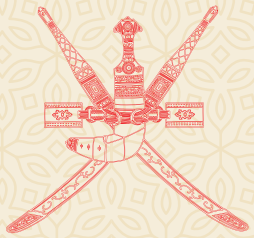

Oman

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

In The Name of God
The Compassionate, The Merciful

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

Great Truth of God

Surat al Kahf (XV111,30)

His Majesty the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said

May he rest in peace

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

May God bless and protect him

Introduction

The Sultanate's gradual emergence from lockdowns and low energy prices gathered pace in 2022. Broader horizons were beckoning, giving impetus to the renewed renaissance that is propelling us towards the vision of Oman 2040. Now, three years into a decade that began with unprecedented challenges, we can see that a brighter, stronger, more confident Oman has been animated rather than distressed by adversity. His Majesty Sultan Haitham resolved to navigate the country through crisis and predicament and today, as abundance rebuilds on a new footing, the outcome of that resolve can be seen everywhere as a measure of his leadership.

The administrative reform urged along by His Majesty has been responsible for creating a more harmonised, integrated system of government, a smoother functioning private sector and a more user friendly civil bureaucracy. Consequently, the positive effect is being felt across the economy and across politics and society.

Meanwhile, a review of the medium-term financial strategy (2020-2024) promoted by His Majesty -and vindicated by the results achieved to date - shows it to be in lockstep with the current chapters of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and of Oman 2040. Preliminary performance results for 2022 revealed a satisfying financial surplus of some OMR1.146 billion. The 2022 budget also came in ahead of estimates as a result of the rise in global oil prices. This positive development was instrumental to a strong degree in accelerating the economic recovery and improving the financial and economic outlook. Additional financial revenues have been steered towards a leaner management of the lending portfolio, a reduction in public debt, enhanced social spending, and stimulated economic growth.

Reflecting this expansive new mood, the Sultanate, in its budget for 2023, has introduced projects that will have a direct developmental impact, at a cost to the treasury of some OMR200 million. In addition, the social protection system is benefiting from an injection of OMR384 million, bringing integrated social protection to the neediest groups, a boost to investments that will ensure greater financial sustainability, and an improved work environment, thanks to earlier retirement benefits.

This yearbook is intended to sketch the progress recently achieved by the Sultanate as it enters a new era of growth. It will hopefully illuminate the background and objectives that paved the way to the renewed Omani renaissance to which His Majesty has committed his highest endeavours. May he be blessed and protected by the Almighty in these endeavours and may he be afforded the gifts of extended good health and wellbeing. And may the Sultanate of Oman be granted the security and prosperity it has worked with such diligence to earn.

Ministry of Information

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Sultan Haitham .. sustaining upward momentum

Three years into the renewed Omani renaissance, the goals of Oman 2040 are driving the momentum needed to sustain the major evolution that is taking place. His Majesty Sultan Haitham has inaugurated new phases of the project, urging them along to completion. In the vision of Oman 2040, and of the renewed renaissance that is rolling out that vision, lies a broad horizon of transformational change, and Sultan Haitham is leading the path to its manifestation. The task is a considerable one, well-designed and closely and constantly monitored since its launch as a grand national initiative by the late Sultan Qaboos. Today, Oman is a greatly transformed nation, internally and in its position in the region and the world beyond; and the renewed renaissance "proceeds in the sure footsteps of the late Sultan towards a future both abundant and secure for the good land of Oman and for all of its citizens."

The Sultanate is now entering a crucial phase in the renewed renaissance, if the full aspirations of Oman 2040 are to be met, and within the timeframe assigned to them; and if the successes already achieved are to be maintained. At stake are the tangible results of the work so far, in the form of accomplished developments which must be preserved, but also the somewhat intangible process of securing the homeland, of maintaining its stability and reputation for stability. Sultan Haitham has pledged and honoured a commitment to the manifestation of Oman 2040, when the Sultanate will be home to smart, sustainable cities; a place where social and economic prosperity and social justice are fundamentals accessible to

all; where economic growth coexists comfortably alongside social welfare beneath a flexible state apparatus, responsible governance, and effective oversight.

An early target in this stage of the transformation process was the increasingly unwieldy state administrative apparatus, which has been gradually restructured over the past three years. Some ministries have been merged to eliminate overlap, some had portfolio titles adjusted; redundant semi-state councils and commissions have been discontinued and new ones established more appropriate to current needs; ministerial functions have been amended as necessary; the Council of Ministers reorganised. All of these changes have had the effect of streamlining the process of government, enabling the structure to move forward with greater effectiveness, better equipped to handle the challenges of accelerated development. Moreover, in parallel with the structural adjustments to the system, legislation relevant to government has been reviewed, for better alignment with the objectives of Oman 2040.

His Majesty has given studied attention to the mechanisms of government decision-making. On 16 June 2022, he published his decision to restructure the Council of Ministers, the second reshuffle announced since his accession. As an all-important priority, the performance of government, and of the administrative apparatus of the state, is key to the attainment of Oman Vision 2040, and must therefore be subject to constant review. A further innovation was the creation of the Supreme Judicial Council, presided over by His Majesty, which will oversee the reform necessary to create a successful judicial system operating under the highest standards of justice, integrity and transparency. The new system will bring the agencies of litigation and of public prosecution together beneath a single judicial authority, facilitating legal processes today and easing passage to the judicial realities of Oman 2040.

Royal Decree No 35/2022 defined the terms of reference of a reorganised judicial affairs administration which would be compliant with the provisions of the Basic Law of the State and with the objectives of Oman 2040. The reform achieves integration between the principal branches of the judicial authority as well as harmonising procedures that link the judicial authority and the apparatus of state, a development that brings many benefits to the public interest.

At a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council chaired by His Majesty on 23 June 2022, it was decided that all necessary legal measures be taken with dispatch to amend laws and royal decrees of relevance to the judiciary, conformant with the terms of Royal

Decree No 35/2022 and with the importance of continuing to converge the governance and procedures of the judicial system to align with the broad direction of the digital transformation and of Oman Vision 2040.

Royal Decree No 36/2022 brought new decentralised powers to the governorates and new vigour to the administration of their respective economic and social aspirations. The decentralised perspective is more modern, more confident in its deferral to local government objectives, enabling the Sultanate's 11 governorates to best identify their respective needs and potential. It appeals to the individual strengths of the regional jurisdictions, while serving the larger national goals of 2040, embodied in the overriding principle of sustainable development. It benefits the creation of an attractive, diverse investment environment, of optimal exploitation of resources, and of upgraded local and municipal services in all areas.

The Decree outlined a harmonised organisational structure for all governorates and abolished the Provincial Affairs Council. It outlined the formation, terms of reference and legal personality of the new governorate structure, which would have financial and administrative independence. It added two new wilayat to the administrative division of the Sultanate of Oman, raising the administrative status of both Jabal al Akhdar and Sinaw to that of wilayah. This brings the number of wilayat to 63 across the Sultanate. Their newfound status will facilitate the efforts of Jebel al Akhdar and Sinaw in attracting investment, developing their resources and upgrading local services.

Sultan Haitham has outlined his principal motivation in expanding the powers of local administrations, explaining that the decentralised approach was designed to assist them in "determining their developmental, economic and social priorities, benefiting from the comparative advantage among them, and simplifying service procedures for citizens." Regional development within the Sultanate is a priority of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, which is redefining national development plans with reference to geographical, demographic and resource-specific strengths, for greater efficiency and balance.

The rollout of the Governorates Development Programme is being seed-funded by an initiative of His Majesty that allocates the sum of OMR20 million to each governorate over the course of the Tenth Five-Year Plan. The funds will be used at the discretion of the governorates to bankroll selected local development projects and disbursed via the development budget's electronic system. Aggregate financial allocations for these projects for 2023 AD amounts to OMR1.2 billion.

At meetings with local dignitaries and representatives, His Majesty Sultan Haitham reasserted the strong bonds that exist between leader and citizens

It is a direct approach to leadership and to identifying the shortest and most effective routes to the resolution of challenges and fulfilment of local aspirations. His Majesty has held direct meetings with sheikhs, dignitaries, and local notables across the Sultanate, cementing the cohesion between leadership and people that lies at the heart of Oman's indestructible social stability.

These meetings have deeply felt connotations for His Majesty, who believes fully in the value of listening directly to the honestly stated needs of local public representatives, as he believes fully in the process of decentralisation. As a model that fits well with overall national goals for the future decades, governorates will gain ever greater autonomy in the management of their affairs, both in the determination of their respective economic and social destinies and in responsibility for the resolution of local tasks and challenges.

During his 4 January 2022 meetings with sheikhs from the wilayat of Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta governorates at Al Shamoukh al Amer Fort in Manah, His Majesty gave royal directives to raise the sums allocated to each governorate under the Governorate Development Programme from OMR10 million to

Sultan Haitham confirmed the ongoing commitment of his government to policies that sustain progress in every aspect of life across the Sultanate, and without risk to economic stability.

OMR20 million over the years of the Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) beginning in 2022. He directed the governors to submit an annual implementation plan to the concerned authorities on how they are planning to utilise these allocations.

His Majesty has been generous in his praise, and financial support, for the role played in Omani society by the Omani Women's Associations. He has also singled out for their valuable contribution the nation's many public and private rehabilitation centres for persons challenged by disability, ensuring that all such entities, which manifest some of the most noble characteristics of those who serve them, are adequately provided for and rewarded for their efforts.

During his 9 January 2022 meeting with the sheikhs of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate at Fort Al Shomoukh al Amer in Manah, His Majesty focused discussions on the value of entrepreneurship and of the small and medium enterprise sector. He spoke of the encouragement SMEs bring to local economies, of their ability to create job opportunities locally by maximising the comparative advantages of specific regions and districts. He encouraged resourceful members of local communities to take the initiative and establish their own projects, with the help of generous assistance packages

His Majesty assured citizens and observers that government development policies are proceeding apace and that the restructuring of state institutions is being carried out in the best service of nation and people.

provided by supportive government entities affiliated to the Ministry of Finance, to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, and the Oman Development Bank.

On 10 January 2022, Sultan Haitham met with the sheikhs of Al Sharqiyah North at Al Shumoukh al Amer, where he touched on a number of issues of developmental, economic and social significance to the governorate. He outlined the broad government policies that aspire to bring prosperity to all of the nation's citizens in a climate of overall economic stability, and the place each citizen had in the endeavour to reach that positive outcome.

On 13 March 2022, His Majesty met with a number of sheikhs from the governorates of Muscat, Al Batinah South and Musandam at Al Alam al Amer Palace. In the course of the meeting, His Majesty raised the issue of licensing fees for the recruitment of non-Omani manpower and referred to his royal directives requiring a reduction of the fees associated with the issuance and renewal of such licences as outlined in the Government Services Pricing Guide. The overall aim of the Guide is to improve the business environment and enhance the competitiveness of the Sultanate in attracting investment and reducing burdens on the private sector, while

His Majesty Sultan Haitham met with the Chairman and members of the State Council.

also bolstering companies committed to raising Omanisation rates. Again, His Majesty spoke of the value to the smaller and larger economy of SMEs and of the need for the private sector to benefit from fee reductions in their practice of affording job seekers a constant stream of employment opportunities.

His Majesty the Sultan directed the addition of 25 food commodities to the list of food commodities exempt from value-added tax, bringing the number of exempt food commodities to 100%, or 513 in total.

During his 23 March 2022 meeting with sheikhs from the governorates of Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi held at in Beit Bahjat al Anzaar in Wilayat Sohar, His Majesty informed the gathering that the state's development plans were on track for full implementation and that the restructuring of public institutions was keeping pace, with the target of better services for both the country and its citizens as befits the function of government. On the new economic zone to be established in the Al Rawdah district of Al Buraimi Governorate, he noted that an opportunity existed to optimally exploit high oil revenue in discharge of the state's public indebtedness. All surplus will be spent on development projects implemented by the government.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham met with the Chairman and members of the Shura Council.

Emphasising the central significance of the bicameral Council of Oman (with its State and Shura branches) in the decision-making task of national government, His Majesty received representatives of each in separate meetings, where he noted the hopes pinned on the discussions, studies, projects, plans and opinions explored within the two Councils. Theirs is a work, he reminded them, that intimately affects the destiny of nation and citizen, that demands they strive zealously for ever greater prosperity for both. The meetings took place in December 2022.

His Majesty's meeting with the Chairman and members of the State Council Office took place on 19 December 2022 at Al Baraka al Amer Palace. He briefed the gathering on the status of current government objectives and urged the Council members to afford priority in their work to ensuring that the momentum and sustainability of the development process was maintained in the higher interests of the country. He also stressed the importance of stronger partnership ties between the Council of Ministers and the State Council, in service of the broad public interest.

On 21 December 2022, Sultan Haitham received the Chairman and members of the Shura Council Office,

His Majesty has pledged to implement additional development projects alongside those scheduled in the 10th Five Year Plan.

again at Al Baraka al Amer Palace. He reminded the visiting representatives of their obligation to exercise the powers granted to them under the Council of Oman Law; of the public aspirations vested in them; and of the need for them to harmonise their functions with those of the municipal councils within their constituencies to avoid duplication and overlap. In the understanding that the interests of the nation superseded all others, His Majesty urged the Council members to strengthen their partnership with the Council of Ministers in the higher interest of all.

