th that Wilayat officials are to be more accessible to their constituents, and meet Shaikhs, dignitaries, and citizens on a regular

basis, to hear their concerns, and to provide a meaningful dialogue between the government and the population. Taxation, through VAT, is on track for its imminent roll-out across the Sultanate,

Only a year into his reign, and having faced the most demanding social, health, economic, and educational challenge of any generation, he has demonstrated all the qualities one seeks in positive leadership, proving decisive, compassionate, innovative, progressive, visionary, and courageous

the e-government portal will continue its development, and 'Oman Future Vision 2040,' the National Plan, was also reaffirmed during December. Recent budget announcements emphasise major government reforms, legislation to assist economic growth, reducing dependency on oil and gas revenues, promoting a diverse economy, and a "structured, competitive marketplace," in a move towards fiscal responsibility.

To paraphrase Whitman's classic verse, "Our fearful trip is nearly done, the nation has weathered every challenge, the prize we sought is nearly won, the port is near, the bells have rung, and the people all exalting." Only a year into his reign, and having faced the most demanding social, health, economic, and educational challenge of any generation, he has demonstrated all the qualities one seeks in positive leadership, proving decisive, compassionate, innovative, progressive, visionary, and courageous.

It is clear His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik seeks greater accountability and transparency in the public service, robust educational development, and economic diversity, all hallmarks of wisdom on the throne. Truly, to quote Whitman one last time, "The ship is anchored, safe and sound," and after just one year the Sultanate, and its people, can look to the future with confidence, with the new 'captain' at the helm.

From one great reign to another

RASHA AL RAISI
MUSCAT, JAN 10

2020 was a challenging year for the whole world and for Omanis in specific. We woke up on the 11th day of it to hear the shocking news of the demise of our beloved Sultan Qaboos, the father and founder of our modern society.

To generations born 1970 onwards, he was the only ruler we knew and was looking forward to celebrating his 50th Anniversary in November. Grief united us as a nation as we sat in front of the TV watching his funeral while tears of anguish and disbelief ran freely. Comfort came when hearing the announcement of our next Sultan: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

I still remembered his calm and down-to-earth demeanour when being interviewed for a local documentary that I watched ages back. Seeing him again at the funeral built a sense of condolence and confidence that we needed in that hard time. Heaven seemed to mourn the great loss too and rained heavily for hours right after the burial, something that would be remembered in awe for generations to come. Weeks after the funeral people still greeted each other with: "Where were you when you heard the news?". During the forty days of mourning, many of us wondered about little things that marked any transition period: Will the money bills change? How about the national day date that meant a lot to us? And the national anthem? The answers came gradually that almost everything will stay the same,

His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik who, like Sultan Qaboos before him, share a long-term vision and steady leadership. In the future, the pandemic will be something of the past that our Omani children might hardly remember it or will only study about in schools

except for the change in the last two verses of the anthem that made it more general and not specific to any Sultan. His Majesty was just continuing the work of the great man before him.

The month of March came with its first wave of coronavirus and the whole world came to a standstill. Oman was one of the first countries to announce total lockdown when many European countries were still debating air travels and closing of borders between different countries. Many of my European friends stopped watching the news and believing data published by their governments regarding the number of cases and deaths in the region or in their countries; contrary to us here who listened keenly to our minister of health's weekly updates that included different stats and preventive measures taken by

the government to stop the spread of the disease. The real test came at summer when the world around us started opening up slowly while we resumed our lockdown status.

Even worse, when in many countries mask-wearing became optional and people started socialising and getting back to normal life whereas here tougher measures were being taken. Many Omanis started grumbling over social media about how fed up they were and "why can't we be just like everyone else?" The answer came shortly after the second wave hit the world and barely affected us and now with half of the world going under lockdown again, we're familiar with living life according to the new norms that include wearing face masks, cleaning hands constantly and social distancing.

This would have not been possible without the wisdom of His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik who, like Sultan Qaboos before him, share a long-term vision and steady leadership. In the future, the pandemic will be something of the past that our Omani children might hardly remember it or will only study about in schools. They might be given the task of researching it and will have to interview us, the generation who went through it. My version would be: "It all started much before March; in January specifically when we lost a great man and gained another..."

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: **The World According to Bahja**. rashabooks@yahoo.com

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Clear steps, clear vision



VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Oman 2040 was developed in line with the Royal Directives of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, as a guide and a key reference for planning activities over the next two decades.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has repeatedly underlined that Oman future developmental goals will be achieved in line with the guidelines of Oman Vision 2040.

“Oman Vision 2040 will be the Sultanate’s gateway to overcoming challenges by keeping pace with regional and global changes, generating opportunities to foster economic competitiveness and social well-being, stimulating growth and building confidence in all economic, social and developmental relations,” the vision document says. The Tenth Five-Year Plan launched with this year’s budget is the first executive plan for Oman Vision 2040. It was set following the Vision’s targets towards a comprehensive economic and social development.

It targets Oman joining the group of the world’s developed countries (in top 20 from top 40 in Vision 2030) by seeking to foster economic competitiveness.

Vision 2040 is developed over several stages. The relevant committees started by identifying the vision themes, and pillars, followed by a status analysis and identification of national priorities. To achieve role integration, the Future Foresight Forum was organised, followed by several workshops to create scenarios and set the vision strategic directions, goals, KPIs, and targets.

The Vision states that a favourable environment will be developed to attract talents in the labour market; partnerships grow in a competitive business climate, comprehensive regional development is achieved through decentralisation, guided by the principle of optimal and balanced use of land and natural resources and the protection of the environment to bring about food, water and energy security.

NATIONAL CAPABILITIES

Vision 2040 necessitates the establishment of a stimulating educational and vocational training system to afford individuals high-level skills to enter the labour market, raise their productivity and improve the efficiency of the economy in general. Values of competition and qualification should prompt individuals to seek high-ranking jobs based entirely on merit. Another aspect of joining forces also entails maximising national capabilities through a national system established to nurture talent, creativity, and entrepreneurial potential.

It calls curricula that incorporate Islamic principles and Omani identity; are inspired by Oman’s history and heritage; are consistent with the contemporary requirements of sustainable development and future skills, and support the diversification of learning pathways.

INTERNATIONAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

An inclusive and equitable healthcare system should cover all of Oman governorates, with the participation of government, the private sector, and civil society. This coverage should include more medical specialties and specialised medical institutes and universities to develop medical staff of various specialisations. The desired healthcare system should follow international best practices in accreditation, be it in medical services, healthcare centres, medical laboratories or medical personnel.

Citizenship, Identity and National Heritage and Culture

The educational curricula should focus on developing national capabilities to stress the importance of the Omani identity and shape the Omani personality in a way to perpetuate the national identity.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Looking after the youth is a guarantee for the future as it encourages their political, social and political participation

Oman Vision 2040 will be the Sultanate’s gateway to overcoming challenges by keeping pace with regional and global changes, generating opportunities to foster economic competitiveness and social well-being, stimulating growth and building confidence in all economic, social and developmental relations

in building the future; while empowering the persons with disabilities; maximising their capabilities and skills and providing them with adequate social protection. Moreover, focusing on sports activities has direct benefits and developmental gains across the different sectors and various age categories, and enhances Oman’s presence on the global sports map.

Economic Leadership and Management
The role that a stable economic leadership and management will play is to set and align the fiscal, monetary, trade, investment, industrial and labour market policies in such a manner to contribute to the development and implementation of economic plans, programmes and projects in line with the strategic directions

NEW ECONOMY

The new economy will capture global trends in technology, innovation and industrial revolutions to keep up with and incorporate such trends in the national plans and programmes in a safe knowledge and technology-based environment that ensures transformation to technology, knowledge and innovation-based economy. The desired economy should be able to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, create an attractive business environment for all and increase exports in sectors with high technical and value-added components.

LABOUR REFORMS

Labour market legislation and flexible policies will reinforce the role of the private sector to generate employment opportunities for qualified Omani youth with the participation of civil society organisations. They will also enable better adaptation of the Omani labour market to the global updates in the future of jobs. They can also help absorb the new workforce into the labour market in a manner that keeps pace with future challenges.

PRIVATE SECTOR

The business environment will be

developed, the private sector will play a leading role and will be empowered to achieve balanced economic development to create a competitive and empowering environment for the private sector to develop free, socially responsible and eco-friendly sectors. The financial deepening will be sought in the capital market and sustainable funding will be provided through innovative models to start productive enterprises, especially SMEs. A competitive economy led by the private sector will make use of several advantages that the Sultanate enjoys, particularly the political and economic stability and the long-term investment of strategic relations. The strategic geographic location of the Sultanate is an excellent opportunity to develop and expand trade partnerships with other countries worldwide.

SMART CITIES

The Sultanate will systematically establish smart cities enjoying advanced basic services and modern technology. It will also build three-dimensional cities revolving around urban, social and economic development. This approach depends on the participation of the private sector, particularly in empowering urban communities so that advanced and smart Omani cities stimulate growth and provide a safe place to live.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The future strategy in natural resource management will focus on developing nontraditional sources of natural resources, such as the use of renewable energy to reduce production costs and subsequently, enhance the competitiveness of economic sectors. New infrastructure projects will be geared towards a green economy, green strategies, and renewable energy production. This approach should take place in such a manner as to promote environmental sustainability, achieve stability, reduce the constraints and pressures of financial management, and replenish the treasury with revenues from non-traditional natural resources.



A march continues with confidence

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

This day sees the completion of the first year of Oman's renewed renaissance. It started with the challenges of oil prices to the pandemic.

It has also been the year where His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said has taken major decisions to take the Sultanate to the next level.

Sultan Haitham won the challenge of keeping Oman stable after the departure of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos said Sulayem al Jabri, adding, "It would have been a difficult task to any new Sultan after 50 years of leadership of a great leader such as Sultan Qaboos. Sultan Haitham took the responsibility to lead Oman to the new vision: 2020 – 2040. The first year of Sultan Haitham leading Oman shows that we are on track of our new vision of a better future."

Col (Retd) Abdulwahab al Balushi reflected, "When we recall the last five decades of late Sultan Qaboos' reign we confidently say that he had managed to lift Oman from an underdeveloped country to a highly developed country. Oman became one of the highly developed countries in the areas of education, health, communication and security."

He said that Sultan Qaboos assured that prosperity is spread equally to all Omani citizens and regions. He successfully managed in unifying the citizens of Oman; he made sure that they respect each other and work hard together in building Oman.

He explained, "Sultan Qaboos also made everyone share the same values and love of Oman. He taught the young and the old of what it is to be an Omani citizen, of being proud of your heritage, traditions and culture. He encouraged us to work collectively in making Oman a great nation – a great place to live and be proud. He ensured that tolerance is rooted in all Omanis."

He added, "Our new beloved Sultan Haitham is another extraordinary visionary leader and in many ways he inherited late Sultan Qaboos' ways in interacting with citizens and how he runs the business of the government, especially when it comes to running the foreign policy."

As soon as it became Sultan Haitham's responsibility to steer



the nation to its next renaissance he took it upon himself to execute the 2040 vision which was entrusted to him by Sultan Qaboos, noted Retd. Col Abdulwahab.

"He knows that the execution of 2040 vision requires bold decisions, therefore he began immediately by restructuring the government and has implemented many new policies to reform the economy and to improve the performance of the government. The year 2020 had been a difficult year mainly because of COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of late Sultan Qaboos, God bless his soul. Meanwhile Ahmed al Mukhaini, public policy analyst said that Sultan Haitham has been faced with significant challenges."