His Majesty's concern for public welfare is a constant theme in his interactions with the agencies of government and he directed a meeting of the Cabinet which he chaired on 3 March 2022 to expedite a review of existing social programmes and the bases on which social security allocations are calculated. The objective of such programmes must be to provide an adequate standard of living for beneficiaries and His Majesty instructed the disbursement of a bonus allocation for the month of Ramadan. He also reminded ministers to do what they could to mitigate the impact of the high cost of goods and services on individuals and families of limited income.

In a practical expression of his understanding of the burdens borne by the labour market, His Majesty instructed the licensing authorities to reduce work-related and recruitment-related fees. Cost-trimming initiatives of this kind can have a direct impact on commercial, industrial and private sector business activities and serve to complement the long-term campaigns to stimulate the national economy and revitalise the investment environment.

The fee reductions were part of a package of measures taken at the recommendation of His Majesty that will have more immediate effect for ordinary citizens and small businesses than the larger programmes focused on national financial sustainability. The SME sector continues to be a focus of His Majesty's attention and he has been vocal in his advocacy of incentives that favour the sector and encourage new start-ups. At a Council of Ministers meeting chaired by Sultan Haitham on 31 May 2022, several significant stimulus measures with economic and social dimensions were approved, at a cost to the treasury of some OMR130 million. The measures include further financial allocations to the Housing Assistance Programme overseen by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. The expanded scheme will add an additional OMR70 million to the Programme budget over the current Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). It will release all citizens at present benefiting from the Ministry's Housing Loan Programne and whose monthly income is below OMR450 from the balance of their loans. Further support will be made available to mitigate electricity costs, offering consumers in the residential category with two or fewer accounts a 15% discount for the summer months, May to August 2022. In addition, payment of the job security benefit was extended to the end of December 2022 for citizens who had become unemployed.

Support for small and medium enterprises, and for self-employed and financially challenged individuals whose situation was caused or exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, was agreed in the form of a raft of payment exemptions. Included among the beneficiaries of such exemptions were borrowers availing of the Oman Housing Bank's emergency loan portfolio; entrepreneurs in possession of a Riada card; and beneficiaries of additional emergency loans granted by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority. SMEs were also exempted from fees and fines resulting from delays in the repayment of loans concluded with the loan portfolio formerly known as the Al Rafd Fund up to the end of 2022. Private and commercial vehicles were relieved from payment of fines and renewal fees for 2020 and 2021. Sums owed by certain Omani entrepreneurs and SME

owners and against whom detention orders had been issued and remained open, or who had been served with penal rulings involving dishonoured cheques, were settled. Cases involving parties not subject to the provisions of loan agreements concluded with the formerly Al Rafd Fund loan portfolio were deferred to the end of 2022.

The Council of Ministers has kept a close eye on the Sultanate's financial performance, and in light of the positive results achieved by the National Programme for Fiscal Balance in maintaining stability, His Majesty instructed the Council at its 17 November 2022 meeting to proceed with the launch of the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development, to have a lifespan of three years beginning from January 2023. The programme will stimulate the financial sector to become a major enabler for the sustainable growth of investment and of the economy.

His Majesty also sought approval for the implementation of a number of additional development projects to supplement those approved in the Tenth Five-Year Plan. These include dualisation of the Sultan Qaboos Road in Salalah, the rehabilitation and construction of a rainwater drainage system along the same highway, and the construction of a multi-purpose port in Wilayat Masirah.

So that the Council of Ministers could continue providing the necessary support to mitigate the effects of inflation on the public, His Majesty directed the adoption of further initiatives, including the accelerated promotion of eligible civil service employees who had attained seniority in 2012 according to a schedule beginning in 2023. Also targeted were rising vehicle fuel prices, to be capped at the November 2021 level up to the end of 2023. The job security benefit for laid off workers was extended to the end of June 2023. Current and retired personnel with borrowings from the Housing Loan Fund of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Royal Guard of Oman and having monthly incomes below OMR450 would be exempted from payment of the balance on their loans, mirroring the relief offered to citizens benefiting from the housing loan programme offered by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

A review of the plan to reduce government service fees led to a decision to cancel, reduce or merge an additional set of such fees in a stimulus to economic activity and greater competitiveness in the business sector, as well as to facilitate the bureaucratic process.

In a follow-up of Sultan Haitham's directives regarding the settlement of minor financial claims incurred by SME owners and by individuals against whom detention orders had been issued, the Supreme Judicial Council, after

first coordinating with the Ministry of Finance, settled debts incurred in respect of 1,169 cases involving SME owners and individuals at an aggregate cost to the treasury of OMR2,445,563.213. Accompanying the cash settlement was a release of all associated detention orders and property confiscations by the system.

In a gesture marking the anniversary of his accession on 11 January 2020, His Majesty gave instructions on 11 January 2023 for a cash bonus to be made across the board to the charitable teams affiliated to the social development committees in all states. The gesture honours the valuable work of the many selfless volunteers working for these charities, as well as providing financial support to charities that back up the work of the Ministry of Social Development. His Majesty is especially appreciative of the vital role they play in community service.

The Muscat Stock Exchange is a significant player in the government's efforts to attract investment from overseas. To encourage greater non-resident participation, His Majesty recommended a suspension of withholding tax and interest on dividends payable to non-resident investors.

The drive to attract overseas investment to the Sultanate, in particular investment in projects that contribute to economic diversification and provide job opportunities for citizens, is a major national priority, as is the financing of these investments. Royal directives have mandated an increase in the ceiling of loans offered by the Oman Development Bank from OMR1 million to OMR5 million, with higher limits for development projects that create added value. In addition to expanding its funding investment in suitable projects, the bank's capital would be raised to enable the increase.

The decentralisation of investment powers to the governorate authorities received a welcome boost in the form of Sultan Haitham's instructions to the Oman Development Bank to expand the list of activities and fields financed by the bank. The expansion will invigorate the investment climate beyond the environs of Muscat, bringing new projects and new jobs to the governorates.

His Majesty has welcomed a strengthening of the partnerships between the Oman Housing Bank and various local banks. Coordination facilitates the provision of financing to applicants, thus reducing waiting lists for loans, including housing loans sought from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The Sultanate's improved financial and economic indicators in 2022 validated the strategies that grew GDP, which came in at OMR44.9 billion at the end of 2022. This represented a rise of 32.4% over the figure for 2021, and a

surplus of some OMR1.146 billion over what had been an estimated deficit of OMR1.55 billion for fiscal 2022.

Net public spending increased in 2022 by some OMR958 million, much of which was directed at improving conditions for cash-strapped consumers. Targeted subsidies served to stabilise fuel prices, and expand reserves assigned to Oman Housing Bank for loan purposes. New funding fuelled development advances in the electricity, waste disposal, and food commodity sectors. Additional allocations were made available to families depending on social security, and overseas student scholarship allowances were raised by some 25%. Self-employed entrepreneurs qualifying for the Riada card were released from having to take on additional emergency loans, as were borrowers from the Oman Development Bank's emergency loan portfolio.

By the end of 2022, the government had succeeded in paying off a tranche of the public debt and securing more control over the loan portfolio. Overall public debt dropped from OMR20.8 billion at the end of 2021 to OMR17.7 billion at the end of 2022.

One positive outcome of the government's stringent fiscal control measures was an upward revision of the Sultanate's credit rating and of its future outlook by the various international credit rating agencies over the course of 2022.

Sultan Haitham, meanwhile, continues to direct national energies towards an acceleration of the major programmes that will fulfil the goals of Oman Vision 2040. These programmes are working in harmony to find sustainable solutions for management of the economy and public finances, as well as of the national workforce. The National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Development of the Financial Sector (Estidama), the National Programme for Economic Diversification (Tanwiya), the Government Digital Transformation Programme, the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nizdahar), and the National Programme for Employment (Tashgheel) have specific responsibilities in the manifestation of these goals.

In its budget for 2023, the Sultanate has introduced projects with a strong developmental impact, for which it has assigned some OMR200 million over and above core budget categories. Among the latter, OMR384 million will fund the social protection system, as dictated by Royal Decree No 33/2021, which had the purpose of targeting the most challenged income groups for integrated social protection. It also sought a review of investment strategy to identify the most efficient investments, such as would serve financial sustainability, and improve the overall work environment by funding a rounding up of retirement benefits.

2

Oman .. land and people
Deep roots and strategic connections

Oman has been a pivot point of civilisation throughout its long unbroken history, a magnet for passing cultures drawn to its strategic location and welcoming traditions. The armies, fleets and scholars of Sumeria, of Pharaonic Egypt and Rome, interacted with Omanis at home and abroad, while its fabled navigators and sea merchants assembled exotic ideas and commodities from their adventures on the high seas, to be nurtured and blended in the tolerant climate of home. An influential naval power, Omani ships plied the Indian Ocean, crossing the Arabian Gulf to the ports of southern Persia, or sailed north to Iraq, or west to the maritime trading posts of East Africa, then down the coast from Somalia as far as Mozambique.

To the Sumerians, Oman was 'Magan', or Copper Mountain. Magan was referenced in hundreds of Sumerian and Akkadian records, rendered in cuneiform script and indicating its importance in terms of strategic location and natural resources, in particular copper and precious stones.

Historical sources describe a steady migration of Arab tribes in the direction of Oman, where they settled from earliest times. The first major organised migration, at the end of the first century AD, was coordinated by Malik bin Fahm, a tribal leader of the Azd.

Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam, and did so voluntarily in the lifetime of the Prophet, who dispatched Amr Ibn al Aas to Oman's

two kings (Jaifer and Abd, sons of Al Julanda ibn al Mustakbir) to invite them to adopt the new faith. They did so enthusiastically and Oman would become both a fortress of Islam at home and a powerful force in its propagation abroad, particularly in East and Central Africa.

During the early years of the da'wa, or call to Islam, Oman was prominent in the apostasy wars that emerged after the death of the Prophet, and participated in the great Islamic land and sea conquests in Iraq, Persia and Sindh, and subsequently much further afield.

The Ya'rubi State is immortalised not only in Omani history, but in the history of the Gulf region and among Arabs in general, for it was the powerful Ya'rubi rulers who succeeded in expelling the Portuguese not only from the Omani coast, but from the coasts of the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean all the way to East Africa.

The Al Busaidi State, founded in 1744 by the Imam Ahmad bin Saeed Al Busaidi and represented in its succession today by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, further enhanced Oman's status as an influential force in the region, where it founded an empire in the first half of the nineteenth century that extended to portions of East Africa. This newly confident power recovered its naval primacy in the Indian Ocean and established balanced political relations with the great powers of the time.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the country had once again retreated into isolation, weakened by internal division and external influence. But 23 July 1970 saw an end to this reversal with the advent of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Once again, Oman banished misfortune to emerge from stagnation into a new era of self-mastery, with all its inherited aspirations intact and its prominence among nations restored.

The success of this chapter of exceptional growth and stability persists undimmed today in the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who at his inauguration on 11 January 2020 pledged unequivocally to sustain it. "Oman remains the supreme goal in everything we do, in everything we strive to achieve. We call upon every citizen, without exception, to safeguard the gains of the renaissance and contribute effectively to maintaining its triumphant forward progress, with the Assistance and Blessings of God."

The names of Oman

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

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

Oman was known by other names. The Sumerians and Mesopotamians called it 'Magan' and the Persians called it 'Mazoon', a derivative of the root muzn, meaning 'clouds and abundant flowing waters'. The latter attribute might be a reference to the early rise of settled agriculture in Oman, creating the grounds for a stable and prosperous society.

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

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

Whatever the exact interpretation, there is no doubt but that the name Oman is an ancient one and one with profound Arab and Arabian cross-links from time immemorial.

Geography and the vitality of place

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

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

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

Legacies of the past and modern landmarks share the story of a formidable civilisation.

where it overlooks the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Gulf.

Oman shares borders with the Republic of Yemen to the south-west, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, and the United Arab Emirates to the north. It has sovereignty over a number of small islands in the Sea of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, including Salamah and Her Daughters, as well as Masirah and the Hallaniyat Islands, and some other small islands in the Arabian Sea.

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

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

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

In the governorate of Musandam the mountains rise to a height of around 1,800 metres above the Strait of Hormuz, which runs between the Omani and Iranian coasts; the navigable international shipping lanes lie on the Omani side.

Omanis compare the Hajar mountain range to a human backbone. The Sultanate's main agricultural area, which boasts farms and orchards irrigated by groundwater, runs northwards from Muscat to the borders of the United Arab Emirates.

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

The mountain area to the east of Wadi Sumail is called al Hajar al Sharqi (the Eastern Hajar) and includes – among others - the wilayat of Sumail and Bidbid. The highest peak in the Hajar range is Jabal Shams in the Dakhilyah Governorate, the summit of which is around 3,000 metres above sea level.