"I think he has managed to rise to these challenges and the fact that he was in charge of Oman 2040 provided him with great opportunity to understand these challenges and their root causes and also provide him with

The government has always been far from violence, oppression and committed to high values of tolerance, neutrality, unity and cohesion of human societies and work to eliminate differences and conflicts between individuals and groups

DR CHONA THOMAS

a road map on how to address these challenges," Ahmed noted. He pointed out that some of these challenges are not easy and require significant or serious decision making and because of that Ahmed thinks it is important

HM is a visionary leader and in many ways he inherited late Sultan Qaboos' ways in interacting with citizens and how he runs the business of the government, especially when it comes to running the foreign policy

ABDULWAHAB AL BALUSHI

that everybody support him as well as give him time and hopefully within the next three to five years we would be able to pick up and resume our growth again.

Dr Chona Thomas, senior plastic surgeon, said, "I wish and

pray that the spirit of Renaissance will be continued with prosperity and peace in Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said, the successor of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In the field of health service, where I am familiar with, the Sultanate has achieved tremendous progress.

"The communicable and infectious diseases were completely controlled and eradicated by health education and immunisation through the health centres and other medical institutions. The government has always been far from violence, oppression and committed to high values of tolerance, neutrality, unity and cohesion of human societies and work to eliminate differences and conflicts between individuals and groups."

Dr Wahid al Kharousi said, "It has been one year since our father, commander and leader has left us – His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

But, within a year we are seeing his choice; His Majesty Sultan Haitham is taking on the work he has left and propagating it further. It is such a relief to see how things are in Oman. We have seen during the year Sultan Haitham has taken over with all the economic difficulties, with Covid pandemic and with the need for changes, he has tackled them with ease, experience and with calmness. Taking the leadership of foreign policy of His Majesty of non- interference. I am sure the future of Oman is in very good hands and I am sure that we are going to see a lot of things that will change not only the people of Oman but change the concept of how we should live. The propagation of giving the youth senior positions is an example of a very well determined 2040 plan and the young people will come with innovative ideas. This will also improve the economy of the country.

Job Security Fund ensures a decent life for all citizens

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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The Sultanate strives to provide social protection for individuals in a way that ensures a decent life for them and their families through various insurance systems that witness deliberate improvements following the requirements of each stage of the institutional building in the Sultanate, and in a manner that ensures its durability and efficiency.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, issued a Royal Decree No 82/2020 approving the Job

Security Fund, the long-awaited system to support the laid off and those who lose their jobs for different reasons.

The system has a two-phase implementation process. The first phase has already started in November 2020, in which the benefits were granted to Omanis whose services have been terminated. HM Sultan Haitham donated RO 10 million to the Fund, whereas from this January, contributions from all Omani workers in both government and the private sectors will be cut as every employee contributes RO

1 out of every 100 riyals of his monthly salary.

Beneficiaries obtain 60 per cent of their salary which has been suspended for one of the reasons referred to and this continues for a maximum of six months, or until another job is found for the employee in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, according to his qualifications, experiences and available work opportunities.

The second phase, however, will start after three years of establishing the Fund, where a subvention will be paid to the job seekers. The system is supervised by the Public

Authority for Social Insurance, the Ministry of Labour, and the National Employment Center. By the end of last November, the total number of beneficiaries of the job security system reached 2901, 84 per cent of whom are male, and 16 per cent of female, according to data published by the Public Authority for Social Insurance.

According to the data, the number of beneficiaries who received a monthly wage of less than RO 300 was about 1,935, while beneficiaries who received a monthly wage between RO 300 to less than RO 500 were 812,

those who received a monthly wage between RO 500 to less than RO 700 amounted to 113, besides, 17 beneficiaries received wages between RO 700 to less than RO 900, 15 received wages between RO 900 to less than RO 1,100 riyals, and nine beneficiaries received a wage between RO 1,100 to less than RO 1,800.

The job security system is one of Oman Vision 2040 objectives to achieve decent living for citizens who have stopped working for reasons beyond their control by bridging the transitional gap between the previous job and the

opportunity to obtain a new job so that it provides them with a source of income for a temporary period until they get a job in a place that it matches their skills and experiences.

The competent authorities, represented by the Ministry of Labour and PASI have worked to develop practical frameworks that ensure the achievement of goals and contribute to supporting this symbiotic initiative to create an attractive work environment and ensure the availability of job security for workers in various sectors.



Aspiring towards a promising renewed renaissance

Oman has just marked one year of mourning after the passing away of Sultan Qaboos, the architect of the 50-year long Blessed Renaissance. On the other hand, today the Sultanate is observing the first anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's ascension to the throne. Being the successor of the Sultan Qaboos, the whole country is on cloud nine for the new Sultan as he has been recommended by late Sultan Qaboos.

Upon ascension to the throne on January 11 last year, His Majesty in his first speech, said: "Dear people of Oman, words fall short of articulating a eulogy for a Sultan as great as him (Qaboos bin Said), or describe his good deeds and accomplishments. Our only relief — the best with which we can eternalise his achievements — is to pursue his rightful legacy and derive impetus for the brilliant steps that he took with full confidence and determination, to preserve the gains that he made and to build upon them".

While aspiring towards a promising renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik assured to pursue the legacy of the late Sultan. He stated, "This is what we are resolved to execute, God willing. We shall march forward on this road so that Oman could attain and maintain its prominent place in which (His Majesty Sultan Qaboos)



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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HIS MAJESTY
SULTAN
HAITHAM BIN
TARIK ASSURED
TO PURSUE THE
LEGACY OF THE
LATE SULTAN

wished to position it and for which he stayed on vigils to realise that goal, and, alas, he was granted success in his endeavours".

On the ascension day, history repeated itself, recalling the day when the late Sultan Qaboos came to throne in 1970. In his first speech delivered to his fellow citizens, His Majesty called upon Omanis to shoulder the responsibility along with the government to build the new Oman, so this would accelerate bringing the bright future, which he promised Omanis with. Alike, His Majesty Sultan Haitham addressed the people of Oman in his first speech, urging them to contribute to preserving the legacy of Oman and marching towards the new era.

In this regard, His Majesty benevolently pointed out, "People of Oman, the trust thrust on our shoulders and the resultant immense responsibilities require us all to work together for the sake of our country's magnificence, with a persistent resolve to promote it to the loftiest levels. This cannot be realised without your support, cooperation, and combination of all efforts to achieve the desired supreme national goal. Your contribution to enrich all efforts of progress, development and prosperity will be highly appreciated".

Both the Sultans have placed their

confidence on their countrymen to be part of the nation-building march, from their first day of ascension. This was a key success factor towards building the mutual trust and cooperation between the leader and his people. This gives Omanis the confidence and sense of belonging, so they devoted themselves and direct their attention towards building the nation for themselves and the new generations to come.

Accordingly, with the Sultanate is undergoing an era of a renewed renaissance, Omanis are expecting new reforms to take place in various walks of life. In fact, what thrilled them more is the quick announcement of a successor to late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. The smooth transition of leadership that took place a year ago was a kind of relief reflecting the sense of unity, continuity and stability of the nation.

Generally, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik assured his fellow citizens from the first day of ascension to throne that Oman will always remain the same, which they have been living in during the reign of late Sultan Qaboos. Reflecting on the promising and reassuring first speech of His Majesty, Omanis had believed that the new Sultan is a great successor and a man of mission to carry on the Blessed Renaissance of Oman.

UNDER SCRUTINY

Crash places aviation safety under fresh spotlight

JAMIE FREED AND STANLEY WIDIANTO

Indonesia's chequered air safety record is again in the spotlight after a Sriwijaya Air jet carrying 62 people crashed into the Java Sea minutes after take-off on Saturday, marking the country's third major airline crash in just over six years.

Before the crash there had been 697 fatalities in Indonesia over the last decade including military and private planes, making it the deadliest aviation market in the world — ahead of Russia, Iran and Pakistan — according to Aviation Safety Network's database.

The Sriwijaya crash of a Boeing Co 737-500 follows the loss of a Lion Air 737 MAX in October 2018 that contributed to a global grounding of the model and the crash of an AirAsia Indonesia Airbus SE A320 in December 2014.

The Lion Air crash, which killed 189 people, was an outlier in that it mainly revealed

There has been a lot of noise made about the speed of its final descent. It is indicative of what happened but why it happened is still in many ways a guess really

GEOFF DELL
Investigation expert

fundamental issues with the plane model and triggered a worldwide safety crisis for Boeing. Even excluding the deaths from that crash, Indonesia would rank above Russia if there are no survivors from Saturday's crash. Indonesia, an archipelago of thousands of islands, is highly dependent on air travel and its safety issues illustrate

the challenge relatively new carriers face as they try to keep pace with unstoppable demand for air travel in developing nations while striving for standards that mature markets took decades to reach. From 2007 to 2018, the European Union banned Indonesian airlines following a series of crashes and reports of deteriorating oversight and maintenance. The United States lowered its Indonesia safety evaluation to Category 2, meaning its regulatory system was inadequate, between 2007 and 2016.

Indonesia's air safety record has improved in recent years, receiving a favourable evaluation by the United Nations aviation agency in 2018. But in a country with a large death toll from vehicle and ferry accidents, the safety culture is battling against a mindset that makes it inevitable for some crashes to occur, experts said.

Saturday's "crash has nothing to do with the MAX, but Boeing would do well to guide Indonesia — which has a chequered air safety record — to restore confidence in its aviation industry," said Shukor Yusof, the head of Malaysia-based aviation consultancy Endau Analytics. Authorities located the Sriwijaya jet's flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder on Sunday but experts said it was too early to determine the factors responsible for the crash of the nearly 27-year-old plane.

The flight took off from Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, the same airport from which the Lion Air jet took off and soon crashed into the sea. The Sriwijaya jet climbed to 10,900 feet within four minutes but then began a steep descent and stopped transmitting data 21 seconds later, according to tracking website FlightRadar24. — Reuters

AMBITIOUS PLANS

Kim's big plan faces harsh reality

JOSH SMITH

Kim Jong Un's ambitious new plan for the next five years is aimed at developing North Korea's shattered economy, but the proposals may falter in the face of major crises that have already stalled the young leader's current projects.

In remarks released this weekend, Kim blamed international sanctions as well as unanticipated crises including the coronavirus pandemic and natural disasters, for preventing the government from improving people's lives, while criticising officials for mistakes that needed to be fixed.

He proposed becoming less dependent on imports, growing nearly every industry, and reforming the way officials work.

However, the new plan is unlikely to turn around the growing decay of the North Korean economy, making it difficult for Kim to deliver on his lofty promises and potentially cutting the resources available for treasured military projects, said Chad O'Carroll, CEO of Korea Risk Group, which monitors North Korea. "(There is) no apparent interest in reform, sanctions relief, or an opening of the economy," he said in a post on Twitter.

Since Kim came to power in 2011, standards of living improved for many North Koreans as markets proliferated and consumer goods became more



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un speaks during the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party in Pyongyang, North Korea, in this photo supplied by North Korea's Central News Agency (KCNA) on Saturday. — Reuters

KIM BLAMED
INTERNATIONAL
SANCTIONS AS WELL
AS UNANTICIPATED
CRISES FOR
PREVENTING THE
GOVERNMENT
FROM IMPROVING
PEOPLE'S LIVES

widely available. But now the country is facing the most challenging situation since a famine in the 1990s, and projects such as tourist resorts, economic zones, and a large hospital appear stalled.

Kim's decision to stage a huge congress and talk of ambitious projects in the face serious shortages for many North Koreans shows how the government has "internalised its own propaganda," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "The country's economic and

social conditions are worse than many outsiders appreciate," he said. "Kim tells his people about domestic shortfalls and promises improvements but is unlikely to adjust policies to receive aid and assistance."