At Qurm Heights in Muscat, the Omani coast narrows and becomes rocky with numerous inlets. The shoreline from South Muscat Point to Ras al Hadd is similar. From Ras al Hadd to Filim on Masirah Bay the Sharqiyah Sands extend over a band of terrain some 160 km long by 8 km wide. To the south west of Masirah Island lies a vast area of flat, stony ground known

as the Jiddat al Harasis. To the west of the Sharqiyah Sands is a stretch of low-lying rocky terrain around 250 km wide crossed by wadis running from north to south; these include Wadi Halfain and Wadi Andam.

West of Masirah Island is the peninsula of Barr al Hikman, which is separated from Masirah by a channel 14 km wide. It consists of salt flats, which can reach as far as 5 km inland and which, at some times of the year, are covered by the sea. The population of this area earns its living from fishing.

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

Frankincense trees grow in some areas – a living reminder that the region was once renowned for its trade in this substance – the main source of its wealth in ancient times.

Fresh water springs flow abundantly in Dhofar throughout the year.

The governorates and wilayat (districts)

The administrative sub-division of the Sultanates delineated under the modern state was approved by Royal Decree No. 114/2011 of 26 October 2011 and Royal Decree 101/2020 of 18 August 2020. It describes 11 governorates, namely: Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, Buraimi, Dakhiliyah, North Batinah, South Batinah, South Sharqiyah, North Sharqiyah, Dhahirah and Wusta.

In an initiative to strengthen provincial government and foster a more localised administrative system, Royal Decree No. 36/2022 of 16 June

2022 bearing on the administrative structure at governorate level replaced Royal Decree No. 101/2020, in line with a more contemporary approach favouring decentralisation in the work of the governorates. A focus on decentralisation in decision-making is expected to have a positive impact on local government and will be in greater alignment with the broad objectives of Oman Vision 2040. These objectives will be targeting sustainability as a core ingredient of any development scheme, as well as furthering the creation of an environment attractive to investment, the development of resources, and an upgrading of local and municipal services and activities.

Each of these governorates has its own distinctive administrative, geographical and economic significance and comprises a number of wilayat (districts). In all, the Sultanate has a total of 63 wilayat. Under Royal Decree No. 36 of 2022, the administration of a governorate and the conduct of its affairs is undertaken by a governor who is appointed by royal decree. The governor has the powers of an administrative head of unit as referenced in the extant legislation, regulations, and royal decrees bearing on units of the state's administrative apparatus.

Administrative oversight for all governorates has been centralised under the Ministry of the Interior, ensuring that issues of common concern to their respective areas are harmonised under unified regulations governing municipal affairs in all regions. In addition, the reformed system sets clear and flexible terms of reference for governors, facilitating them in carrying out direct executive tasks related to economic development; in identifying and exploiting income resources within their respective governorates; in enhancing competitiveness and encouraging investment in ways that fulfil the needs and aspirations of citizens, while remaining compatible with the government's broader national objectives.

The terms of Royal Decree No. 36/2022 harmonised the organisational structures within governorates by creating identical administrative divisions in each, while matching the size and nature of the various levels within the structure with the specific requirements of the various territories. The system is structured so as to facilitate smooth government, while enhancing the self-reliance of governors in their executive responsibilities. The governor then closely monitors the performance of the various municipalities under his control.

In a further step to streamline administrative and municipal output in governorates across the Sultanate and to facilitate procedures for citizens, the Municipal Councils Law was announced on 12 November 2020 in the form of Royal Decree No. 126/2020, and certain provisions of this Law were amended pursuant to Royal Decree No. 38/ 2022 issued on 16 June 2022.

Muscat Governorate

Muscat is at the centre of the country, politically, economically and administratively. It is the capital of the Sultanate, the seat of government and the administrative centre of the State. Muscat is a vibrant domestic hub of economic, tourism and commercial activity, as well as of the Sultanate's relations with other countries.

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

Muscat has the highest population density of all the provinces in the Sultanate, with a population of 1,302,440 residents in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 1,419,578 per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August 2022.

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

Muscat Governorate comprises six wilayat: Muscat, Mutrah, Amerat, Bausher, Seeb and Quriyat. The administrative centre of the governorate is Muscat.

The Municipal Council of the Governorate of Muscat has 21 members, including 12 elected members representing its various wilayat.

Muscat Governorate… where development proceeds apace on all fronts.

Wilayat (6)

Muscat | Muttrah | Al Amerat | Bausher | Seeb | Quriyat

2020 — 1,302,440 Population

2022 — 1,419,578 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Dhofar Governorate

Dhofar – the Arabian Peninsula's Land of Frankincense and Oman's great gateway to the Indian Ocean - was once the crossroads of Southern Arabia's fabled caravan routes. Today, in the enlightened half century of the modern Renaissance, it has served as an important gateway to Oman's progress and prosperity.

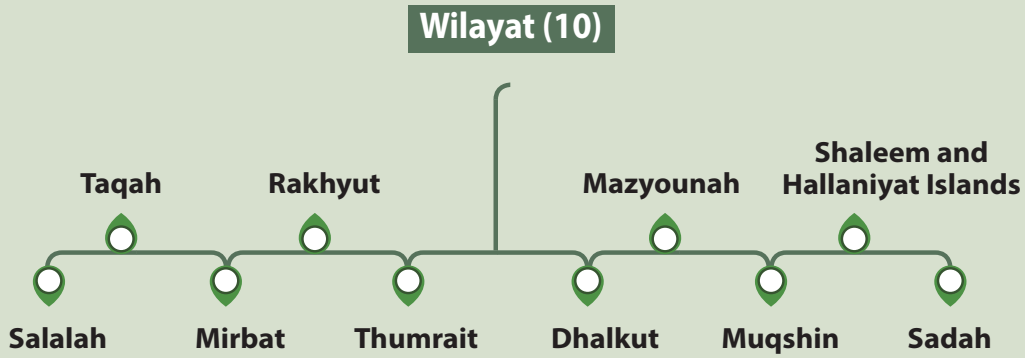
Dhofar Governorate lies at the southern end of Oman, with Salalah some 1,000 kilometres distant from Muscat. It borders the Wusta Governorate to the north-east the Arabian Sea to the south-east and south, the Republic of Yemen to the west and south-west and, to the north and north-west, the Rub' al Khali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

This governorate has 10 wilayat – Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat, Rakhyut, Thumrait, Dhalkut, Mazyounah, Muqshin, Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands, and Sadah. The administrative centre of the governorate is Salalah.

The population of Dhofar Governorate was 416,458 according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments for the year 2020, and 449,917 according to the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information for August 2022.

The Municipal Council of Dhofar has 29 members, including 20 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

Dhofar governorate is known for its contrasting seasonal weather. At times it is clothed in green beneath an enveloping mist (Ain Jarziz).



2020 — 416,458 Population

2022 — 449,917 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Musandam Governorate

Musandam is of great strategic importance, as it overlooks the Strait of Hormuz, the most important international waterway. It is important for oil exports and trade, both at the regional and international level, through which 90% of Gulf oil exports go to the outside world.

It is also the eastern gateway to the trade and navigation movement to and from the Gulf States. Musandam, located in the far north of the Sultanate of Oman, serves as the gateway between the Gulf and the open sea in the Sea of Oman and Indian Ocean.

The Governorate of Musandam has four wilayat – Khasab, Daba, Bukha and Madha. The administrative centre of the governorate is Khasab.

The population of the province was 49,062 in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishment, and 52,320 in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information for the month of August 2022.

The Municipal Council has 17 members, including 8 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

Khasab Fort is one of Musandam Governorate's most outstanding landmarks.

Wilayat (4)

- Khasab
- Daba
- Bukha
- Madha

2020	49,062 Population
2022	52,320 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Buraimi Governorate

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

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

Buraimi is seeing implementation of promising development projects which are designed to promote the governorate's tourism potential. The new tourism and development schemes, vast in scale and purpose, offer a pronounced and very promising advance to a level of development sophistication that will reflect not only on Buraimi but on the Sultanate as a whole.

The Governorate has three wilayat – Buraimi, Mahdha and al Sinainah and its administrative centre is Buraimi.

The population of the governorate was 121,802 in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 127,591 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The Municipal Council of Buraimi has 15 members, including 6 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

Buraimi Governorate has been singled out for many tourist-related projects designed to stimulate its economy.

Wilayat (3)

- Buraimi
- Mahdha
- Sinainah

2020 — 121,802 Population

2022 — 127,591 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Dakhiliyah Governorate

Dakhiliyah Governorate, consisting of a large upland block in the centre of the country, could be described as the Sultanate's 'strategic depth.'

From the Jabal al Akhdar or Green Mountain range, its terrain slopes southwards in the direction of the desert. A pivotal link between the Sultanate's different governorates, Dakhiliyah borders the South and North Sharqiyah Governorates to the east, the Dhahirah Governorate to the west, the Wusta Governorate to the south and the Muscat and South Batinah Governorates to the north.

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

It has nine wilayat – Nizwa, Bahla, Manah, al Hamra, Adam, Izki, Sumail Bidbid and Jebel Al Akhdar, and its administrative centre is Nizwa.

In the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, Dakhiliyah had a population of 478,501, and 509,212 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Its Municipal Council has 27 members, including 18 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

An aerial view of Moaz Lake in Wilayat Nizwa in Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Wilayat (9)

Nizwa · Bahla · Manah · Al Hamra · Adam · Izki · Sumail · Bidbid · green Mountain

2020	478,501	Population
2022	509,212	Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

North Batinah Governorate

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

The Governorate occupies a crucial geographical location along the southern shore of the Sea of Oman. It has long been a major Omani maritime and trade link with countries bordering the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

A visual representation of this governorate's major economic potential is the broad Batinah Plain, one of the Sultanate's largest agricultural plains. It is also rich in mineral resources, which are currently being exploited as a basis for several vital heavy industry projects.

Sohar Industrial Port is one of Oman's mega-projects. The Sohar Industrial Estate, which is linked to the port, continues to attract major industrial and manufacturing enterprises, including fertiliser, petrochemicals, aluminium and iron projects. These operations have been further boosted by the Sohar Free Zone and Sohar Airport, a new portal to the Sultanate. The Al Batinah Expressway, another major infrastructural project and a key component of the national road network, will facilitate rapid access to and from this busy industrial area.

The population of North Batinah Governorate stood at 784,681 in the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments of 2020, and at 833,766 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The North Batinah Municipal Council has 21 members, including 12 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

The Governorate of Batiniyah North provides a maritime window for the Sultanate on the outside world (Wilayat Sohar)

Wilayat (6)

Sohar | Shinas | Liwa | Saham | Khabourah | Suwaiq

2020	784,681 Population
2022	833,766 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

South Batinah Governorate

South Batinah consists of six wilayat: Rustaq, Awabi, Nakhl, Wadi al Ma'awel, Barka, Al Masna'a, and Al Rustaq. The administrative centre is Rustaq.

The governorate had a population of 465,550 in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments for the year 2010, and 496,266 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

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

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

Specific attention has been focused on the development of the natural warm water springs of Ain al Kasfah in the wilayah of Rustaq and Ain al Thuwarah in the wilayah of Nakhl, in addition to extensive public gardens and tourist parks.

The Municipal Council of South Batinah has 21 members, including 12 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

The Hawqin district in Wilayat Rustaq in the Governorate of Batiniyah South is remarkable for its rich natural landscape and abundant waters.

Wilayat (6)

Rustaq
Awabi
Nakhl
Wadi al Ma'awel
Barka
Al Musannah

2020 — 465,550 Population

2022 — 496,266 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

South Sharqiyah Governorate

South Sharqiyah Governorate, which lies in the north-east of the Sultanate, borders the Arabian Sea to the east, the Sharqiyah Sands to the south and Dakhiliyah Governorate to the west.

The Governorate comprises five wilayat – Sur, al Kamil Al-Wafi, Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan, Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali and Masirah. The governorate's administrative centre is Sur.

South Sharqiyah has seen the implementation of a range of development projects, along with a major extension of the road network and infrastructure specific to tourism. It is home also to major economic projects, including LNG plants, a urea-ammonia smelter and the Sur Industrial Zone.

South Sharqiyah had a population of 315,445 in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 337,647 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The Municipal Council of South Sharqiyah has 19 members, including 10 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

The Governorate of Sharqiyah South has several ongoing development projects adding value to diverse sectors of its economy (Jaalan Beni Bu Hassan).

Wilayat (5)

Sur
Al Kamil wal Wafi
Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan
Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali
Masirah

2020 315,445 Population

2022 337,647 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

North Sharqiyah Governorate

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

North Sharqiyah's six wilayat are Ibra, Mudhaibi, Bidiyah, Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid, Dima and Al-Ta'een and Sinau. The administrative centre is Ibra.

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

North Sharqiyah had a population of 271,822 in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 287,361 in the August 2022 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The Municipal Council has 23 members, including 14 elected members representating the governorate's various wilayat.

The Badia-Sur Highway is one of the new link roads that connect the Governorate of Sharqiyah North with the rest of Oman.

Wilayat (7)

Ibra | Mudhaibi | Bidiyah | Qabil | Wadi Bani Khalid | Dima wal Ta'een | Snow

2020 — 271,822 Population

2022 — 287,361 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Dhahirah Governorate

Dhahirah Governorate is steeped in history and rich in agricultural and tourist potential. It has undergone major positive changes across all sectors since 1970. The Governorate consists of a semi-desert plain that descends from the southern slopes of the western Hajar Mountains towards the desert of Al Rub al Khali. The Kor Mountains separate the province from the Omani interior to the east. It shares a western border with the Rub al Khali and a southern border with the Governorate of Wusta.

The Dhahirah Governorate has three wilayat – Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank. Its administrative centre is Ibri. The population of the governorate was 213,043 people in the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 225,509 in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information for August 2022.

At the crossroads of the centuries-old trans-Arabian caravan routes, Dhahirah is distinguished in addition to its intensive agricultural activity by several oil and gas fields and has benefited liberally from substantial development projects.

Its Municipal Council has 15 members, including 6 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

Wilayat Ibri in the Governorate of Dhahirah is a lush agricultural region, which is also home to impressive tourist attractions and historic sites.

Wilayat (3)

Ibri

Yanqul

Dhank

2020 213,043 Population

2022 225,509 Population

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.

Wusta Governorate

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

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

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

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

Wusta comprises four wilayat – Haima, Mahawt, Duqm and al Jazer. Its administrative centre is Haima. The population of Wusta was 52,344, according to the 2020 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 56,945 in August 2022, per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Its Municipal Council has 17 members, including 8 elected members representing the governorate's various wilayat.

Duqm Special Economic Zone, a multipurpose amenity of international stature.

Wilayat (4)

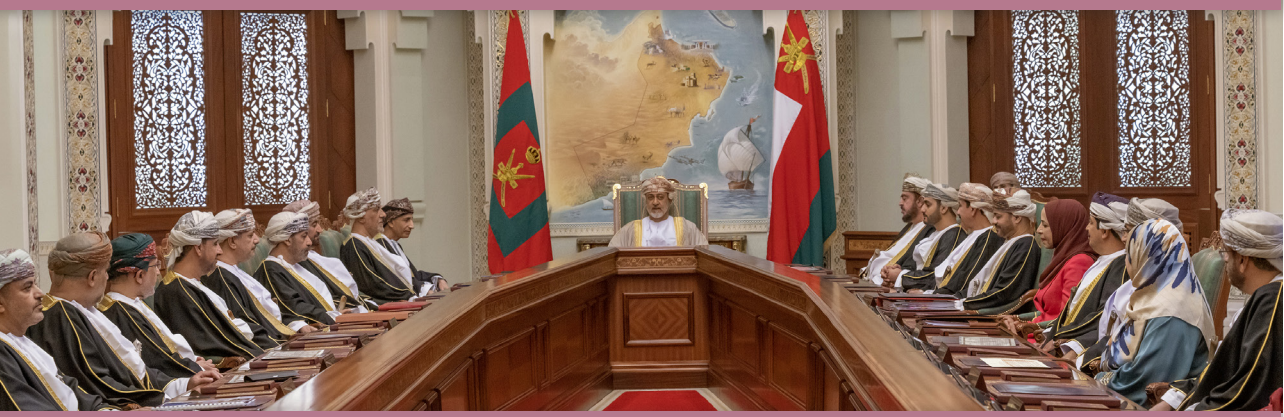
Haima **Mahawt** **Duqm** **Al Jazer**

2020 **52,344 Population**

2022 **56,945 Population**

Its population according to the results of the General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments.

Its population, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August.



3

Modern institutions .. embodying the aspirations of the future

Completing the manifestation of a state of institutions and law

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik pledged from the earliest days of his accession to pursue with diligence the path undertaken by his predecessor, His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Taimur, and he has not forsaken that commitment. Indeed it has been a very central preoccupation of His Majesty's to advance the late Sultan's legacy towards its grand completion, towards a consolidation of the Sultanate's status as a powerful state of institutions and law.

In undertaking this great task, Sultan Haitham outlined a detailed blueprint of the various areas for which legislation was being drafted. Crowning all was the monumental Basic Law of the State, and streaming from this was legislation bearing on the administration of the governorates, on the affairs of municipalities, on instruments of action. The vision of Oman 2040, with its many aspirations relating to health, education and scientific research, innovation, economic diversification, financial sustainability, provincial development and governance of the state's administrative apparatus, demands for its success an infrastructure of modern institutions, institutions worthy of the participatory democracy represented in the State and Shura arms of the Council of Oman, as well as the municipal councils in the governorates of the Sultanate.

With the publication of Royal Decree No 75/2020 of 12 August 2020 bearing on the state's administrative apparatus, Sultan Haitham effectively ruled into law the promise of his speech of 23 February 2020, in which he had affirmed his determination "to take such measures as are necessary to restructure the state's administrative apparatus. We will modernise the schema of laws, regulations, programmes and mechanisms relevant to labour, elevating its values and principles, and espousing and streamlining procedures and

measures of performance, transparency and accountability that will bring them into full harmony with the requirements and goals of our vision."

The overhaul of the state's administrative apparatus was an initiative imperative to the success of the current and coming stages of the development process, if they were not to be bogged down by an increasingly inadequate infrastructure that would gradually sap momentum. The improvements would bring new vigour to the process and encourage more active engagement with the expansive goals of Oman Vision 2040. At stake were transformative, and inevitable, economic, social and cultural considerations that will determine the fate of the coming two decades and beyond.

This was the backdrop that inspired publication of the Basic Law of the State on 11 January 2021, pursuant to Royal Decree No 6/2021. The Basic Law constitutes the legal framework of reference that governs the work of the various authorities and establishes the boundaries that separate them. It is the source from which the various state agencies derive the foundations and scope of their work. It lays out the legislative framework and associated considerations that are pertinent to the building of the modern state; as well as the relationships between institutions; the responsibilities, rights, duties and tasks assigned to the various organs of the state and to its affiliated administrative, executive, parliamentary and judicial institutions. Thus it ensures that each component undertakes its national task in a manner that guarantees harmony and complementarity between the Council of Ministers and the bicameral Council of Oman. It helps protect the independence of the judiciary in its pursuit of justice, equipped with tools that monitor and assess performance against a measure of fair adjudication.

The administrative apparatus of the state

Royal Decree No 75/2020 was the legislative basis from which the restructuring of the state's administrative apparatus was launched. It embodied the promise made by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in his powerful speech of 23 February 2020, where he laid out his commitment to the development process and the need to consolidate the principle of the state of institutions.

The state administrative apparatus is described in three chapters containing 18 articles. Article 1 specifies the component units of the apparatus as including ministries, military and security agencies, councils, and other executive units that derive their authority from the state. The definition includes any public legal person serving to manage a public service or economic facility, such as a public authority or institution. The state's administrative apparatus consists of central units, such as ministries, agencies, councils and

the like, and decentralised units, such as public bodies or institutions. The establishment and abolition of units of the state's administrative apparatus shall be by royal decree. Units of the state's administrative apparatus may issue regulations, decisions, or instructions within the limits of the powers assigned to them under the royal decrees issued in their regard.

Basic Law of the State

The Basic Law of the State was promulgated on 11 January 2021 in the form of Royal Decree No 6/2021. It confirmed the principles on which the Sultanate of Oman was founded, and which dictated and guided its broad policies, locally, regionally and internationally. It validated its international standing as an arbiter of justice, truth, security, stability and peace among nations and peoples. It confirmed Oman's determination to pursue its vision for the future. It cemented its commitment to protect the homeland against all threat, to preserve, along with its territory, its rich cultural heritage, and the unity and social fabric of its people, their rights, duties, and freedoms. It reiterated its support for the state of institutions, and reinforced the principle of shura (consultation).

The Basic Law of the State consists of 98 articles, laid out in seven chapters. It describes a stable mechanism for the transfer of government rule in the Sultanate, and a mechanism for the appointment of a Crown Prince, whose duties and powers it outlines, in a context in which the rule of law and independence of the judiciary are sacrosanct principles in the governance of the state.

Chapter Two of the Basic Law lays out the values that guide the state's political, economic, social, cultural and security policies. The third chapter covers public rights and obligations. Article 18 states that "life and dignity are the right of all human beings, and the state is obligated to respect and protect these rights in accordance with the law."

Article 21 states: "All citizens are equal before the law. They are equal in public rights and duties, and there can be no discrimination between them on the basis of gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, domicile or social status."

The Basic Law of the State, in its Articles 34, 35 and 36, guarantees freedoms, as represented in freedom of worship as conforms with established custom in the matter of ritual; that is to say in a manner that does not violate public order, or contradict morality. Freedom of opinion and expression, verbally, in writing, and by all other means, is guaranteed within the limits of the law. Privacy is sacrosanct, inviolable. All forms of electronic communication, of communication by telephone, telegraph, post or any other means is inviolable, its confidentiality guaranteed. It may not be monitored, searched, accessed, disclosed, delayed, or confiscated, except in such cases as are specified in law, governed by the procedures described therein.

Firm foundations

In its introductory articles, the Basic Law of the State defines the Sultanate of Oman as an independent Arab, Islamic, and fully sovereign state, with Muscat as its capital, Islam as the state religion, Islamic shari'a as the basis of legislation, and Arabic as the official language of the state.

Articles 5 to 11 of Part One of the Basic Law bear on the mechanism of government in the Sultanate, defining to whom the mandate of government devolves. It states: "The system of governance is Sultani, hereditary in the male descendants of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan, and provides that succession shall pass from the Sultan to his eldest son, then to the eldest son of this son, and so on down through the generations.

In the event that the incumbent should have no sons, succession devolves to the eldest of his brothers. In the absence of the brother, succession shall pass to the eldest son of the eldest brother, and if the eldest of the brothers had no son, then to the eldest son of another brother in accordance with the age hierarchy of the brothers.

If the ruler has neither brother nor a nephew from a brother, succession passes to his uncles and their male offspring in the manner and sequence outlined in Clause 2 of Article 5.

"The successor shall be a Muslim, mature, rational and the legitimate son of Omani Muslim parents."

Where succession has passed to an heir who has not yet reached the age of 21 years, the powers of Sultan shall be exercised by a Regency Council that has been formally appointed by the Sultan. Where he has not appointed a Regency Council prior to his death, the Royal Family Council shall appoint a Regency Council consisting of one of the Sultan's brothers and two cousins and a Royal Decree shall be issued from this Regency Council.

Also under the provisions of Article 5 of the Basic Law, a Royal Order shall issue appointing the legitimate successor as Crown Prince. The Royal Order will define his competencies and the tasks assigned to him. The Crown Prince shall take an oath before the Sultan prior to his exercising the powers or tasks assigned to him. The oath is as stipulated in Article 10 of this Law. Where a temporary impediment prevents the Sultan from the exercise of his powers, the Crown Prince shall replace him.

Article 9 stipulates that "the Royal Family shall be assigned a council with the title Royal Family Council, in respect of which the formation, structure and determination of its powers and primacy of its members shall be by means of a Royal Order."

The Organisational Structure of the State

The State's organisational structure consists of His Majesty the Sultan and the councils, the institutions and authorities listed below:

1. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
2. Council of Ministers
3. Defence Council
4. National Security Council
5. Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman
6. Supreme Judicial Council
7. Private Office
8. Higher Committees, Subsidiary Councils and Public Authorities

First: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

His Majesty the Sultan is the Head of State, its paramount and final authority and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His Majesty's person is inviolate. Respect for him is obligatory and his command must be obeyed. He is the symbol of national unity. He is the country's guardian and defender. Article 49 of the Basic Law of the State defines His Majesty's functions.

Two: The Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers assists His Majesty the Sultan in formulating and implementing the broad policies of the state. It is the executive body assigned to carry out these policies. Specifically, it submits recommendations to the Sultan on matters of national concern. It proposes legislation and drafts royal decrees, attends to the interests of the general public and ensures continuity in the provision of necessary services. It participates in drawing up broad development objectives and project implementation procedures and schedules. It conducts deep analysis of plans prepared by specialist authorities after first presenting them for deliberation to the Council of Oman. It submits finalised plans to the Sultan for approval, follows up on the execution of approved projects. It examines proposals received from individual ministries drafted in line with their specific competencies, and seeks and adopts appropriate recommendations and decisions in this regard.

The Council of Ministers oversees the functioning of the state administrative apparatus, monitors its performance, coordinates with its respective units, and generally supervises the enforcement of laws, royal decrees, regulations, decisions, treaties, agreements and court rulings in a manner that enhances compliance. Finally, it accepts any further competencies conferred on it by the Sultan, or authorised under the law.

On 16 June 2022, His Majesty Sultan Haitham issued Royal Decree No 34/2022 establishing a Council of Ministers, headed by His Majesty and with membership as follows:

His Majesty Sultan Haitham chairs a meeting of the Council of Ministers.