The plan — which includes proposals for more advanced nuclear weapons — appears to be doubling down on North Korea's "Byungjin," or parallel development policy, said Kang Dong-wan, professor of Political Science & Diplomacy at Donga University in Busan. — Reuters

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate
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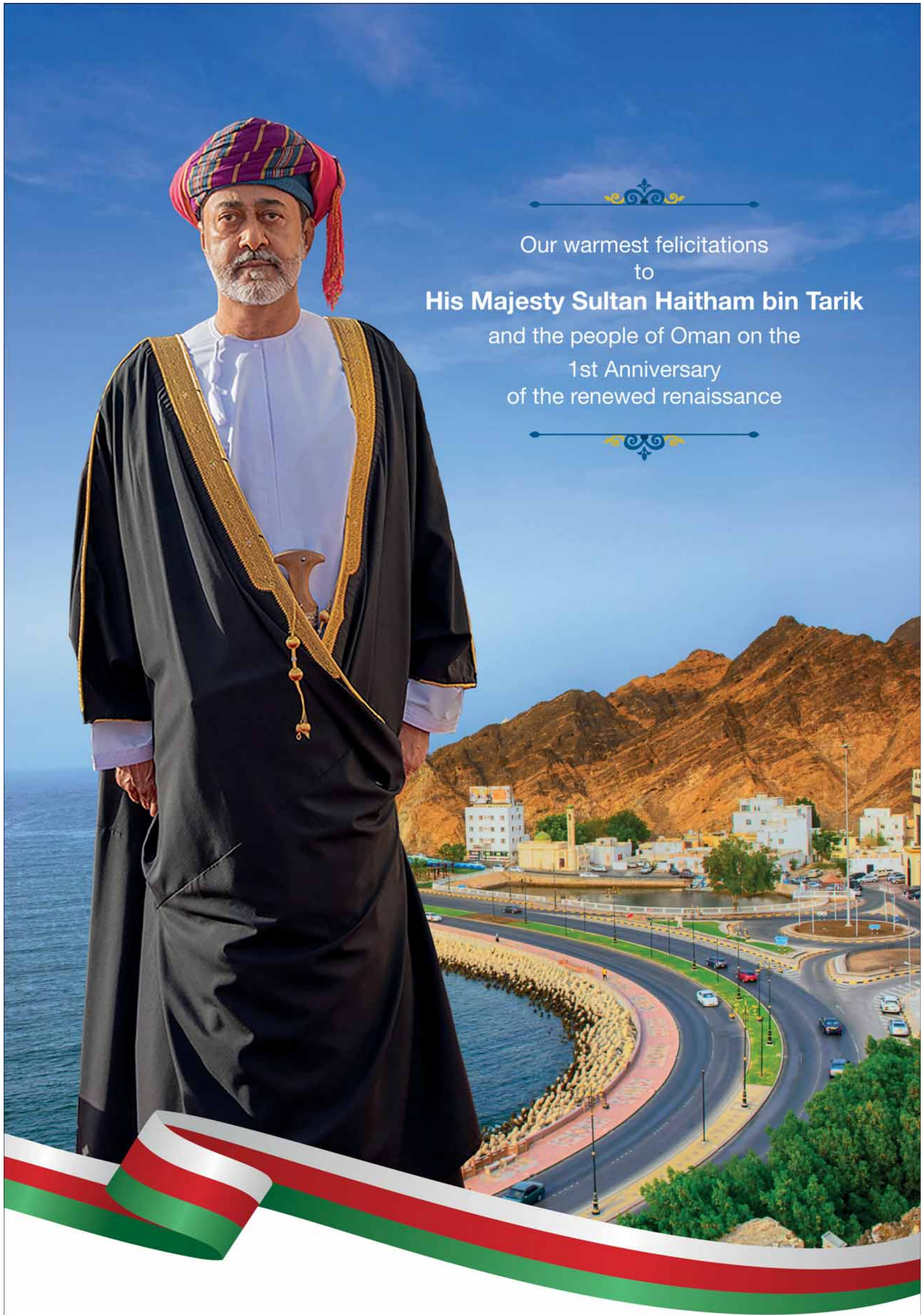
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Blueprint for economic recovery and fiscal sustainability

Inheriting an economy battered by prolonged low international oil prices made worse by the coronavirus pandemic, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik responds with bold measures and pragmatic leadership to return the country to health through the enactment of far-reaching reforms, large-scale restructuring of government ministries and public sector entities, cost rationalisation efforts, and programmes advocating transparency and accountability. *The Observer* looks back on some of the landmark initiatives launched by His Majesty's Government to help put the Sultanate on the path to economic recovery and fiscal sustainability

MEDIUM-TERM FISCAL BALANCE PLAN

Affirming an earlier pledge to prudently manage the country's financial resources and improving fiscal sustainability, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik approved the Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024) on October 22, 2020.

The plan includes a set of programmes whose overall goal is to lay down foundations for financial sustainability in the Sultanate, cut down debt, raise the efficiency of government spending through prioritising of financial action, increase government income from non-oil sectors, bolster the State's financial reserves and improve revenues from government assets to enhance their capacity to address any financial challenges and to channel these revenues into the right course for economic growth and prosperity.

At the same time, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to speed up the establishment of a national integrated system for social insurance with a view to protecting low-income segments and Social Security Scheme families against any adverse impacts from the Plan.

He also issued directives for the implementation of a number of developmental projects in various governorates, to the tune of RO 371 million.

Oman's fiscal sustainability is considered an enabler for Oman Vision 2040, and an immediate priority to allow the Vision's implementation to begin on a strong standing.

Fiscal sustainability aims to improve the ability to withstand financial circumstances and absorb and economic or social challenges that may arise in the future, as well as ensure financial efficiency for the government and the ability to fund the vision's development plans.

INVEST-EASY AS OMAN'S ONE-STOP LICENSING PORTAL

The Omani government has

reiterated the importance of a centralised single window system for registering new businesses and issuing commercial licences – a mandate currently vested with Invest-Easy, a portal set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The significance of a one-stop national licensing portal has been highlighted in the newly published Medium Term Fiscal Plan (2020-2024) formulated by the Ministry of Finance as a strategy for reining in Oman's ballooning annual fiscal deficit and external debt.

Stressing the importance of electronic transformation initiatives to help strengthen Oman's business-friendly credentials, the MTFP blueprint noted: "Achieving a comprehensive electronic transformation in the procedures for registering companies and issuing commercial licences through the "Invest Easy" initiative, so that the initiative represents for the business community in the Sultanate a single access point to all electronic government services."

To this end, much progress has been made in the integration of various government agencies – 26 entities to date – into the Invest Easy system, according to the Ministry of Finance.

They include the municipalities of Muscat, Suhar and Dhofar, which has reduced the time required to start a business from several weeks to only a number of weeks.

Significantly, all of the government ministries and agencies that have are stakeholders



in the overall licensing process are now integrated into the Invest-Easy port. These include the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA); Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; Tax Authority; Environment Authority; Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

NEW STIMULUS PACKAGE FOR ECONOMIC REVIVAL

In September, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) unveiled a slew of policy measures – the second since March this year – designed to strengthen the ability

of banks and Finance & Leasing Companies (FLCs) to support the country's economic revival. The new measures granted a further extension of the timeline for the existing loan deferment scheme, enhance the tenor and limit of the Forex Swap facility provided by the Central Bank, revise the Loan to Value (LTV) ratio for housing loans, and allow consideration of a relaxation of the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) for banks.

Importantly, as part of the latest measures, the apex bank has extended the validity of its Loan Deferment Scheme, which were unveiled at the onset of the pandemic in March this year, till the end of the first quarter of 2021.

"It has been decided to further extend the availability of the deferment scheme of loans /

instalments / interest for affected borrowers particularly SMEs, without adversely impacting the risk classification of such loans, till March 31, 2021," the Central Bank stated.

Seeking to provide relief to housing loan applicants, particularly first-time buyers of housing property, the CBO decided to reduce the Loan to Value (LTV) margin for housing loans to 10 per cent, down from the existing requirement of 20 per cent. This measure, it stressed however, is permitted only in respect of first-time homebuyers of residential properties for own purposes.

Nevertheless, banks are permitted to include the cost of registration and insurance in the value of the housing property while computing the LTV in

respect of all housing loans, it said. The latest initiatives come just under six months since the Central Bank announced a raft of policy measures and financial incentives designed to unlock an estimated RO 8 billion in additional liquidity for the benefit of businesses impacted by the economic downturn and the COVID-19 threat.

PRIVATISATION

Around 33 projects and initiatives, involving investments totalling in excess of \$2.5 billion, are currently available for local and international investment across the Sultanate.

A list of these ventures, spanning the healthcare, agriculture and fisheries, food security, mining, manufacturing and logistics sectors, was unveiled by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP) recently.

Hospitals and related healthcare ventures account for a third of the projects in the portfolio. Overseeing these projects is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Unit of the Ministry of Finance. Currently in planning are general hospitals each worth \$72.80 million at Bahla and Samayil, as well as a string of similar general hospitals named Al Namaa (\$73m), Al Falah (\$72.8m), Al Najat (\$72.8m) and Rashad (\$70.2m). More modest-scale hospitals are also planned at Dhalkout (\$39m), Al Mazyouna (\$33.8m), and Bukha (\$18.2m), while a one-of-a-kind National Rehabilitation Centre is also on the cards at a cost of \$52 million.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), which regulates all four of the country's biggest free zone developments, is overseeing a string of mining-related investments. The largest of these is a soda ash production plant at a cost of \$145.64 million.

Also available for investment are smaller-scale ventures, currently in the conceptual stage, that include a clinker manufacturing facility (\$20.72m), quick lime production plant (\$14.3m), and a ground calcium carbonate factory valued at \$7.25m.

Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), the government's food investment and development arm, is soliciting investments in four key ventures – part of a large portfolio of projects designed to secure the Sultanate's access to essential food commodities and related goods. Currently, open for investment are a Food Logistics Company (\$19.3m), Food & Vegetables Marketing Platform (\$4.43m), Food Techno Park (\$10m) and Animal Vaccine Project (\$30m).



New IPOs, REITs to buoy Oman bourse performance in 2021

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

MIXED BAG: Investors are pinning their hopes on a sustained market recovery this year following what has been a challenging 2020 for the MSM

Boding well for an uptick in the performance of the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) — soon to be renamed Muscat Bourse Company (SAOG) — are a number of initiatives and developments that promise to provide new opportunities for investment and market growth during 2021.

On the cards are several Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), potentially new products in the form of Exchange Traded Funds, and new listings of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs).

These anticipated launches, coupled with added momentum in the implementation of the Mandatory Health Insurance Scheme (Dhamani), among other initiatives, promise to buoy the Omani bourse during the current year. Investors are pinning their hopes on a sustained market recovery this year following what has been a challenging 2020 for the MSM.

The MSM30 Index closed 2020 down by 8.10 per cent year-on-year (YoY) at 3658.77, while the MSM Total Return Index was down by 1.6 per cent to close the year at 4175.48, mirroring sharp declines in most stock markets across the world.

According to leading investment services firm Ubhar Capital (U-Capital), around 3 or 4 IPOs are anticipated for launch in 2021, as opposed to the solitary public offering recorded last year.

“The IPO market will remain slightly better than in 2020. We expect 3-4 IPOs in the field of oil/gas, insurance, utilities and more



REITs to materialise in 2021”, said U-Capital in its assessment of the market outlook for this year.

In contrast, only one IPO materialised last year. Oman’s first REIT i.e. Aman REIT offered 50 per cent of its RO 20 million fund in the first public offering by a property fund in the Sultanate. Aman REIT was listed on March 15, 2020.

Next week, the IPO of Oman REIT Fund, billed as the biggest-ever listing of a property trust in the Sultanate, formally opens on January 17.

Oman REIT Fund is the first Omani real estate investment trust with a diversified assets portfolio, which is offering 40 per cent of its total issued capital of RO 65 million for public subscription.

The REIT, managed by Shumookh Fund Management LLC, is offering 261.903 million units at an issue price of 102 baisa per unit comprising 100 baisa as unit value plus 2 baisa towards issue expenses.

For the insurance sector, there is positive news in store in the form

of Mandatory Health Insurance — dubbed ‘Dhamani’ — which will be rolled out in earnest this year.

“Mandatory Health Insurance for residents and nationals along with for tourists will be implemented in multiple phases which will be beneficial to the insurance sector of Oman”, said U-Capital in its report.

Other developments anticipated during the year promise to produce a mixed bag of results. The roll-out of Vodafone, for instance, as the third telecom operator in the Sultanate has incumbent players, as well as customers, wondering what the launch of the global brand means for them.

U-Capital commented: “We expect Vodafone to start operating in mid-2021, which will result in more competition locally. However, we do not expect an immediate impact on the existing operators in 2021, but will see erosion of their market share over the next 2-3 years.”

Local banks are also expected to continue to come under pressure

from the challenging fiscal environment, as the investment services firm explained: “Low US Fed policy rates are expected to provide respite to borrowers, but will at the same time pressurise interest yields of banks.

The highly competitive environment continues to pressurise other operating income of banks, which constitutes typically 25-35 per cent of total operating income of banks.

On the other hand, the current capital adequacy ratios for most banks are well above the minimum regulatory requirements through continuous capital raising activities in prior years. However, some banks might raise capital in 2021 in order to further strengthen their balance sheets.”

The outlook for the leasing sector is anticipated to be equally challenging, primarily from the ongoing liquidity crunch, delayed payments and increasing defaults. Leasing firms are also expected to face tough competition from conventional and Islamic lender.

PRESS RELEASES

OAB OFFICIAL GETS RECOGNITION AT WORLD WOMEN LEADERSHIP CONGRESS AWARDS

Asma al Zadjali, Head of Banking Operations Group at OAB, was bestowed with the award for ‘Middle East’s Woman Leaders’ at the 8th edition of World Women Leadership Congress & Awards.



The virtual event was held on December 10 to honour the strategic and influential role of various women leaders in the Middle East, in the development of the modern economy, technology, and administrative methodologies.

Commenting on receiving the award, Asma said, “At OAB, empowering women and promoting gender diversity are

key values that we put at the forefront of our business. We believe that everyone at the bank deserves an equal opportunity at professional and career growth, based on their proficiency, performance and talent. This has resulted in several women taking new responsibilities and challenges, in every aspect of their jobs, with several of them holding positions of authority within their respective departments. The Award reaffirms the important role women play in building the future of OAB, as a leading financial institution within the banking sector in the Sultanate.”

OCTAL SUPPORTS YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME



As part of its commitment to engage in community-focused projects, OCTAL has lent its support to a Youth Leadership Programme run by international training consultant company, Creative People Solutions (CPS). Held at the Salalah Vocational College, the initiative offered 20 young graduates the chance to take part in a 5-day skill-building course, helping them to improve their leadership capabilities and prepare for the world of work.

Playing a key role in the Sultanate’s economic diversification plan and as a major employer, the Salalah-based PET manufacturer is active in a number of initiatives that focus on enhancing the skillsets of the next generation, while promoting home-grown talent. The course is designed to support youth in discovering the ‘5 Cs’ of leadership development including Character, Competence, Choices, Connections and Commitment.

ENERGY OMAN TIES UP WITH POTENTIAL ADVERTISING



Energy Oman recently announced its partnership with Potential Advertising and Publishing, the publisher of Oman Oil and Gas Directory, to produce, publish and distribute the forthcoming versions of the directory and manage its portal.

The partnership aims to broaden the scope of the directory’s business listings to include companies from the power, renewables and mining industries.

This strategic move comes in line with the government’s integration of the power and the oil and gas sectors and streamline structures and regulations in the energy sector. The partnership will see the rebranding and relaunching of the directory to Oman Energy Directory.

Saudi cut to boost oil market de-stocking



General view of Saudi Aramco’s Ras Tanura oil refinery and oil terminal in Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

LONDON: Saudi Arabia’s voluntary oil production cut is expected to bring the oil market into deficit for most of 2021 even as new lockdowns to contain the spread of the coronavirus batter oil demand, analysts say.

Saudi Arabia, the world’s biggest oil exporter, surprised the market on January 5 with a voluntary output cuts of 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March.

— Reuters

Now motor insurance cover can be obtained online

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 10

In line with the government’s digital transformation efforts, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has introduced e-Tameen — an app that allows motorists to obtain motor insurance coverage via the net or their smartphones.

e-Tameen provides details on available insurance options, best offers and prices. Customers can access the Standard Motor Insurance Policy feature on the app for all details, as well as terms and conditions.

“Policyholders can log into www.etameen.om to view the offers made by insurers and compare the prices and benefits and then select the appropriate offer after entering the required details and then move to payment page and issue the policy. The process can be easily completed in Arabic or English using e-payment by debit or credit card”, said the Authority, which also regulates the insurance sector, said in a



statement.

The purchase process can be completed in several steps and thereafter the policyholder can create a file in the system to revisit for renewal or modification or to buy a new policy after entering specific particulars such as ID number, car plate number,

validity of vehicle’s licence, type of required insurance (third party or comprehensive). Then the system will display all offers suitable for the request from all insurers available on the system to select from.

After selecting the suitable offer the system moves to detailed

procedures to complete the purchase process such as entering the number of the driving licence and particulars of the policyholder such as address are required to complete the process. It also displays all the details entered by the policyholder and total price for consent and confirmation,

e-Tameen provides details on available insurance options, best offers and prices. Customers can access the Standard Motor Insurance Policy feature on the app for all details, as well as terms and conditions

then moves to payment page and card’s details and the required security features such as the pass code or OTP to complete payment and issuance of the policy.

The system ensures all security properties including authentication, integrity and confidentiality. Thereafter the vehicle details are synchronised with Royal Oman Police Traffic and Civil Status systems so as the vehicle’s owner can complete the renewal procedures and issuance of registration licence, it added.

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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

Distinctive AL Zofran projects Announce that they registered in the commercial register with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry under No. 1277119 announce that they are in the process of transferring their legal form from a joint liability company to a limited liability company in accordance with Article No. (19) duplicate (2) of the Commercial Companies Law No. 74/ 4 and its amendments. Inform everyone who has an interest in this amendment and everyone who has objection to these amendments must submit the reasons for his objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of two months from the date of publishing this announcement.

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

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features



Using words and scribbles to paint a better picture

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

An artist usually draws inspiration from things around them. When artists find a cause that they are passionate about, they will pursue this interest, read and learn more about it, explore it until they discover an even wider space so that they can take their art into an even higher form.

Kawthar al Harthi is a passionate artist who wants to create art that is unique to her. While she is still developing her craft, she is currently zooming into collages — particularly those of written words, drawn scribbles and lines, diaries and old notebooks.

Her recent sources are the works of people around her and she has spent hours collecting notebooks and old papers to put her vision into life.

Kawthar has a Bachelor of Art Education from Sultan Qaboos University, and she is an art teacher.

"In my point of view, one cannot exactly say when art as a passion starts to bloom in a person. The love for art grows within the artist as soon as he or she becomes aware of the world around him or her," Kawthar said.

It was only three years ago when Kawthar started to pursue collages. She thought that it was something new and something that has not been fully explored especially within the Sultanate.

Kawthar believes that memories occupy a huge space in the lives of people and just as written words tell people

of what life was like, putting them into a collective tells an even deeper story.

"The remaining pieces of the diaries would make a good picture", she thought.

"What father left" is one of Kawthar's closest works to her heart that narrates the details of her late father's life.

"The two paintings are a compilation

Heritage appears spontaneously in her works as it is a part of her reality. In "What father left" painting she pasted a picture of the Omani turban (masar) that her father used to wear

of papers that my father left in his library. His school notebooks, diary, address and phone books, letters and other miscellaneous papers. I added to it photographs of my father's possessions such as a dead trunk tree, antique that he always puts in his library, stairs and childhood home," Kawthar shared.

"I started working on both paintings at the beginning of 2019. I was so drawn to the notion that an entire life is represented by papers, the person's thoughts, and messages exchanged between him and his friends and a lot of interesting details that give a pure picture of the

real memories," Kawthar added.

Kawthar inspires her works' ideas from her daily life. "the artist is in a constant search for new and unique ideas. Ordinary details that people see in their surrounding could mean something special to the artist", she said.

Heritage appears spontaneously in her works as it is a part of her reality. In "What father left" painting she pasted a picture of the Omani turban (masar) that her father used to wear. She doesn't believe in the idea that art should be a medium intended to promote heritage.

"Heritage doesn't need to be promoted for in the artists' works. On the contrary, adding some cultural touches to the work would promote for the work itself as it would give it a super value, especially among those fans of heritage," she said.

Her favourite materials and tools for shaping the painting are papers, photographs and dry materials such as charcoal, lead and pastels.

She has participated in many local and international exhibitions. "I participated in the Annual Youth Exhibition in 2018 in the Omani Society for Fine Arts and the Small Business Exhibition in 2019. As I also participated in the exhibition of the Omani International Forum in 2019 in Vienna. It was a wonderful experience because I got the opportunity to meet some great artists," she said.

Currently, Kawthar has two works on display in the Christmas exhibition at the Matti Sirvio Gallery in Muscat.





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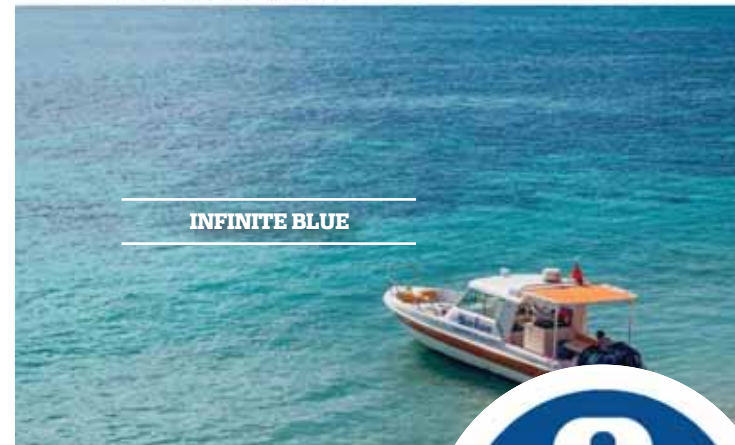


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ART

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ENTERTAINMENT

'Everyone is an artist': Behind fat and felt in Beuys centenary year

With his felt hat, fat-smearing exhibition space and the legendary declaration that "everyone is an artist," Joseph Beuys embodied modern art of the post-war 20th century like few others.

On May 12 this year, the charismatic performance artist and sculptor would have turned 100. He died in January 1986 of a lung infection in Dusseldorf.

Twenty museums and institutes in his home state of North-Rhine Westphalia, western Germany, plan to pay tribute to Beuys this year, on top of events and exhibitions set to take place in Berlin, Stuttgart, Darmstadt and Vienna.

The centenary year is scheduled to launch in early March, provided the programme doesn't fall victim to the coronavirus pandemic like so many other cultural events.

Presenting the life and work of Beuys in an exhibition is already challenging enough. He was known for using fat and felt to create art, but his legacy extends well beyond gallery spaces: Beuys was a social commentator and activist, a professor, a co-founder of Germany's Green Party, a self-styled shaman and a media sensation.

These days, gallery visitors confronted with Beuys' work in art galleries see school blackboards covered in writing, mighty basalt stones embedded with felt, huge blocks of tallow and display cases containing ritualistic objects as if for a journey into the afterlife.

The works are difficult to decipher, for they are often mere remnants of Beuys' spectacular actions. Without their creator, they simply

leave the viewer to contemplate in silence.