His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said
Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers

His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimur Al Said
Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs

His Highness Sayyid Dhi Yazan bin Haitham bin Tarik Al Said
Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth

HE Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud Al Busaidi
Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court

HE Lieutenant General Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Na'mani
Minister of the Royal Office

HE Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal bin Said Al Busaidi
Minister of Interior

His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi
Minister of Foreign Affairs

HE Sultan bin Salem bin Saeed Al Habsi
Minister of Finance

HE Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser Al Shaibaniyah
Minister of Education

HE Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said Al Said
Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs

HE Dr Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Harassi
Minister of Information

HE Salem bin Mohammed bin Said Al Mahrouqi
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

HE Dr Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed Al Habsi
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

HE Dr Khalfan bin Saiid bin Mubarak Al Shuaili
Minister of Housing and Urban Planning

HE Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said Al Mahrooqi
Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation

HE Engineer Said bin Hamoud bin Said Al Maawali
Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

HE Dr Said bin Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Saqri
Minister of Economy

HE Qais bin Mohammed bin Musa Al Yousef
Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion

HE Laila bint Ahmed bin Awad Al Najjar
Minister of Social Development

HE Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain
Minister of Labour

HE Engineer Salem bin Nasser bin Said Al Awfi
Minister of Energy and Minerals

HE Dr Mohammed bin Said bin Khalfan Al Maamari
Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs

HE Dr Hilal bin Ali bin Hilal Al Sabti
Minister of Health

Three: The Defence Council

The Defence Council was established by Royal Decree No 105/96 on 28 December 1996. On 25 January 2021, Royal Decree No 12/2021 was issued reorganising the Defence Council under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan and with a membership consisting of six individuals selected on the basis of their rank or position. These are: The Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs; the Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Supreme Commander; the Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office; the Head of the Internal Security Service; the Inspector General of Police and Customs; and the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

Without prejudice to its other competencies, as stipulated by legislation and royal decree, the Defence Council is competent to consider all issues related to the protection and defence of the territorial integrity of the Sultanate. It convenes where a need arises for announcement of a general mobilisation.

Four: The National Security Council

The National Security Council (NSC) is responsible for considering all matters related to national security. On 25 January 2021, Royal Decree No 13/2021 announced a restructuring of the National Security Council. The introductory article described a national security council to be formed under the chairmanship of the Sultan, the Supreme Commander, with membership consisting of the Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Supreme Commander; the Head of Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office; the Head of the Internal Security Service; the Inspector General of Police and Customs; and the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces. The Council may request the attendance of non-members as it deems appropriate.

The National Security Council has a Secretary-General whose appointment is decided by royal decree. The Council is supported in the exercise of its powers by a Secretariat-General that reports to the Royal Office, and a number of committees that report to the Council. The operating structure of the Secretariat-General , the assignment of the Secretary-General's powers, the creation of committees and definition of their competencies, are determined by a decision of the Minister of the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Commander in Chief.

Five: The Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman

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

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

The Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman consists of six governors, appointed and headed by His Majesty the Sultan. Royal Decree No 112/2020 was issued on 18 August 2020 creating certain new positions, including that of Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman, to which position was assigned the rank of minister.

Six: The Supreme Judicial Council

Article 82 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates that "the judiciary shall have a Supreme Council that supervises the proper functioning of the courts and their auxiliary bodies. Its formation and the nature of its operational system shall be defined by royal decree, and the law shall specify its powers insofar as concerns the functioning of judges and of the public prosecution."

Pursuant to these guidelines, Royal Decree No 35/2022 was issued with the purpose of reorganising the administration of judicial affairs. This reorganisation included the establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council, headed by His Majesty the Sultan, and having a vice-president with the rank of minister.

The Supreme Judicial Council has responsibility for drafting the general policy of the judiciary, acting to ensure the smooth functioning and ongoing development of the work of the courts and the public prosecution. It has facilitated the litigation process by overseeing the introduction of simpler procedures and easing access to the process for litigating parties. It proposes draft laws and royal decrees of relevance to the judiciary, and delivers opinions on draft judicial cooperation agreements between the Sultanate of Oman and other countries. In this respect also, it works to enhance cooperation in judicial and related matters with the relevant authorities in sister countries and with international organisations and institutions of like purpose.

The Supreme Judicial Council is a legal entity with financial and administrative independence. It exercises its functions

in all matters related to the judiciary with the assistance of an independent annual budget, which provides it with such specialist technical and administrative cadres as its needs to conduct its affairs efficiently. Its task of harmonising the work of the courts and the public prosecution under a single judicial system with a view to streamlining procedures and workloads and eliminating overlap in the system is moving the entire process towards greater integration and thereby benefiting due process.

The royal decree establishing the Supreme Judicial Council also mandated the creation of a secretariat-general to serve as the Council's administrative entity. The Council's Secretariat-General handles all of the administrative and financial affairs of the judiciary and is headed by a secretary-general, assisted by several assistant secretaries-general, working to provide financial and administrative support to the judicial facility, including the public prosecution.

Seven: The Private Office

The Private Office was established on 3 June 2020 by means of Royal Decree No 59/2020, and it reports directly to His Majesty the Sultan. The specific function of the Private Office is the daily preparation and documentation of matters for presentation to His Majesty the Sultan, or of those for which he has instructed that information be provided to him, or for which directives have been issued. The Office, therefore, keeps His Majesty abreast of the progress of work programmes and projects arising from the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Eight: Higher Committees, Subsidiary Councils and Public Authorities

Article 63 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates that "Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers specified, and their members appointed by virtue of Royal Decrees. The said Councils shall be associated with the Council of Ministers unless their establishing Decrees state otherwise." Royal Decree No 75/2020 bearing on the administrative apparatus of state specifies that the state's administrative apparatus should consist of central units such as ministries, agencies, councils, and similar, and decentralised units, as typified by public service bodies and institutions. A public service body is established with the purpose of managing a facility that serves the public interest without seeking to earn a profit; while a public institution manages an economic facility that is a participant in the development of the national economy. All such units of the state's administrative apparatus are established and/or dismantled by means of royal decree.

Higher Committee for Conferences

The Higher Committee for Conferences shall undertake the task of preparing, following up and coordinating in relation to conferences in which the Sultanate participates, especially conferences related to the Cooperation Council for the Arab Gulf States, by working and coordinating with the relevant ministries.

The Supreme Higher Committee for Five-Year Plans

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

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

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

Secretariat-General of National Celebrations

The Secretariat General of National Celebrations (SGNC) has the task of preparing and organising the celebratory public events that mark national occasions. The Secretariat is a legal personality with full financial and administrative independence. It was established on 1 March 2020 by Royal Decree No 6/2020, and its supervision assigned to the Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court.

On 9 August 2020, Royal Decree No 116/2020 was issued amending certain provisions of Royal Decree No 6/2020. The title 'Supreme Committee for National Day Celebrations' was amended to 'Secretariat General of National Celebrations' and the decree also stipulated the formation of an executive committee at the Secretariat General, to be headed by a secretary general and with membership consisting of representatives - each of a standing no less than ministerial undersecretary or equivalent – of each of the following bodies: The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment Promotion, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, and the Royal Oman Police.

The committee also includes one member each representing the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, and the Royal Protocol.

State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution

Financial controls were first introduced in the Sultanate in 1970. The state's financial and administrative control body has evolved through many stages of legal and structural adjustment, as well as through several changes of title since that time. Among the most prominent changes were those ushered in by Royal Decree No 95/1999, which converted the Secretariat-General for State Financial Control to a stand-alone institution with financial and administrative independence. Subsequent royal decrees regulated the work of the agency and further amended its organisational make-up.

The evolutionary process culminated on 27 February 2011 in Royal Decree No 27/2011, when the authority acquired its current title, the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI), along with broad audit control competencies. In the same year, the State Financial and Administrative Oversight Law was issued. Royal Decree No 111/2011, which subordinated the agency directly to His Majesty the Sultan, coincided with issuance of the Law for the Protection of Public Funds and Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest (Royal Decree No 112/2011). This latter, with its sweeping objectives and powers, was destined to become an important support for the audit institution in the exercise of its national role.

In 2014, the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution was entrusted with the duties of the Anti-Corruption Commission and with implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, after Royal Decree No 64/2013 approved the Sultanate's accession to the UN treaty.

On 11 January 2021, the Basic Law of the State specified in Article 66 the institution's competence to follow-up activity at all of the financial and administrative units of the state's administrative apparatus and other public legal persons, in such manner as is approved by law.

Oman Investment Authority

The Oman Investment Authority is the investment arm of the government. It functions to manage the Sultanate's financial resources and assets, to invest these in such manner as achieves the greatest return. It operates within the limits of its commitment to the implementation of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to achieve greater prosperity in a more sustainable economic context for the Omani people and for future generations.

In accordance with Royal Decree No 61/2020 of 4 June 2020 establishing the Oman Investment Authority, ownership of all government companies, investments and assets, with the exception of Petroleum Development Oman and the government's contributions to international institutions, were transferred

to the Authority. The transfer was consistent with the Authority's necessarily substantive input into the governance and management of these companies so as to adapt their policies and regulations to meet the evolved sustainability objectives of the Authority.

Royal Decree No 57/2021, which defined the operating system of the Oman Investment Authority specified the objectives and functions of the agency. Its Article 5 stipulates that the agency is the investment arm of the government, and that its function is to manage, develop and invest the funds and assets of the Sultanate of Oman in order to achieve the highest return, to build financial reserves and savings for the state adequate to supplement the general state budget and to achieve financial sustainability such that it may make a positive contribution to overall government strategies. These will include, in particular, strategies targeting specific economic sectors, as well as that enhance the investment environment and attract investment into the Sultanate.

Sultan Qaboos University Council

The Sultan Qaboos University Council is the university's supreme administrative body. The SQU Charter authorises the Council to formulate and implement general policy, and the Council carries out specific tasks related to enhancing the university's status and enabling it to fulfil its mission and achieve its objectives to best effect.

On 13 March 2022, the Council approved the establishment of a new programme, the Certificate in Arabic Language and Literature for Non-Native Speakers, to be delivered by the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at the College of Arts and Social Sciences. The Council also approved the introduction of a Bachelor of Elementary Education programme at the College of Education. The latter will provide teaching competencies for the primary or basic education level, helping to create exceptional cadres dedicated to elevating teaching standards in the early cycles, backed by technical expertise and research, as befits the accelerating advances the country is experiencing.

The Tender Board

The Tender Board was established on 30 April 1973, and in October 1984 Royal Decree No 86/84 brought an amended system into line with legislative advances drafted to keep pace with the Sultanate's economic and social development objectives. On 24 March 2008 Royal Decree No 36/2008 introduced the Tender Law, which works today as an effective tool for the protection and management of public funds. Its promulgation was followed up by amendments in the form of Royal Decrees Nos. 19/2011, 120/2011 and 60/2013.

On 17 August 2020, Royal Decree No 84/2020 was issued in the matter of the

Secretariat-General of the Tender Board, stipulating that the Tender Board shall have a secretariat-general benefiting from a separate legal personality and financial and administrative independence. The Secretary-General of the Tender Board will bear responsibility for all of the administrative and financial affairs of the Secretariat, representing it in its relations with others and before the judiciary. He will have the powers of head of the said unit as stipulated in the royal decrees and laws applicable to units of the state's administrative apparatus.

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

The Board exercises its functions by way of measures that guarantee the implementation of government projects, by providing goods, supplies and services of the highest specification at the lowest price, and by ensuring equal opportunity for all companies and institutions in the competition for public contracts. It is particularly supportive of small and medium enterprises, encouraging them to participate in the bidding process, and it is equally supportive of government strategy to provide work opportunities for the national workforce.

Oman Medical Specialty Board

From its institution on 4 April 2006 under Royal Decree No 31/2006, the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) has been advancing steadily towards the attainment of its methodological and scientific goals in the specialised medical education field. It aims to achieve status as a leading academic institution in this region of the world, and every year the Board sees an increase in the number of doctors enrolled in its training programmes.

The Board launches novel strategic projects annually that are in alignment with the government's directives for Oman Vision 2040.

From its inception and up to the end of 2021, the Board has seen more than 900 male and female doctors pass through its various specialist programmes. It trains doctors at six main training centres, including Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, the Armed Forces Hospital, the Police Hospital, Al Nahda Hospital, and Al Massara Hospital, in addition to four district branch centres, including Nizwa Hospital, Sohar Hospital, and Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah, bringing to 10 the current accredited training centre total.

Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit

The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit was established by Royal Decree No 100/2020 issued on 18 August 2020. The unit has a legal personality, financial and administrative independence and the capacity to own, manage and dispose of fixed and moveable assets.

The unit's mission is to see through to completion the various objectives of the Sultanate's vision for the future (Oman Vision 2040), monitoring their stage by stage outcomes and the performance indicators of the entities entrusted with achieving them. This it can accomplish by providing a stimulating environment for the creation of future vision projects, including of projects of economic or development benefit, and devising appropriate solutions or actions to mitigate the obstacles they encounter. The Oman Vision Unit seeks out potential partners, then works to cement partnerships between the various stakeholders involved in Oman Vision 2040 and then between them and the private sector generally, always with the goal of maximising the outcome for Oman Vision 2040.

The unit is building collaboration with government agencies, encouraging them to excel in a culture of innovation and best practice standards. It is reviewing closely all services provided to the public to ensure continuity of quality as well as to develop systems and procedures that ensure that all who deal with government service agencies obtain the best service available. Crucial to the success of this initiative will be a streamlining and simplification of access and processing mechanisms.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones was established under Royal Decree No 105/2020 of 18 August 2020 and enjoys financial and administrative independence. It reports to the Council of Ministers.

The Authority oversees the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the free zones at Mazunah, Salalah and Sohar, and all other economic or free zone areas operating within the Sultanate.

Under Royal Decree No 53/2022 issued on 28 June 2022, responsibility for the affairs of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates devolved to the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, which now exercises the functions of the industrial body in the matters of drafting general policy, as well as the regulation, control, supervision, and harmonisation of services and incentives offered to investors.

The Authority proposes policies and

strategies of direct relevance to the work of the country's special economic and free zone areas, motivated to enhance their contribution to the state's development goals. It makes submissions to the Council of Ministers for approval of such plans, then proceeds to their implementation and follow-up. It evaluates approved strategies and prepares studies and programmes that fall within the Authority's jurisdiction. It proposes the establishment of new economic and free zones, then completes the preparatory measures for issuance of the necessary royal decree to secure their establishment, selecting sites, defining limits, incentives, advantages and facilities granted to operating agencies and operating companies respectively. It is responsible for the regulation and control of the investment environment in the special economic and free zones.

The Authority is also concerned with promoting investment opportunities in these zones, operating both within the Sultanate and overseas. In this regard, it coordinates with other competent authorities to approve the establishment of legally compliant companies beneficial to the development of the zones, while managing, extending and promoting the sector.

The Capital Market Authority

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has worked, as legislator and regulator, to achieve for the capital market and insurance sectors the highest economic interests of the State. It strives to protect all parties interacting with these sectors, guided by a pursuit of justice, integrity and transparency that fulfils international best practice standards. It monitors the legislation governing the two sectors, issuing new laws or amending or replacing existing legal instruments to keep pace with current requirements and accommodate developments adopted by accredited global organisations.

Royal Decree No 5/2021 of 6 January 2021 converted the Muscat Securities Market to a closed Omani joint stock company under the new name Muscat Stock Exchange Company SAOC. The action was a significant one in its positive impact on the standard of service offered and powers granted in the drive to attract foreign investment and enhance the liquidity of the stock exchange. It has succeeded in increasing the trading volume and increasing investor confidence. The Muscat Stock Exchange licence was approved by the Authority on 11 April 2021.

The Securities Law issued by means of Royal Decree No 46/2022 is a key component of the strategy to upgrade regulation of the securities market in the Sultanate to levels compatible with current and future requirements. Tighter regulation is of crucial concern in light of the technical revolution, and demands legal safeguards to regulate financial technology and create a legal shelter for innovative financing instruments.

The Oman Charitable Organisation

The Oman Charitable Organisation has been able to achieve many of the lofty goals for which it was established. The Organisation concerns itself primarily with the receipt and collection of gifts and contributions donated to it as pious giving or voluntarily outside of the worship context. It passes this charity on to the disadvantaged or otherwise deserving, financing and supporting projects that take care of children, orphans and the elderly. In addition to funding social care projects that benefit citizens, it provides urgent relief both inside and outside the Sultanate to victims of disasters such as fires, accidents or weather emergencies. As appropriate, the Organisation sometimes channels its assistance through other social and charitable institutions operating in Oman or overseas.

The Organisation benefits from generous state subsidies that back up the resources collected from the public, along with grants, shares and bonds donated to it by private generosity, and returns on its own investments. It uses unallocated funds to generate additional income from revenue-producing initiatives, ensuring a stable flow of income for its many worthy projects.

Total donations received by the Organisation in the period from 1 January 2022 to 1 September 2022 came to RO3,103,885, representing the generosity of 192,648 donors. Total donations for 2021 were RO4,919,127.50 .

The work of the Organisation extends to the Sultanate's most geographically remote areas, where its contributions to charities working locally are facilitated by such beneficial technology as electronic payment gateways and information and communication technology that assist it in optimising the timing and nature of its charitable assistance

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

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

The Authority focused its energies on creating a telecommunications sector capable of providing all users with access to world-class telecommunications services at affordable prices, and to

this end, it has worked continuously to increase the number of licensees in the market and to provide more options for consumers.

On 28 July 2022, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority published a decision bearing on regulation in the implementation of communication services. The initiative will see tighter controls and improved quality across the board, as well as new job opportunities for national cadres. Earlier, on 22 February 2022, a regulation bearing on communication service outages was published, classifying service outages as planned or unplanned and describing five levels of severity.

The regulation dictated that licensees must commit to examining the performance of the most important components of their telecommunications network at least once a year. They must measure the effectiveness of emergency plans, and commit to implementing procedures and systems for managing and developing the telecommunications network, applying the technical and operational measures approved by the Authority.

The National Records and Archives Authority

The National Documents and Archives Authority is the body responsible for preserving, collecting, classifying and archiving documents and other records of national value in the Sultanate of Oman. Since its establishment on 2 July 2007, it has worked in close compliance with the terms of Royal Decree No 60/2007 to develop the documentary sector, using carefully selected preservation techniques. In this manner, it has managed to establish a sophisticated archival system based on scientific principles that facilitates document management within government agencies. As it applies these principles to best practice standards, it encourages ongoing scientific research and intellectual and artistic creativity in the field.

The National Documents and Archives Authority stores more than 577,000 paper and electronic documents in multiple formats, and the archive is constantly growing, reflecting its importance to the state. In addition to the Sultanate's official documents, the archive contains a vast record of Oman's folk history, all stored in a manner that both preserves them for posterity, but also facilitates access by scholars for the purposes of research.

The Authority maintains mutually beneficial relations with archival institutions throughout the world and has signed 19 memoranda of understanding with national representative bodies, international archives and document centres. These agreements complement its efforts by way of diplomatic channels or through its connection with countries with which Oman shares historical, economic, political or geographical ties. Where bilateral and joint contracts and agreements were concluded in the past, the NRAA endeavours to obtain originals

or copies of these, the latter case where the original is held in an international archive.

Under the terms of reference assigned to it, the Authority has adopted the Sultanate's openly collaborative approach in its field of endeavour and to date has hosted an impressive 22 scientific conferences and symposia for visiting archival associations. It also provides local and international libraries with the product of scholarly research, having issued 44 publications to date introducing Oman and its perspective on history through significant documents in its possession. These valuable studies are prized by researchers and scholars both at home and abroad

The Public Authority for Social Insurance

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has made significant strides in its drive to achieve social insurance cover for citizens working in the private sector. Its role is vital in protecting this segment of the working community, a goal which provides its principal motivation.

The insurance system has made quantum leaps in recent years, keeping pace with fast-moving economic change. The industry has shown a flexible attitude to early challenges and crises, finding solutions marked by a social and humanitarian dimension. Probably the most significant challenge in this growth trajectory has been the aspect of job security, and payouts to beneficiaries have seen sequential extensions, even as insured categories and small businesses eligible for temporary payments have expanded exponentially. A package of facilities was also provided with a view to ensuring continuity among those private sector institutions contributing to the nation's development plans. Insurance enables enterprises operating in a changing economic climate to remain flexible and pursue equitable employment practices, guaranteeing economic, social and psychological stability both for the insured and for business owners. It reassures Omanis privately employed in the Sultanate, as well as freelance and self-employed Omanis, and Omanis working overseas.

The Authority is keen to put in place at the earliest opportunity systems, policies and regulations to oversee the work of institutions with a view to ensuring sound decision-making and success in achieving objectives. One core objective is the attainment of comprehensive insurance coverage, with adequate benefits and privileges compatible with maintaining a decent standard of living for all segments of society. Its broad strategy is linked to the overall vision of Oman 2040, when the Authority is aiming through the rollout of its ambitious coverage plans to find itself among the top 20 social insurance institutions globally.

The Consumer Protection Agency

A Royal Directive was issued on 26 February 2011 calling for the creation of an independent authority for consumer protection, resulting in Royal Decree No 26/2011 of 28 February 2011 that established the Public Authority for Consumer Protection. The PACP Regulations followed on 5 April 2011, pursuant to Royal Decree No 53/2011.

On 12 August 2020, Royal Decree No 77/2020 amended the name 'Public Authority for Consumer Protection' to 'Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).'

Since its establishment, the Authority has pursued an integrated work system to exercise its mission as a protective shield for consumers by protecting them from illegal practices that may be committed by actors in the supply chain. It closely monitors the various markets in the Sultanate.

As the world opens up to an economy that is global in its scale and reach, the Sultanate's markets are required to adapt. The resulting spike in the exchange of merchandise through import and export has placed consumers at the mercy of fluctuating standards or outright fraud. Fraud has become the top priority for the Authority because of its unique responsibilities. Royal Decree No 54/2021 bearing on the creation of harmonised legislation to combat commercial fraud in the territory of the Gulf Cooperation Council States was drafted with a view to strengthening the legal infrastructure available to protect the Sultanate's marketplace from harmful practices, and has proved to be an important support for the PCA's role in this respect.

To bring its work in line with the standards required, the Authority implemented the ISO quality management system (ISO). This system organises and simplifies work procedures to enhance efficiencies and overall performance levels, using indicators as guidance. It has resulted in a shift in routine work patterns, which benefit from standardisation and best practice targets.

The Civil Aviation Authority

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

On 17 August 2020, Royal Decree No 85/2020 was issued in the matter of the Public Authority for Civil Aviation, amending its name to the 'Civil Aviation Authority.' Subsequently, Royal Decree No 60/2022 of 2 October 2022 relegated all functions relevant to climate affairs from the Civil Aviation Authority to the Environment Authority.

The Authority has been an active contributor to the development of both

the legislative and service aspects of the civil aviation sector and to the expansion of this crucial transport link both locally and internationally. It oversees the drafting and observance of regulations governing civil aviation in the Sultanate, issuing the necessary permits for crews and maintenance stations, concluding bilateral air agreements with other countries, and ensuring the security of airports and the safety of air transport. It sets out the financial infrastructure necessary to maximise revenue from the Sultanate's airports and facilities and to encourage investment. It oversees and checks, insofar as its sphere of competence permits, all matters relevant to the operations of airline and aviation-related services active within the Sultanate.

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

The Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education was established on 13 January 2021 by means of Royal Decree No 9/2021, which amended and replaced the previously entitled Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation. The competencies of the new Authority were outlined, the most prominent of which gave it power to establish a national system to oversee the quality of school and higher education in the Sultanate, ensuring that it measures up to international standards. Educational institutions are encouraged to build internal quality assurance systems, and public and private schools are monitored for compliance with the standards and procedures set by the Authority and their programme offerings accredited accordingly.

The Authority continues to perfect a comprehensive national system for the assessment of qualifications. Omani qualifications are graded within this framework, and harmonised with foreign and international qualification standards. The Authority publishes the results of its quality assurance and accreditation assessments, listing and grading Omani and international qualifications within the framework. It is also involved in training educational cadres in the methodology of measuring and ensuring superior standards within the school and higher education systems and as measured within its National Qualifications Framework.

The Environment Agency

The Environment Agency was established on 18 August 2020 by means of Decree No 106/2020, which abolished the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. The Authority enjoys financial and administrative independence and reports to the Council of Ministers.

Under Royal Decree No 60/2022, the Environment Authority was assigned the competences related to climate affairs previously handled by the Civil Aviation Authority.

The Environment Agency is mandated to propose policies and strategies relevant to environmental protection and sustainability, pollution control, nature conservation, environmental safety and the preservation of important ecosystems. It operates within the framework of the core objectives of sustainable development, the protection of wildlife, nature conservation, and the preservation of renewable resources. It works to ensure that all resources are exploited in a sustainable manner.

The Agency promotes broader horizons of scientific research in the environmental fields, by exchanging experiences, and collecting and applying scientific data.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Development Authority was established on 18 August 2020 by Royal Decree No 107/2020. Transferred to it were all of the allocations, assets, rights and obligations of both the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises and the Rafed Fund, along with all of the Fund's extant capital and its annual state allocation from the general budget.

The Authority is working on initiatives to expand the SME and crafts sectors as part of a comprehensive national development strategy. All proposals will then be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. It will be responsible for creating a regulatory environment designed to encourage the growth and development of SMEs and craft industries, as well as preparing the groundwork for such plans and programmes as further the objectives of the Authority. In this regard it will coordinate with other competent authorities to provide SMEs with financial, administrative and legal advice that supports their growth and enhances their competitiveness. Helping them produce high-quality products and services will be specialised centres offering facilities and skills training to international best practice standards.

The executive regulations bearing on the financing of SMEs and craft workers were published by the Authority on 18 January 2022 and specified the maximum amount of financing available at

RO250,000 per enterprise, subject to completion of an economic feasibility study and assessment of the project's required investment costs.