The K20 modern art museum, located in the city of Dusseldorf, is therefore looking for other ways to remember him.

The exhibition "Everyone is an Artist: Cosmopolitical Exercises

The exhibition focuses solely on Beuys' actions and performances... This allows the German artist to be shown in dialogue with his contemporaries from across the world, including those from non-Western countries

with Joseph Beuys" is scheduled to open there on March 27.

"We hope that everything goes according to plan despite the coronavirus," director Susanne Gaensheimer says. Her museum, like all cultural attractions in Germany, is currently closed under a lockdown to curb case

numbers.

The exhibition focuses solely on Beuys' actions and performances, presented in films and photographs, Gaensheimer says. This allows the German artist to be shown in dialogue with his contemporaries from across the world, including those from non-Western countries.

Gaensheimer doesn't want to show the large-scale pack of sledges, layered piles of felt or the 1,000-kilogram bronze sculptures already displayed at a retrospective in Dusseldorf 10 years ago.

She considers such works to be relics of things that Beuys did in museums himself. "If we reconstruct such installations in exhibitions, how much of the living energy of Beuys can we carry over?" she says.

Even the grand opening of the Beuys centenary year is intended as artistic performance: 24 women and men are to play the music of Erik Satie for 24 hours to launch the K20 show - in reference to Beuys' interest in the French composer, as well as his "24-Hour Happening" in Wuppertal in 1965.

The programme stretches into 2022. Other exhibitions in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia include a show of Beuys' key works in the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, a major collection of his early works focusing on shamanism in the moated Moyland Castle, and an exhibit exploring his sociopolitical impact in Essen's Ruhr Museum.

A special radio station is also in the offing, which will broadcast theatre and other performances and an orchestral work by composer Heiner Goebbels. — **dpa**



UK music festivals urge govt action to save summer events



ORGANISERS OF British music festivals last week said the coronavirus pandemic had devastated the industry and warned that events could disappear for good without more government support.

Giving evidence to a UK parliamentary committee, organisers and representatives of the multi-billion pound summer festival industry said a government-backed insurance scheme was crucial to events going ahead in 2021.

They also encouraged ministers to set a clear decision-making timetable, to give festivals enough time to prepare for this year's events.

"If we get as far as Easter (in early April) and we still don't know that crowds can gather at festivals — however large or small — then we're in a catastrophic situation," Steve Heap, of the Association of Festival Organisers, told lawmakers.

He added that a recent survey of members showed nearly half needed to know if 2021 events could go ahead in the first three months of the year.

Sacha Lord, co-founder of the annual Parklife festival in Manchester, northwest England, said organisers, as well as freelancers and contractors involved in supply chains, could all be "wiped out" without this year's events.

"If we don't take place in 2021 I think the vast majority could disappear," he added.

Existential crisis

Britain — one of the countries worst affected by the global health crisis, with over 75,000 deaths — has seen its £5.8-billion (\$7.9-billion, 6.4-billion-euro) music industry hit hard by the pandemic.

A series of nationwide lockdowns, the most recent of which was announced on Monday evening, and

months of other restrictions to curb the close-contact spread of the virus have shuttered music venues.

In July, the music sector was given a lifeline of £250 million from the government's £1.6-billion Cultural Recovery Fund to help keep the arts afloat during the outbreak.

But every year, thousands of Britons and tourists flock to the country's summer music festivals, which take months of planning and now appear increasingly endangered.

An umbrella organisation for the music industry echoed organisers' concerns in a report released Tuesday, noting summer events were in an "existential crisis" due to COVID-19.

"There is a real threat that the vast majority of the 2021 season will not happen either," the organisation said, noting they were "pillars of our culturally rich live music scene and showcase an incredible variety of musical genres".

The country's famous Glastonbury music festival, for instance, generates over £100 million for the economy of the southwest of England, UK Music said.

Music festivals as a whole employ 85,000 people directly each year, it said.

UK Music joined the calls for an approximate date for when venues might be able to reopen and for the creation of a government-backed reinsurance scheme for the sector.

It noted similar schemes have been launched in Germany and Austria.

"Insurance is the most critical factor that will enable us to plan festivals," Paul Reed, chief executive of the Association of Independent Festivals, added at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport hearing.

"It is the key to unlocking everything else." — **AFP**

Congratulations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
And the people of Oman
On the Anniversary of His Majesty Taking Over the Reigns



STEERING TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE



Oman, under the wise and visionary leadership of **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** is steering ahead towards a brighter future. A firm focus on nation-building and far-sighted initiatives in every sphere, including education, heritage and culture among many others, will continue to contribute towards Oman's prosperous future.

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On this occasion, Saud Bahwan Group salutes the vision of **His Majesty** and congratulates the people of Oman.

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Nurturing Renaissance

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is implementing people-centric policies through a more participatory decision-making process. His recent meetings with Shaikhs of Wilayats in the governorate of Dhofar is just the first step in creating a direct dialogue between the leader and his people. This opportunity to listen to their views about ways to improve social services and enhance the effectiveness of government responsiveness is the key to compassionate and responsive governance.



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik plants a frankincense tree at the Royal Razat Farm in Salalah during his visit to Dhofar Governorate. – File photo



A leadership forged in adversity

His Majesty the Sultan's Royal Decrees and effective actions during the last 12 months prove that both he and the Sultanate are staying the course even as unleashing structural reforms to right the imbalances within state governance, commerce and society

KOSHY SAMUEL
MUSCAT, JAN 10

Great leaders are forged in the furnace of adversity, crisis and challenge, and measured by their ability to respond to all the three. Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos had weathered political and social storms, mainly of local and regional concern, to build a vibrant, modern and progressive nation. Today, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq is facing unprecedented challenges, a hydra with two extraordinarily malevolent heads in the form of the coronavirus pandemic and a globally weak oil market.

For His Majesty the Sultan, however, these are global challenges, and every move is monitored and critiqued by an international media seeking to divert attention from their own woes. One year, you may say, is too short a time to judge a ruler. However, rebutting such opinions, His Majesty the Sultan's many Royal Decrees, and positive and effective actions during the last 12 months prove that both he and the Sultanate are staying the course, even as unleashing structural reforms to right those imbalances within state governance, commerce and society.

In the Royal Speech on February 23, he said, "Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource and the hands that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them, and sense their needs, interests and aspirations which will definitely be accorded the attention that they deserve." The Sultan donated a massive RO 10 million as seed money for the fund, in a truly noble gesture since the Omani population is one of the youngest in the world:



As an extraordinary 46 per cent of its citizens are under the age of 19. He promised a Youth Job Security Fund after assuming power, and he has followed through and delivered on that promise.

His Majesty is implementing people-centric policies through a more participatory decision-making process. His recent meetings with shaikhs of wilayats in the Governorate of Dhofar is just the first step in creating a direct dialogue between the leader and his people. This opportunity to listen to their views about ways to improve social services and enhance the effectiveness of government responsiveness is the key to compassionate and responsive governance.

In response to the initial threat of coronavirus, His Majesty the Sultan set up a Supreme Committee with wide-ranging powers and authority, though he regularly chairs the meetings offering his support and guidance. His government has spared no effort in addressing the Sultanate's needs in response to the demands of the pandemic with the primary objective of safeguarding the health of all citizens and residents.

Consequently, the Sultanate appears to be managing the spread of coronavirus effectively, with

the lowest numbers of deaths and infections within the region. The pandemic has been controlled by a combination of effective travel bans, lockdowns, effective social distancing, mandatory masks and hygiene measures that have proven extremely effective.

In December 2020, the Ministry of Health approved Pfizer and BioNTech vaccines as the Sultanate's immunization partners in the fight against COVID-19. Dr Ahmed Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, launched the National Campaign for Immunization against COVID-19 under the theme of 'Immunization Is a Prevention' by taking the first jab. To date 7,500 frontline workers and seniors have been vaccinated, with priority treatment for those most at risk.

The pandemic has tested the resilience of the nation's diversification and investment strategies, but it has also highlighted the robustness of its society and led us to appreciate the strength of what is undoubtedly becoming one of its most important assets – its entrepreneurial and innovative young talent.

According to Azzan al Busaidi, Chief Executive Officer,

ITHRAA, Oman's long-standing investment in, promotion of, and support for, entrepreneurship, and its focus on creating a tech-savvy society looks to be paying dividends during the pandemic as Oman's entrepreneurs generate and implement diverse ideas and processes to both combat the virus and invigorate the economy.

In February, Oman's Industrial Innovation Centre rallied innovative tech start-ups and SMEs to form a team which produced ventilators and manufactured 3D produced facemasks, now deployed across the country. The youthful talent at Oman Maker's Centre, based in Innovation Park Muscat, has developed a digital artificial respiration device that simulates a commonly used ventilation system. Tested and subjected to rigorous quality checks, the device has already been approved for use in hospitals nationwide. Meanwhile, serial entrepreneur Raif al Harthy's digital platform Wareed provides a home delivery service for prescription medicine to the elderly, the infirm and other service users.

In March 2020, The Research Council Oman set up a COVID-19 research programme with a clinical and public health scope to cover

areas including telemedicine, therapeutics and diagnostics, and the environmental impacts of the virus. All funded projects are planned to be executed over the next three to 12 months with growing confidence in applied and practical outcomes. To-date, the programme has received 442 research proposals, 103 in the clinical category, and 339 in the non-clinical spectrum.

The Oman Technology Fund (OTF) has allocated \$2.6 million to support those start-ups developing ideas for short and long-term pandemic-related projects. One such start-up is Behar. Based in the coastal town of Barka, this young company has created Behar market to help local fishermen in overcoming the challenge of closed markets and reconnecting them with their customers.

His Majesty the Sultan has placed the welfare of his population ahead of all other considerations. His government has introduced several initiatives to assist small businesses, supported scores of citizens who have lost jobs, and offered interest-free loans for entrepreneurs whose businesses were upended by COVID-19.

Half a century ago Oman had 10 kilometres of paved roads,

His Majesty is implementing people-centric policies through a more participatory decision-making process. His recent meetings with shaikhs of wilayats in the Governorate of Dhofar is just the first step in creating a direct dialogue between the leader and his people

one hospital and no secondary schools. Today, the Sultanate has national highways ranked among the best in the world. It has four international airports and three major seaports. Nearly 90 per cent of Oman's population has access to mobile broadband and a burgeoning system of government cloud services. This country of 4.6 million is also home to over 55 universities, colleges and training institutes.

His Majesty the Sultan's launch of Oman Future Vision 2040 moves to consolidate the gains and objectives of the Renaissance and to unlock the economic potential of the Sultanate.

"All those who have had the privilege of participating in the making of Oman 2040 will now join hands to realise its directions and goals, into a future bursting with ambitions, where everyone has a role to play. Towards that future we shall move forward sure footedly, hastily and with confidence", His Majesty the Sultan said in Oman Future Vision 2040.

"Oman Vision 2040 is the Sultanate's gateway to overcome challenges, keeping pace with regional and global changes, generating and seizing opportunities to foster economic competitiveness and social well-being, stimulate growth and build confidence in all economic, social and developmental relations nationwide."

His Majesty is stamping his seal on the throne and the Sultanate, responding effectively to adversity, calmly to crises, vigorously to challenges, covetous of the compassion and concern he has for those who look to him for protection, advice, and guidance, a man destined to rule with the wisdom of myth and magic, the love of a Sultan for his people.



A year of reforms

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

The past one year, since His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq ascended to the throne, will be remembered in the history as a period marked by reforms aimed bringing in far-reaching economic and social benefits in the Sultanate.

In all his speeches, His Majesty the Sultan vowed to upgrade the march of nation building and enhance the pace of progress, striking a high note in Omani people's enthusiasm for an ambitious renaissance that covers all spheres of life.

"To reaffirm the attention that we accord to the protection of citizens, we gave directives to establish a Social Security Scheme to ensure that the State honours its duty to provide decent living for citizens and spare them the impacts of measures entailed by financial policies. We will also accord attention to channeling some of the output of financial policies to the Social Security Scheme so that it becomes, God willing, an overarching canopy of social protection", he said during his address to the nation on the occasion the 50th National Day.

To provide means of decent living for Omani citizens amid adverse global economic conditions, a Job Security System Law has been promulgated by Royal decree. His Majesty the Sultan donated RO 10 million as a personal contribution towards the

foundation of the fund.

He also issued directives to speed up the establishment of a comprehensive national Social Security Scheme that provides protection to low-income groups and Social Security Fund beneficiary families against expected impacts of the medium-term Fiscal Balance Plan.

In a series of decrees, he restructured the administration and brought in changes in economic imperatives as part of a decentralisation process.

CABINET RESTRUCTURED

The royal decrees issued in August reduced the number of the ministries from 26 to 19 and created new ministries including a Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in addition to merging and renaming of some ministries as well.

The Sultan also named some elected Majlis Ash'shura members as new ministers, integrating them into his new government. This suggests a sensitivity to public opinion as some of them have been very active in public seminars and on social media.

In his first speech, His Majesty listed the priorities on his agenda, including education, employment, and fiscal plans in alignment with the Oman Vision 2040.

THE ROYAL
DECREES ISSUED
IN AUGUST
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MINISTRIES FROM
26 TO 19

THE 10TH FIVE-
YEAR PLAN, AIMS
TO ACHIEVE A
REAL GDP GROWTH
RATE OF NO LESS
THAN 3.5%

In a remarkable move, a Royal Decree ordered the formation of a new authority named the Oman Investment Authority in June last year. It was established to merge the two existing investment funds of the sultanate – the State General Reserve Fund and the Oman Investment Fund.

Oman Vision 2040 is the foundation of the second Renaissance with its pillars of decentralisation, diversification of sources of national income, attractive economic environment for foreign investment and more job opportunities for young Omanis

HM THE
SULTAN SAID
OMAN
ADVOCATES
PEACEFUL
CO-EXISTENCE
AMONG NATIONS

ROLLED OUT
MEASURES
INCLUDING A
MEDIUM-TERM
FISCAL BALANCE
PLAN (2020-2024)

The Vision accords priority to the development of sustainable governorates by espousing decentralisation as a style of governance as stated in the Royal Decree, "the State's Administrative Apparatus consists of central units like ministries and councils and non-central units like authorities and public establishments."

The Sultan was quick to take action following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. He ordered the formation of a Supreme Committee to tackle the developments arising out of the situation, monitor its spread and

take steps to limit its impacts and devise strategies in accordance with survey results.

He told the nation, "We have taken all precautions to accommodate these circumstances and alleviate their negative impacts in all sectors of the state, with priority given to health, social and economic sectors. We reiterate our support to these sectors so that health and education services, of all types, could continue to be rendered in the best manner to all citizens of this dear country".

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

His Majesty also ordered to form an economic committee to deal with the economic impacts of COVID-19 in the domestic front. Accordingly, a number of decisions were taken and resulted in the Government's offering packages and incentives to private sector establishments and firms.

The steps included the establishment of an Emergency Loans Programme which offers assistance to segments of entrepreneurs whose businesses were most severely stricken by the pandemic.

An Endowment Fund and Anti-COVID-19 Support Fund were established as prime movers of public support to the Ministry of Health in the battle against coronavirus. His Majesty the Sultan himself donated RO 10 million as a personal contribution to the funds.

FIGHTING COVID-19

In order to tackle the economic challenges arising out of the COVID-19 situation and plunging oil prices the government rolled out several measures including a Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024).

With a set of programmes to lay down the foundations for financial sustainability in the sultanate, cut debt and raise efficiency of government spending by prioritising financial action, the plan aims to increase government income from non-oil sectors, bolster the state's financial reserves and improve revenues from government assets and channelise these revenues in the right course for economic growth and prosperity.

10TH PLAN

The 10th Five-Year Plan, rolled out in the beginning of 2021, aims to achieve a real GDP growth rate of no less than 3.5 per cent on average and to achieve a growth rate of GDP at current prices of 5.5 per cent on average during the years of the plan.

On the foreign policy front, as soon as he assumed power, in his first nation address, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed the permanent stand of the country's foreign policy, saying that the Sultanate advocates peaceful co-existence among nations, good neighbourliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.



IN ALL HIS SPEECHES, HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN VOWED TO UPGRADE
THE MARCH OF NATION BUILDING AND ENHANCE THE PACE OF PROGRESS

TOP PRIORITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT



FOREIGN POLICY

“On the foreign front, we shall trace the course of the late Sultan, reaffirming the fundamentals of our country’s foreign policy based on peaceful co-existence with nations, good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for countries’ sovereignty and international cooperation in various spheres.”

REGIONAL ROLE

“In the Arab front, we will continue to support the Arab League and cooperate with our brethren, leaders of Arab states, to achieve the goals of the Arab League, promote our citizens’ lives, distance this region from conflicts and work for economic integration that will serve our Arab peoples.”

INTERNATIONAL ROLE

“Oman will maintain its role as an active member of the United Nations Organisation, a member that respects the UN Charter and works with member states towards achieving international peace and security, as well as economic prosperity for all countries of the world.”

YOUTH

“Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource and the arms that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them, and sense their needs, interests, and aspirations which will definitely be accorded the attention that they deserve.”

VISION 2040

“We stand today with a firm invincible will on the threshold of a vital stage of development and nation-building. It is a stage which you all have participated in drawing out its prospects in Oman 2040 Future Vision, and contributed to devising its economic, social and cultural goals, in a manner that embodies a clear-cut vision, great expectation towards a more prosperous future.”

EDUCATION

“On top of our national priorities is the education sector, with all its types and levels. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with the supporting environment which motivates research and innovation.”

FISCAL BALANCE

“Despite these challenges posed to our economy, we are certain that the Fiscal Balance Plan and its related procedures, as endorsed by the government recently, will undoubtedly steer our economy to the shores of safety. The economy will witness, during the next five years, rates of growth that meet the expectations of all citizens of this dear country.”

DECENTRALISATION

“We have also laid down the regulatory foundation of local administration through a system of decentralisation of services and development in the governorates. We will regularly follow up progress in the administrative system with the aim of supporting and developing it to empower society to shoulder its responsibility in nation-building.”



AFTER HIS ASCENSION TO THE THRONE, HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK ISSUED 131 ROYAL DECREES IN 2020 ALONE – A RECORD COMPARED TO ANY TIME IN THE HISTORY OF OMAN WHEN THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF ROYAL DECREES WAS 50 IN A YEAR – IN ADDITION TO ROYAL DIRECTIVES AND ORDERS

THE FIRST ROYAL DECREE BY HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM WAS ISSUED IN FEBRUARY AMENDING THE ANNEXURE NO 3 OF THE LAW OF THE STATE FLAG, LOGO AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttvyp

Within a short span of just one year, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has succeeded in improving the efficiency of the government's performance and laying down the foundations for financial sustainability in the Sultanate.

After his ascension to the throne, His Majesty the Sultan issued 131 Royal Decrees in 2020 alone – a record compared to any time in the history of Oman when the average number of Royal Decrees was 50 in a year – in addition to royal directives and orders.

The highest number of decrees followed the Royal Speech by His Majesty in February 2020 about the need to restructure and streamline government to align with the Oman Vision 2040.

Even as the first Royal Decree issued in 2020 was by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos on the ratification of the General Budget of the State, the first Royal Decree by His Majesty Sultan Haitham was issued in February amending the Annexure No 3 of the Law of the state flag, logo and national anthem.

Most of these decrees dealt with appointments, including Royal Decree No 14/2020 appointing a Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. Other decrees included appointments of Special Envoy to His Majesty the Sultan, the Minister of Heritage and Culture, the Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Art Affairs, Adviser at the Diwan of the Royal Court, Adviser to the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Secretary-General of the National Museum, and appointments of diplomats.

A Royal Decree in the same month granted minister's rank to the Secretary-General of the National Day Celebrations Committee, issued the law of the internal security service.

March also witnessed six Royal Decrees on ratification of a number of

international agreements and treaties, six more related to oil agreements, and a Royal Decree on issuance of the taxation authority system.

On March 31, 2020, His Majesty issued two Royal Decrees 42/2020 promulgating the Organisational Structure of the Tax Authority and 43/2020 ratified the Multilateral Convention, signed by the Sultanate on November 26, 2019, to implement tax treaty measures for the prevention of Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

Royal Decree No 44/2020 in April endorsed the Sultanate joining the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) scripted in New York on December 20, 2006.

April saw issuance of Royal Decrees on appointments in the administrative units of the State, Royal Decrees granting Omani nationality, a decree on official holidays, Royal Decrees on international agreements and treaties, and another amending the provisions of the Royal Decree on the members of Oman Human Rights Commission, among other decrees.

May saw issuance of two Royal Decrees on Sultanate joining international agreements, while June witnessed issuance of six Royal Decrees including establishment of the Private Office, the ratification of an agreement between the Sultanate and Slovakia on avoidance of double taxation, and prevention of tax evasion.

The same month witnessed His Majesty the Sultan issuing a Royal Decree, No 61/2020, on the establishment of Oman Investment Authority.

In July, Royal Decree No 65/2020 appointed a Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The month also saw more decrees on appointments, including the appointment of the Under-Secretary for Fisheries at the same ministry, the Under-Secretary for

ROYAL DECREES SET RECORD AS REFORMS GATHER MOMENTUM



IN SUPPORT OF THE REFERENCE MADE TO THE KEY ROLE OF WOMEN IN HIS ROYAL SPEECH IN FEBRUARY THIS YEAR, TWO NEW FEMALE MINISTERS AND FOUR NEW FEMALE UNDER-SECRETARIES HAVE BEEN APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY. THERE ARE ALSO NOTABLE APPOINTMENTS IN THE FORM OF YOUNGER MINISTERS, INCLUDING HIS OWN 31-YEAR-OLD SON, HIS HIGHNESS SAYYID THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM AL SAID, AS THE NEW MINISTER OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND YOUTH

Heritage at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, and the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, among other appointments.

A mammoth 28 new Royal Decrees were announced on August 18, 2020 which signalled a step in reducing the number of ministries (from 26 to 19) and the overall size of the government, and decentralising power by devolving authority from His Majesty to a number of these ministries.

A total of 10 ministries have effectively merged.

Royal Decree 94/2020 established the Ministry of Economy. The most notable focus seems to be on the economy, with the new post of Minister of Finance.

His Majesty has for the first time appointed a Foreign Minister, a Minister of Finance and a Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

Royal Decree 111/2020 named the new Council of Ministers, with notable changes at the top of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Finance and

the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

In support of the reference made to the key role of women in his Royal Speech in February this year, two new female ministers and four new female under-secretaries have been appointed by His Majesty. There are also notable appointments in the form of younger ministers, including his own 31-year-old son, His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, as the new Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The efficiency drive

A MAMMOTH 28 NEW ROYAL DECREES WERE ISSUED ON AUGUST 18, 2020 WHICH SIGNALLED A STEP IN REDUCING THE NUMBER OF MINISTRIES (FROM 26 TO 19) AND THE OVERALL SIZE OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND DECENTRALISING POWER BY DEVOLVING AUTHORITY FROM HIS MAJESTY TO A NUMBER OF THESE MINISTRIES

IN DECEMBER, HIS MAJESTY ISSUED A ROYAL DECREE TO ESTABLISH ENERGY DEVELOPMENT OMAN COMPANY (EDO) AS A CLOSED JOINT-STOCK COMPANY, UNDER WHICH PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT OMAN (PDO) BECAME A SUBSIDIARY OF THE NEW ENTITY

translates into these new laws which merge or expand a number of ministries to include other portfolios under their particular administration, including:

Royal Decree 88/2020 merges the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Legal Affairs into the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

Royal Decree 89/2020 establishes the Ministry of Labour, which will include the former Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Civil Service, National Training Fund and the National Employment Centre.