The Public Services Regulatory Authority

The Authority for Electricity and Water Regulation was established under Article 19 of the associated Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Water Related Sector, itself promulgated by Royal Decree No 87/2004 of 1 August 2004, as amended by Royal Decrees No 59/2009 and 47/2013. The Authority has a separate

legal personality and enjoys financial and administrative independence. It reports directly to the Council of Ministers.

On 12 August 2020, Royal Decree No 78/2020 amended the title 'Authority for Electricity and Water Regulation' to 'Public Services Regulatory Authority' and assigned to the new Authority a number of specialist responsibilities in connection with the regulation of natural gas transportation. The activities in question are those described in Articles 4, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 of the Oil and Gas Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 8/2011 and the Authority has been granted all relevant powers to to exercise its competence in regulating the transport of natural gas. These powers relate specifically to the conclusion of concession agreements for the transportation of natural gas and the issuance of licences for this purpose. These agreements will then be subject to approval by royal decree before becoming effective.

In order to determine the required levels of service that must be met by companies to qualify for licenses to distribute and supply, the Public Services Regulatory Authority, on 1 July 2022, initiated the application of standards to ensure that they meet best practice levels in their delivery of services to subscribers.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance was established by Royal Decree No 3/2013, published on 8 January 2013. The Authority was afforded a separate personality and financial and administrative independence and affiliated to the Royal Oman Police. On 30 November 2014, the working structure of the Authority was defined in Royal Decree No 68/2014.

On 22 April 2021, Royal Decree No 39/2021 amended the name from Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance to Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

Under Article 2 of the decree, the Authority states its purpose as the protection of lives and property, attaining public safety, reducing the risks of natural and industrial disasters, and minimising their effects should they occur. It is also responsible for implementing measures and procedures related to civil defence and ambulance work, including the provision of ambulance services on the roads and, in certain emergency situations, an air ambulance.

In exercise of the provisions of Royal Decree No 39/2021, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority on 6 February 2022 launched the Home Ambulance Service. This service offers a response service that provides emergency medical care to critical cases at home, followed by transfer to the nearest and most appropriate health institution. It is already operating in several governorates, having been launched in those governorates with the lowest population density as a preliminary stage. The service will expand gradually to reach all corners of the Sultanate.

Oman Human Rights Commission

Since its establishment, the Oman Human Rights Commission has pursued a sustained and transparent campaign to protect human rights and the perception of human rights in the Sultanate. It has demonstrated a strong commitment to the protection of civil liberties and fundamental freedoms, responsibilities and duties in the Sultanate, as befits the mandate afforded it under Royal Decree No 124/2008. On 15 November 2008, a Human Rights Commission was established and its functions defined. The Human Rights Commission had a legal personality and independence in the exercise of its functions. Headquartered in Muscat, the Committee reported to the State Council.

On 18 April 2016, Royal Decree No 23/2016 amended the name of the organisation to: Oman Human Rights Commission.

Royal Decree No 57/2022 bearing on the reorganisation of the work of the Oman Human Rights Commission followed the decision to restructure the state's administrative apparatus. The decree stipulated that "the Oman Human Rights Commission shall be composed of 14 members selected from among individuals with expertise in and concern for human rights, and from representatives of existing government agencies of like concern." Members of the Commission "shall be appointed by royal decree, and the members shall at their inaugural meeting elect a chairman and vice-chairman who are not from among the representatives of the government agencies."

The OHRC has strengthened its activities at the external level by communicating with human rights organisations overseas, as well as participating in meetings, conferences, workshops, and regional and international training courses. The Commission has responded to a number of international reports dealing with issues concerning human rights in the Sultanate, after first coordinating with the competent authorities to verify the information contained in these reports.

Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

The Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science facilitates exchange between the relevant Arab, Islamic and international organisations (UNESCO, ALECSO, and ISESCO) and the peer authorities in the Sultanate of Oman. It promotes the intangible heritage of Oman and communicates the ongoing endeavours of the Sultanate in the fields of education, culture and science.

It cooperates with the three overseas organisations in a manner that enhances understanding and communication between peoples and cultures.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Protection is allocated biennially through UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere programme in recognition of outstanding contributions to the environment made by individuals, groups, institutions and organisations, as aligns with UNESCO's published policies in the field.

The pioneering Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Protection was the first Arab award to be allocated at global level on the theme of environmental protection. Established in 1989 on an initiative of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, it was quickly embraced by UNESCO.

The Cyber Defence Centre

The Cyber Defence Centre was established by Royal Decree No 64/2020 on 10 June 2020 to be the competent authority responsible for electronic defence in the Sultanate and the national reference hub for all matters involving the protection of vital interests in cyberspace. It oversees the building of national specialist capacities related to cybersecurity. It is affiliated to the Internal Security Service.

The Centre sees its mission as enhancing the capacity of affected units and individuals to deal with cyber threats, in part by creating partnerships between the relevant sectors and local and international peer entities. In furthering its objectives, the Centre can avail of a set of competencies, including the preparation, implementation and amendment of strategies, and verification of their implementation, subject to the required approvals. It can establish legislative and regulatory frameworks and governance mechanisms for the implementation and follow-up of strategies and of a national plan designed to mitigate or eliminate risk in the cybersecurity field, always subject to approval. It can submit proposals for amendments and is responsible for preparing a determination and classification of all entities associated with the cybersecurity infrastructure, identifying the relevant sectors and entities vulnerable to risk.

On 9 February 2022, the Personal Data Protection Law was published in the form of Royal Decree No 6/2022. Its provisions apply to the processing of personal data. Among its provisions, the Law states that "it is not permissible to process personal data except in a context that is transparent and honest, respectful of human dignity, and that has the express consent of the owner of the data. All requests for the processing of personal data must be executed in writing in a clear, explicit and understandable manner, and the processor is obligated to prove the written consent of the owner in order to complete the processing of his or her personal data.

4

Tolerance .. a constant in Omani society across the ages

Oman has been recognised from time immemorial as a haven of civilised communication, of harmonious interchange with the peoples and cultures that crossed its shores. Tolerance lies at the very heart of the Omani character, a core, unassailable feature of their national identity and culture.

The Sultanate's relationship with other nations is based on a set of principles, foremost among which is a good neighbourliness that extends beyond the countries in its immediate neighbourhood. Oman has always taken pride in the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others. It maintains diligent respect for international laws, charters and norms, as well as for freedom of religion and creed.

Tolerance, so deeply rooted in its culture, has underpinned the Sultanate's approach to diplomacy across the many chapters of its history, notwithstanding changes in the nature of its governance. It stems from an enlightened perspective on human nature, from a sincere respect for the cultures and beliefs embraced by the many diverse peoples of our planet. It is an approach that eschews bias, cherishes positive neutrality. The foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman is based on a deeply held view of itself as a country with goodwill for all, a view that sees dialogue and tolerance as the appropriate response to conflict, as fundamental guidelines in dealing with global issues and addressing international challenges.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, speaking on 23 February 2020 soon after his accession, recalled that the world "has known Oman throughout its long and honourable history as an active force for peace and stability in its region, and for the development and prosperity that flow from civilised values. Successive generations have

taken turns to salute the flag of their country, to keep alive its message of peace, that it may be broadcast across the world with its resolve to build rather than destroy, to choose friendship over separation. To this," His Majesty affirmed, "we pledge our loyalty, that we may pay due respect to our shared commitment to civilised values and to a historical trust."

Religious tolerance was from the outset a cornerstone principle of the modern Omani renaissance, and today the Basic Law of the State guarantees personal freedoms and their practice within the limits of the law. Article 34 of the Law stipulates that "freedom of worship as conforms with established custom is protected, provided that this shall not violate public order or contradict the moral code." The Omani Personal Status Law also guarantees to non-Muslims residing in the Sultanate the right to exercise their respective rituals of worship, albeit in a manner that does not contradict Omani tradition. This is in accordance with Article 282 of the Law, and it is an undisputed fact that other religious communities maintain houses of worship freely in Oman, where non-Muslims may perform their religious rituals freely and openly under the protection of the law.

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat Governorate.

In order to promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance, and to protect the fabric of society from all threat of conflict, the Omani Penal Code issued by Royal Decree No 7/2018 defined all acts designed to foment religious or sectarian strife or to lead to feelings of hatred or contempt or disunity among citizens, or to instigate such, as crimes against the State's internal security, punishable by prison terms of no less than three years and up to ten. Article 108 states that such crimes are "deemed an aggravating circumstance where the crime should occur in a house of worship, or an official establishment, council or public place, or emanate from a public official during or in the process of the performance of his/her work, or from a person of religious status or one delegated as such."

The Sultanate's commitment to harmonious relations between peoples of all cultures and persuasions was the motivator behind an initiative to produce an exhibition that would promote internationally the goodwill embodied in Omani society. The exhibition that resulted fosters constructive dialogue between religions and creeds, drawing for its inspiration on the Sultanate's own well-established experience in religious tolerance, cultural understanding and peaceful coexistence. Entitled 'Message of Peace from the Sultanate of Oman,' the project was launched from a desire to erase negative stereotypes of Islam in the West. It emphasises the value of tolerance as a human principle from which relations between human beings can only benefit.

The success of the exhibition was instantaneous, both locally and internationally. By 2022 it had visited 136 locations worldwide, of which 96 were international and 40 within the Sultanate itself. It has engaged proactively with scientific and academic institutions, universities, institutes and museums in many countries across the globe, most prominently the United Nations and Unesco. It has participated in conferences, meetings and a multiplicity of events, all of which share a devotion to human and cultural harmony and support the message of the Sultanate of Oman in the international community.

This diversity of locations and cultures visited by the exhibition has given the Sultanate a valuable opportunity to strengthen its international relations and spread its evolved message of tolerance and coexistence.

In this regard, the US Department of State's Report on Religious Freedom in the World applauded the contribution made by Oman's 'Message of Islam' exhibition in changing negative stereotypes in the world.

The Sultanate, meantime, continues its endeavour to convert the world to understanding and acceptance, values more than ever necessary at the present time. On 16 November 2019, Oman

announced to a large international audience in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, the creation of the Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values.

The Declaration lays out a three-stranded blueprint designed to restore balance to the turbulent world in which we live today. The first strand seeks to achieve a universal agreement on goals that will improve people's lives: a basic level of dignity and rights, and human cohesion protected against annihilation and extinction. The second strand would adopt a global system of ethics that promotes understanding and peaceful coexistence and motivates people to unite in their efforts to protect the environment. The third strand focuses on the need to instil or revive spiritual values in mankind and to reconcile them with the evolution of reason, philosophy and faith.

Meanwhile, in celebration of International Day for Tolerance and under the shared umbrella of the United Human Values and Message of Peace projects, the Sultanate on 16 November 2022 hosted an international conference appropriately entitled 'United Human Values, Sustainable Development for All.' The conference was the outcome of a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a group of government and private institutions operating in the Sultanate. Also co-sponsoring the event was the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, supported by several international organisations and institutions.

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, meanwhile, has been working with agencies of like intent on initiatives that broadly serve the principles underlying social harmony, such as compassion for others, respect for the human self, an appreciation of diversity and of the sacred; and a disavowal of all forms of discrimination, intolerance and violence. It operates by involving individuals, institutions and relevant agencies in campaigns and exchanges that value equality over discrimination, that counter disinformation and misinformation, promote trust in individuals and communities, and generally encourage hope and discourage fear.

For its part, the Department of the Presentation of Islam and Cultural Exchange at the Office of the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, with its bilateral responsibilities, protects the authentic spirit of Islam, encouraging tolerance towards non-Muslims residing in the Sultanate through activities and programmes that reflect this purpose.

The Department is also responsible for the 'Hedayah' programme, which is delivered remotely over the course of a year to new converts to Islam. It concerns itself with the sciences of the

Holy Qur'an, with faith, jurisprudence, the Arabic language and the Prophet's biography. It functions to introduce sound Islamic principles to the novice Muslims, defining these both in the abstract and in their practical application. It encourages the creation of strong bonds of brotherhood between the new converts, and it offers practical exercises that ease their path to the correct performance of Islamic rituals.

In conjunction with the development of services, spurred by the introduction of beneficial technology, the Ministry is dedicating resources to optimising the performance of its endowment funds, including mosque, school, charitable and civil endowments. Over the course of 2022, it oversaw the issuance of 25 endowment shares, endorsed 18 endowment institutions, legitimised 385 agencies, registered an increase of 130 endowment assets, issued 1,200 title deeds for endowment assets, and contracted 10 real estate investments.

In the sectors for which it is responsible, the Ministry introduced an electronic system for mosques in 2021. The system offers 21 electronic services through an application which is acknowledged to be the best in its field. By delivering mosque-related services electronically from any place and time, it greatly reduces the workload at the Ministerial offices.

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs has also completed an inventory of contemporary and heritage mosques built and restored. As of November 2022, there were 1,756 large and 14,533 local mosques nationwide, as well as 1,106 prayer halls, bringing the total to 17,395 places of Islamic worship across the Sultanate.