Royal Decree 90/2020 establishes the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Royal Decree 93/2020 amends the name of the Ministry of Housing to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Royal Decree 96/2020 amends the name of the Ministry of Oil and Gas to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Royal Decree 97/2020 amends the name of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Royal Decree 98/2020 amends the name of the Ministry of Higher Education to the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation.

Royal Decree 100/2020, which establishes the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Royal Decree 105/2020, which establishes the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (the previous Minister of Commerce and Industry is the chairman).

Royal Decree 106/2020, which establishes the Environment Authority.

Royal Decree 107/2020, which establishes the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises.

In September, Royal Decree No 114/2020 ratified the Government joining the "Convention on the Contract for International

Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR)", done at Geneva on May 19, 1956, and its Additional Protocol Concerning the Electronic Consignment Note, done at Geneva on February 20, 2008.

In the same month, His Majesty issued a Royal Decree No 118/2020, amending some provisions of the Income Tax Law.

In October, Royal Decree No 120/2020 amended some provisions of the Law on Penal Procedures and Royal Decree No 121/2020 promulgated the Value Added Tax Law.

In November, Royal Decree No 125/2020 was issued on the "Law on Streamlining Litigation Procedures in Settlement of Some Disputes" and Royal Decree No 126/2020 on the promulgation of Municipal Councils Law.

In December, His Majesty issued a Royal Decree to establish Energy Development Oman Company (EDO) as a closed joint-stock company, under which Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) became a subsidiary of the new entity.

In the same month, he issued Royal Decree No 127/2020 to transfer an adviser from the Ministry of Health to the Private Office and Decree No 129/2020 effected transfers and placements in the diplomatic corps. Royal Decree No 131/2020 was issued on the water and wastewater sector.

On January 1, 2021, His Majesty issued two decrees -- Royal Decree No 1/2021 approves the 10th Five Year Development Plan 2021-2025 and Royal Decree No 2/2021 ratifying the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2021.

Royal Decree No 4/2021 granted a Class A licence to the Omani Company for Future Communications to provide basic mobile public telecommunications services.

On January 5, 2021, His Majesty the Sultan issued a Royal Decree regarding the transfer of the Muscat Securities Market to a closed Omani joint stock company.



Anniversary

January 11

HM Sultan Haitham ascension to power

The Defence Council opened a letter by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos naming His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as the new leader of Oman. The new Sultan takes oath before an emergency session of the Council of Oman in Al Bustan.



February 24

First speech of new HM

HM Sultan Haitham gives first speech after a 40-day mourning period. HM the Sultan assures the nation that Oman will continue its peaceful stance and stated his strategies to improve the economy. In the beginning of his speech, HM said in Sultan Qaboos Oman lost the man who instituted this modern country. His loss has deeply touched us all.



March 9

New deputy PM for defence affairs



His Majesty the Sultan appoints HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said as Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

March 11

Supreme Committee to tackle COVID-19

Royal orders set up a Supreme Committee to tackle COVID-19 under the chairmanship of the Minister of Interior with a number of top officials as members.



March 31

Tax Authority unveiled

Royal Decree sets up the Tax Authority. The Chairman of the Tax Institution assumes the powers and prerogatives dedicated to the Minister of Finance wherever cited in the Income Tax Law. The Chairman of the Tax Authority shall issue the regulations and decisions on income tax.



June 3

Private office set up

Private Office established to oversee the operations of the civil ministries, reporting directly to His Majesty the Sultan. The Private Office is headed by Hamad bin Said al Aufi, former minister of agriculture and fisheries and significantly, also the former chairman of the National Priorities and Alignment Strategies committee for Vision 2040.



June 4

Oman Investment Authority established

State's General Reserve Fund, Oman Investment Fund, all government companies except Petroleum Development Oman Company come under the Oman Investment Authority. The Authority shall have a legal identity, enjoy financial and administrative autonomy and report to the Council of Ministers.



June 15

New committee on COVID-19

His Majesty the Sultan sets up a committee under the Supreme Committee on COVID-19 to tackle the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The committee is chaired by the Minister of Interior, Chairman of the Supreme Committee. It will deal with the economic consequences of the pandemic by devising an appropriate mechanism that ensures a speedy resumption of commercial activities to accelerate economic growth.



June 23

Interest free loans to SMEs

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issues orders to offer interest-free emergency loans to entrepreneurs particularly SMEs, self-employed entrepreneurs, as well as beneficiaries of loans of Oman Development Bank and Al Raffid Fund to ease the impact of COVID-19.





of accession



December 15

Oman Future Vision 2040 launched

HM the Sultan launches Oman Future Vision 2040. Based on national priorities on which Oman Vision 2040 is based, His Majesty the Sultan called for channelling all efforts and resources for the realization of goals and programmes of fiscal balance, the development of legal instruments for investment, the streamlining and acceleration of government services, the development of economic zones and the implementation of major projects, along with the upgrading of national expertise — with all this to be linked to the employment of citizens, being a top national priority.

December 9

Haya takes over water distribution

Royal decree on the water and wastewater sector said Oman Wastewater Services Company (Haya Water) shall run the activities of water and wastewater in all governorates of the Sultanate, except for the Governorate of Dhofar, where Dhofar Power Company will run water and wastewater activities.



December 3

Postal stamp on HM Sultan Haitham launched

HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham bin Tariq al Said launches first postal stamp on His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. HH Sayyid Bilarab also launched a commemorative stamp marking the 50th anniversary of the Blessed Renaissance march.



December 3

Energy Development Oman established

HM the Sultan issues a Royal Decree to establish Energy Development Oman Company (EDO) as a joint-stock company, under which Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) becomes a subsidiary of the new entity. The Decree stipulates that the appointment of the members of the board of directors of EDO — which has a broad mandate in energy activities, finance and investment — will be via royal orders from the Sultan. EDO's capital is RO 500,000. Along with PDO, EDO will own an interest in the Block 6 Petroleum Agreements and undertake any projects related — directly or indirectly — to the exploration, development, extraction, production, transportation, ownership, sale, storage and delivery of hydrocarbons.

October 12

VAT to be implemented in April 2021

Oman becomes the fourth member of the GCC to rollout VAT, following in the footsteps of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which have since introduced the new levy. Oman's Tax Authority has been granted up to six months after the tax comes into force to issue the Executive Regulations.



August 12

Job security fund set up

HM the Sultan orders the setting up of a Youth Job Security Fund to guarantee welfare of citizens. His Majesty the Sultan himself donated RO 10 million and encouraged society to participate at a later stage. It will support citizens who lost their jobs till they find new employment. The scheme will be funded by both government and private sectors as every employee will have to contribute RO 1 out of every RO 100 of monthly salary. The first phase started in November 2020. The second phase will start after three years of establishing the Fund.

August 18

Council of Ministers restructured

HM Sultan Haitham bin Tariq restructures the Council of Ministers. For the first time, Oman gets finance and foreign ministers. The Ministry of Economy set up after a gap of 8 years. 26 ministries pared down to 19. His Majesty the Sultan also appointed His Highness Theyazin bin Haitham al Said as the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. Ministries of Culture and Sports merged.



September 16

Dialogue with the masses

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq met some of the shaikhs of the Dhofar Governorate in Salalah as part of the dialogue with the citizens of the Sultanate. The meeting comes within His Majesty the Sultan's review of the wilayats' needs and requirements. The aim of the meeting is listen to people's views on development and explore ways to strengthen the role of government agencies.



October 1

First foreign visit to Kuwait

In his first foreign visit as Sultan, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq goes to Kuwait to offer condolences on the death of late Kuwait Emir Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah.





Innovative and impactful

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@PATKAUSHAL

“On top of our national priorities is the education sector. It will receive full attention, and it will be provided with the supporting environment, which motivates research and innovation. We will also provide it with all means of empowerment, since it is the base upon which our children will be able to participate in meeting the requirements of the coming phase of development.”
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on

February 23, 2020
For a nation being innovative and impactful are key to build the foundation for research, which is treated as a major yardstick for quality education and the nation’s strive to enhance its own capabilities. Keeping this in mind, the Sultanate has taken a leap forward to boost its resources and set up a system that strives for establishing an academic society based on innovation and scientific research. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s speech epitomised the national

priorities for the education sector.
To ensure that education, research and innovation go hand in hand, a major overhaul of the higher education sector was done to clearly prioritise education goals and stop the leakages of research and innovation. The country has always been striving for innovation and research which led to international recognition of researchers from the Sultanate, as many of them got awards, accolades and did real stime contribution to science and technology.

The issues like the challenges being faced by the innovators and solutions proposed by the researchers have always been encouraged and to overcome them all sorts of financial, technical and marketing supports are given to them to protect even intellectual property rights of such researchers. There have been models of local digital platforms in order to reach an integrated national platform that would help the Omani innovators transfer their ideas into creative projects that add to the national economy and

raise the Sultanate’s position in international innovation indicators. Among the most recent successful research projects was work on COVID-19 in March 2020 that involved 28 research proposals with a total cost of RO 280,000. The researchers are aimed at coming out with innovative solutions to fight viral diseases including coronavirus. The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (MoHESRI) is drawn towards a National Strategy for Research and Development 2040 (NSRD

2040) to focus on strategy plans for works on research and innovation in all possible sectors. The NSRD 2040 is aligned with the Oman Vision 2040, which among many other broad goals, is inclined towards building scientific temperament among the students. Besides NSRD, there is a country’s National Innovation Strategy (NIS) that is aimed at guiding the country’s institutions involved in research and innovation to priorities and achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

QUANTUM LEAP IN GOVERNANCE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

For a nation to take major strides in all sectors a perfect combination of both micro and macro styles of governance is highly recommended. The Royal Decree 101/2020 issued on August 18, 2020 is hugely effective in achieving a proper municipal affairs system in the Sultanate. It ensured a quantum leap in development initiatives. The Royal Decree brought a positive impact in all the 11 governorates and wilayats with an assurance to achieve better governance to fulfil the aspirations of the common

man. Additionally, it also aimed at better administration of governorates, implementation and following up of developmental projects, and decentralisation of power among governorates and wilayats at the same time. Accordingly, each governorate is given an individual entity, independence in terms of financial and administrative matters. Allocation of funds for various developmental projects, its management and disposal, and maintaining the budget reserves for future progress needs are part of this. In light of the Royal

Decree, the Sultanate shall be administratively divided into governorates for better focus and they are as follows: Muscat, Mutrah, Al Amerat, Bausher, Al Seeb, and Qurayat form part of the Governorate of Muscat with the capital city is the centre of the governorate. Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat, Rakhyout, Thamrait, Dhalkout, Al Mazyouna, Maqshan, Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands and Sadah will make the Governorate of Dhofar, and Salalah will be the centre of the governorate. Musandam Governorate comprises Khasab, Dibba, Bukha, and Mad’ha and Khasab will be the centre of

the governorate. Governorate of Al Buraimi consists of the wilayats of Al Buraimi, Mahdha and Al Sinaina. The centre of the governorate being Al Buraimi. Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah will be formed by the states of Nizwa, Bahla, Manah, Al Hamra, Adam, Izki, Samayil and Bidbid. The centre of the governorate is Nizwa. The wilayats of Suhar, Shinas, Liwa, Saham, Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq will make North Al Batinah Governorate. Suhar will remain to be the centre of the governorate. Al Batinah South Governorate includes the

wilayats of Al Rustaq, Al Awabi, Nakhl, Wadi Al Maawil, Barka and Al Musanna. The centre of the governorate is Al Rustaq. South Al Sharqiyah Governorate comprises Sur, Al Kamil W’al Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Masirah with Sur being centre of the governorate. The wilayats of Ibra, Al Mudhaibi, Bidiya, Al Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid, Dima W’ attaein will make North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and Ibra is the centre of the governorate. Al Dhahirah Governorate is formed by the states of Ibri, Yanqul, Dhank and the centre of the governorate is Ibri.

Al Wusta Governorate consists of the wilayats of Haima, Mahout, Al Duqm and Al Jazir. Haima is the centre of the governorate. The Royal Decree for the reorganisation and devolvement programmes is considered a gigantic leap towards better and more efficient management of the governorates because it helps them in specialising and developing while investing resources that are promoted to achieve sustainable development. The job-seekers will be given ample opportunities thus the nation will be able to tap their potential to the best results.



Oman International Rally returns

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) hosted the Oman International Rally, Oman leg of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc), from February 6 to 8, 2020. Oman rally sensation Abdullah al Rawahi finished second behind rally great Nasser Saleh al Attiyah of Qatar.



AL RAWAHI EXCELS

- Al Rawahi said it was a great feeling to be on the Merc podium along with some top rally drivers.
- In 2019, Abdullah became the first Omani and GCC driver to win Jordan Rally in its 45-year history.
- Al Rawahi was partnered by Jordanian Ata Hmoud in their Ford Fiesta R5 in the Oman International Rally.
- Al Attiyah kept his dominance of the opening leg of Merc 2020 Championship with a convincing start-to-finish victory.
- The Qatari and French co-driver Matthieu Baumel won each of the 12 special stages (SS9 was cancelled) in their Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 and romped to a winning margin of 5min 04.1sec on Oman's return to the regional series for the first time since 2015.
- The success was Al Attiyah's sixth in Oman as he tries to break Mohammed Ben Sulayem's record of seven wins in the Sultanate. Baumel has now won the event twice (2015 and 2020).
- Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al Attiyah and Italian co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini finished third in their Ford Fiesta R5s.



The Omani drivers put up a great show in the rally. But there is no surprise knowing their interest in rallying and motorsports. Abdullah came second and is a promising driver

NASSER SALEH AL ATIYAH

Qatari driver

It was high-competition field with the presence of world champion Nasser al Attiyah. We took part with a new car and it was highly challenging and testing race for us.

ABDULLAH AL RAWAHI

Omani driver



ZAKARIYA TAKES MERC 2 HONOURS

- Not to forget, Oman's back-to-back rally champion Zakariya al Aufi converted his knowledge of the rally stages into a career-best performance in the Merc event to finish fourth.
- "This is my third Merc rally and my best ever performance so far. I am very happy to finish first in the Merc 2 category," the winner of Oman Rally 2017-18 and 2018-19 said.
- Both Al Zubair and Jarah al Tauqi retired on the second loop with technical issues and that paved the way for fourth-placed Al Aufi to pip Al Thefiri, fifth, to Merc 2 honours. Omani drivers Khalid al Manji and Jassim al Muqahwi reached the finish sixth and seventh overall.

Al Musannah to host Olympic class world sailing meet

Oman Sail will host a 400-strong fleet of the world's best sailors when the World Championships for three Olympic classes kick off in November 2021. Taking place in Asia for the first time in its history, sailors in the 49er, 49erFX, and Nacra 17 class will kickstart their path to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games during the six-day event.

The championship will run from 16-21 November 2021 at Al Musannah Sports City, driving tourism in the governorate and further enhancing Oman's pedigree as a world-class host of major international events. It is anticipated that Olympians continuing their racing careers will take part at the Championship alongside the next generation of high-performance doubles sailors, all looking to start their 2024 Olympic campaign in good form.



ASIAN WINDSURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Also, the Sultanate has been chosen to host the 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, marking a return to elite international competition for the Techno293, Techno293Plus and the foiling Formula Windsurfing class, which is included for the first time in Asian Windsurfing Championship history.

Taking place in Khasab, Musandam Governorate, and anticipating fifty of the best windsurfers to compete over six days between 11-16 October 2021. These include past champions and promising young riders from 15 countries in Asia.



Oman's Test cricket dreams gain flight

As the Sultanate celebrates the first anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham's ascension, it is nothing but sheer coincidence that cricket, of which the HM has been a great patron, has got a huge shot in the arm.



This is a phenomenal time for us. We had the lows of 2020 when there was little or no cricket and then we come to 2021 and we come out with a bang. We have received our first Test accreditation for Ground No.1 which is really a phenomenal, uplifting, mood enhancing vaccine that we could have got for cricket in Oman

PANKAJ KHIMJI

Oman Cricket, Senior Board member



This is a big news and a wonderful achievement for Oman Cricket. The New Year has started on such a promising note for the Sultanate. Apart from UAE, Oman is the only other Associate nation to enjoy Test, ODI and T20I status. This is a very proud moment for us all

MADHU JESRANI

Secretary, Oman Cricket



Muscat's Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) Ground I has received the approval to host Test matches with Afghanistan opting to host their 'home' Test series against Zimbabwe in February in Muscat.

Oman becomes **the second** Associate team after the UAE to get ICC approval to host Test matches.



KANAK KHIMJI

Oman Cricket Chairman



Oman Cricket is delighted to know that the Sultanate has become an accredited venue for Test matches, ODI and T20 Internationals. The credit must go to our chairman Kanak Khimji and the Board of Directors for guiding us through thick and thin all these years. This honour and achievement is a realisation of our chairman's dream. Oman hosting Test matches and all forms of international cricket is a dream come true. This was his vision and we should all thank him for guiding us to the path

DULEEP MENDIS

Head Coach and Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket

Oman hosts Asian Olympic Council Executive Meeting

The Sultanate hosted the prestigious 74th Executive Board meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) in December 2020 which was attended by the OCA President Shaikh Ahmad al Fahad al Sabah.

- The OCA meeting decided on the 2030 and 2034 Asian Games bids
- In the meeting, Doha won the bid to host the 2030 Asian Games while Riyadh was selected to host the 2034 edition.
- The voting was conducted through a secure online system. A series of rehearsals were done on familiarising the officials with the methodology of the voting procedure.



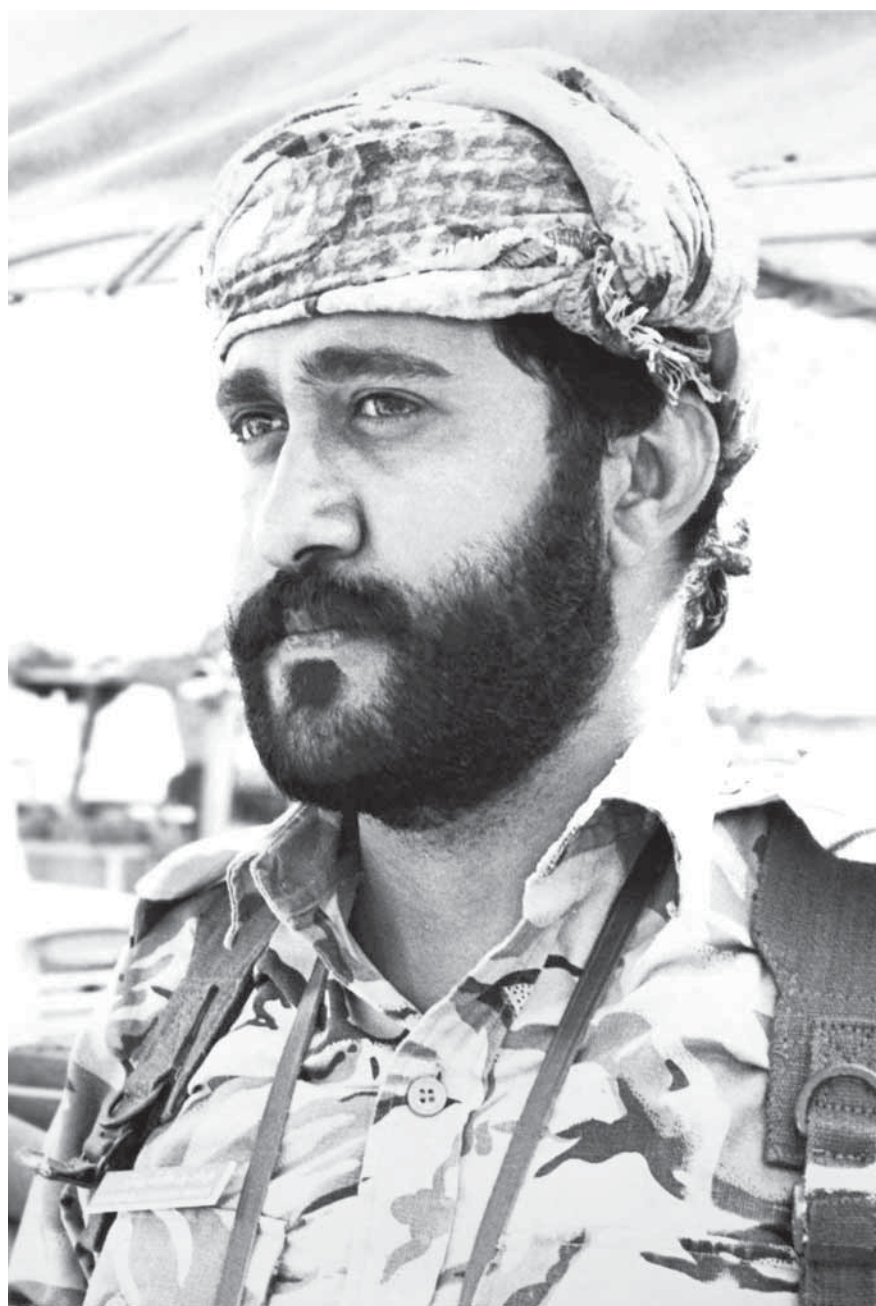
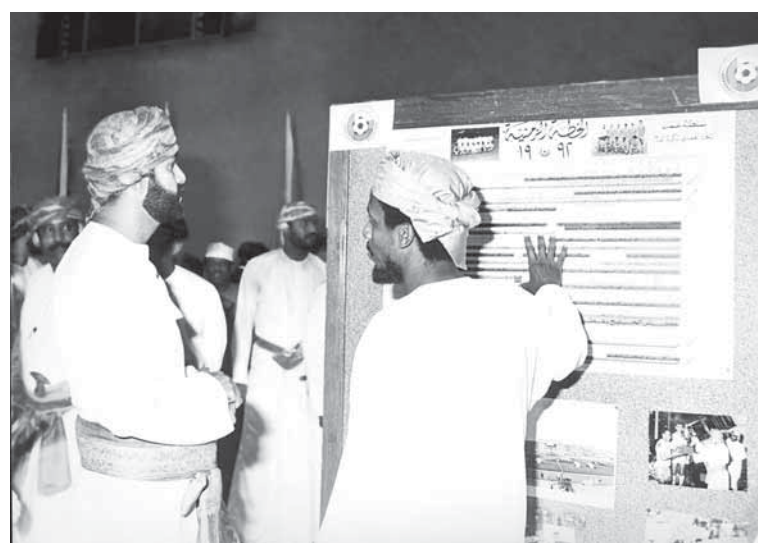
Two countries from Gulf show their commitment, interest and hard work. I am proud of the system and level of the presentation delivered by Riyadh city and Doha city. I have visited both corners and the prepared presentation was better than many countries who have hosted Olympic Games. I am wishing good luck to both cities.

SHAIKH AHMAD AL FAHAD AL SABAH

OCA President



HM's LIFE IN PICTURES





HEIR TO RICH LEGACY