Having embraced the digital transformation, the Ministry now sponsors platforms and applications dedicated to the study of the Holy Qur'an. It has also launched courses in memorisation of the Holy Book, and the endowment share project for the Holy Qur'an schools. The latter initiative has the overriding purpose of guiding society towards a new and enlightened vision founded in an innovative, integrated, streamlined re-organisation of the Qur'anic system in the Sultanate.

The Office of His Eminence the Sheikh, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, plays a prominent role in spreading religious awareness on the basis of correct knowledge emanating from the Holy Book and the guidance of the purified Prophet's Sunnah, while the College of Sharia Sciences stands out as a scientific institution that aims to consolidate the values and noble principles of Islam, spread the values of tolerance and love, and extend a hand of acquaintance with The other leads to cultural mixing based on the exchange of cultures and respect for privacy.

5

Justice .. A harmonised justice system marked by integrity and transparency

Flexible laws; an independent legislative authority with full powers; an oversight system that is transparent, accountable and true to its sovereign mandate; and an efficient, impartial and capable judiciary constitute the four supporting arms of the Sultanate's justice system. Combined with the accelerating powers of technology, they uphold the vision enshrined in Oman 2040. The process of building a strong, specialised judiciary and effective oversight system has been thorough and carefully managed. The outcome is one that could only have been achieved by way of an effective legislative and participatory system of administration, both of these long-established components of the modern renaissance and of Oman Vision 2040.

The strength of the judicial system remains a priority for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as he completes the renaissance process initiated by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur, advancing it to new dimensions of ambition. The renewed renaissance is geared to meet ever broadening social and national aspirations, to preserve and extend the Sultanate's stability in every aspect, and it is with these goals in mind that His Majesty has given particular attention to the justice system. He has spoken publicly on frequent occasions of the need for an irreproachable system of justice and has participated in the endeavour to modernise the legislative system and to further develop tools of accountability. Speaking on 23 February 2020, His Majesty made clear his determination "to take such measures as are necessary to restructure the state's administrative apparatus, to modernise its system of legislation and laws, mechanisms and work programmes, to uphold its underpinning values and principles, to engage with contemporary means, to simplify procedures, apply standards of performance, integrity, transparency and accountability that will

ensure compatibility and harmonisation with the goals of our vision."

His Majesty returned to this theme in his address marking the Sultanate's 50th National Day on 18 November 2020, affirming that "the work of reviewing the legislative system and its mechanisms of oversight continues with the objective of greater transparency and accountability. These will be the pillars of the future Oman." He emphasised the crucial nature of these principles if the rights of nation and people were to be protected, defining them as "essential to the consolidation of justice and integrity. This system," he pledged "will receive our special care, God willing."

In light of His Majesty's particular focus on the integrity of the justice system, and on modernising the state administration, its governance and the structure of its institutions so as to optimise performance and keep pace with developments, Royal Decree No. 35/2022 was published on 16 June 2022 and addressed the matter of the administration of judicial affairs. It decreed the establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council, which enjoys a separate legal personality and financial and administrative independence. The framework of Council policy will pay respect to the principle of the rule of law and will strengthen the status of the judiciary in the Sultanate of Oman, in part by streamlining the management of its affairs.

On 23 June 2022, His Majesty chaired a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council at Al-Baraka Al-Amer Palace, where he once again outlined the core content of this decree as it merges with the provisions of the Basic Law of

His Majesty Sultan Haitham chairs a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council at Al Baraka Al Amer Palace on 23 June 2022.

the State and the objectives of Oman 2040. He stressed the importance of promoting integration between the various judicial authorities on the one hand and between each of them and units of the administrative apparatus of the state in a manner compatible with the public interest.

His Majesty directed that all necessary legal measures be taken to amend laws and royal decrees relevant to the workings of the judiciary such as to accord with the provisions of Royal Decree 35/2022. He noted the strategic importance of continuing to develop the work of the judicial system and the exercise of its processes such as to align them with the government's path to digital transformation and with Oman Vision 2040.

The Supreme Judicial Council

The establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council, presided over by His Majesty the Sultan and with a vice-president having the rank of minister, in accordance with Royal Decree No. 35/2022, was a product of His Majesty's commitment to strengthening the judicial system and of his strong personal belief that smooth litigation procedures are the cornerstone of justice. The state has a fundamental mission to create the means to a fair justice system, grounded in values of integrity and equal opportunity, in which citizen rights are soundly guaranteed by the law.

The Supreme Judicial Council, with its legal, financial and administrative independence, henceforth assumes all affairs related to the judiciary. It manages an independent annual budget for this function, which enables it to fund the necessary specialist technical and administrative cadres needed to unite the litigation and public prosecution authorities under one judicial system. This will serve to align the separate functions of judicial personnel, integrating their respective tasks, and consequently to streamline the overall judicial process, constituting a major improvement over the current laborious separation of tasks.

The Supreme Judicial Council stands over a vision of achieving the highest standards of justice, integrity and transparency in its service to the rule of law. It believes the path to a stronger judiciary lies through a participatory legislative system, an independent, specialised and efficient judicial system, and transparent oversight. It will act to uphold these principles and to facilitate litigation procedures, making them more accessible and user friendly to litigants. It will propose draft laws and royal decrees of relevance to the judiciary, deliver opinions on draft judicial cooperation agreements between the Sultanate of Oman and other countries. It will promote and develop cooperation on judicial matters with the relevant authorities in regional and

other countries and with international organisations of like concern.

The Secretariat-General of the Supreme Judicial Council is the administrative body that handles all administrative and financial affairs of the judiciary. It is headed by a secretary-general of appropriate rank and assisted by a number of assistant secretaries-general. It provides financial and administrative support to the judiciary, including the public prosecution, so that judges and members of the public prosecution may not be distracted by administrative tasks from the performance of their judicial mission.

The new system is also focused in its attention on removing obstacles that create distance within the judicial system between litigants and the litigation authorities. The merging of functions within the judicial administration will bring major benefit to the cross-current of processes being enacted across the system. It will help prevent conflicting judicial rulings, condense the traditional lengthy litigation of disputes and shorten the frustrating delays that isolate litigants from due process. The result will be much needed savings in cost and effort to all parties, and speedier justice. Moreover, the work of judges and of the public prosecution will be more accountable to central oversight by a department for judicial inspection that will report directly to the Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council.

The system will also serve to enable a single higher judicial authority to decide on appeals against rulings delivered by the lower courts. Thus all rulings that may be legally challenged before the Supreme Court can be appealed, replacing a system which restricted appeals to certain limited case numbers. Litigants in administrative cases may now challenge rulings of the Court of Appeal before the Supreme Court, and this will have positive effects in the search for justice and equality between litigants.

In its determination to achieve flexibility and a smoother exercise of the administrative and financial work related to the judiciary, the new system has ensured that delegation at the relevant administrative levels shall be guaranteed in order that optimal performance of its overall objectives can be achieved.

A shared umbrella, for enhanced performance

The establishment of the Supreme Judicial Council may be seen as a first step towards the creation of a harmonised judicial system in which all judicial branches and courts operate beneath a single umbrella structure. At stake is the overall efficiency of the system, better work performance and speedier adjudications. The Supreme Court is the highest arbiter of litigation in the Sultanate. It examines appeals filed before it against rulings issued by

the courts of appeal in cases accepted for examination by the Court. It adjudicates in cases of negative or positive conflict over jurisdiction between courts, and in disputes involving the extent to which laws and regulations conform to the Basic Law of the State and its provisions.

The Sultanate of Oman has 13 courts of appeal distributed across the governorates, and these are competent, within the scope of their jurisdiction, to consider appealed judgments issued by the summary courts or courts of first instance, as well as to examine criminal cases. There are 45 summary courts in the Sultanate, again distributed across all governorates, and these are competent to rule in the first instance in litigations brought before them, though not in criminal prosecutions.

Judicial inspection is an essential pillar if the independence of the judiciary is to be upheld and justice to be served in full integrity. His Majesty has reiterated that work continues on the overhaul of the legislative and oversight aspects of the system, and on development of effective instruments of accountability. These changes are essential components of a secure future for Oman, crucial to the protection of national and citizen rights and the sanctity of its justice system.

The Secretariat-General of the Judicial Inspection Authority has the function of activating the necessary mechanisms of control and inspection with a view to achieving the desired efficiencies in judicial actions and rulings. It assumes oversight over the work of judges, insofar as its competence extends, in that it advances the role of judicial inspection as a control tool within the judicial authority. Moreover, it encourages higher levels of judicial performance, more systematic work practices and a standardisation of procedures between courts.

Legislation, the judiciary and oversight

The Supreme Judicial Council has adopted a set of initiatives with the shared purpose of modernising the system of legislation and laws, mechanisms and work programmes, and integrating a contemporary approach to the workings of the justice facility. The initiatives, which affect all branches of the system, have completed justice, speedily achieved, as their ultimate objective. To this end, the Council is encouraging the use of future technologies and artificial intelligence as agents of greater transparency and integrity. Furthermore, they will facilitate the trend towards the creation of a specialised judiciary, competent and well qualified to deliver the services it exists to provide.

The initiatives adopted, in coordination and partnership with the Oman 2040 Vision Implementation Follow-up Unit, are reforming the judicial

system by developing and harmonising judicial legislation and simplifying procedures. These advances are of key importance to the growth of the national economy and to the success of the country's investment strategy, which demands transparency and efficiency in the judicial system. Impartiality in judicial work will benefit greatly from judicial inspection and from the existence of well-qualified and properly graded judicial cadres.

The initiatives are building capacity and special expertise within the judiciary in parallel with the improved business environment and broader investment opportunities. They are facilitating litigation services through the introduction of mobile labour units, specialised investment units, mobile notary services, future technology and the use of technology in litigation and notary services. All of this is building confidence amid the growing cohort of beneficiaries who now can navigate the system with ease and see the speedy conclusion of adjudications, enforcement of rulings and other court processes.

As the demand for greater competence and an increasing range of specialisations within the judicial system grows, the training of legal and judicial cadres has kept pace and Oman can today boast a scientifically trained body of personnel well equipped to handle an increasingly complex legal environment with consummate skill and ease.

The Notary Public Departments

Notaries public in the Sultanate exercise their functions through 61 notary public departments distributed across the governorates. Statistics issued by the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary report a total of 210,000 documents and declarations notarised by these departments in 2021, in addition to some 19,000 marriage certificates and 3,827 divorce certificates.

Notary public departments have expertise in multiple tasks that protect rights and document the social, commercial and financial relations of individuals and institutions. These tasks include the drafting of contracts and deeds as required by law or as sought by individuals, such as powers of attorney, declarations, divorce certificates, marriage documents, certificates of non-marriage, commercial contracts and a variety of other documents and endorsements.

Under the broad policy of regeneration being enacted within the judicial system, many of its procedures are being digitalised, in alignment with the government's preference for international best practice in the field. This will altogether improve the investment environment in the Sultanate

and enhance the confidence of investors. Royal Decree 51/2022 amending some provisions of the Notary Public Law once again confirms His Majesty Sultan Haitham's ongoing focus on the justice system. It will be a further legal asset in attracting foreign investment, especially given the pre-eminent position of the notarial system in Oman. Along with the digital transformation, this and the other major adjustments to the legal environment are encouraging business at every level. Many notarial services are now accessible electronically, including the processing of declarations and sub-contracting to agencies, in particular to commercial and investment agencies, as well as the ratification of contracts digitally with ease. The resulting facility in the delivery of notarial services is raising the quality of the judicial services generally, with swifter justice, savings in time and effort, and an overall consolidation of the rule of law.

Justice and legal affairs

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs plays a vital and important role in strengthening the integrated Omani legal system, at the apex of which sits the Basic Law of the State, to which all royal decrees, laws, regulations and decisions issuing from time to time from the various legislative sources are required to conform.

Pursuant to the provisions of Royal Decree No. (88/2020) merging the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Legal Affairs into one ministry called the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, defining its terms of reference and approving its organizational structure, the Ministry prepares and reviews draft royal decrees, takes procedures for issuing them, and reviews draft laws, regulations and decisions of a legislative nature. Prepared by units of the State's administrative apparatus and other public legal persons before issuing and publishing them in the Official Gazette.

In practice, the role of the Ministry is not limited to preparing and reviewing legislation and undertaking procedures for its publication, but extends to include reviewing existing legislation and recommending adaptations, coordinating in this task with the relevant government agencies.

The Ministry is also responsible for offering legal opinions on matters presented to it for interpretation as they relate to the application of royal decrees, laws, regulations and decisions. These opinions are delivered at the request of units of the state administrative apparatus or other public legal persons. It also offers legal advice on the basis of facts presented to it that have a bearing on the implementation of international conventions, or contracts entered into by units of the administrative apparatus or other public legal persons. It has expertise in the settlement of disagreements arising between units of

the state administrative apparatus and other public legal persons, or between them and companies wholly owned by the government.

In addition to its competencies in the areas of legislation and legal advice, the Ministry is qualified to review draft contracts that entail financial obligations on the state exceeding in value five million Omani riyals. These reviews are conducted prior to the signing of any such contract by any government agency. It has special competency to review all draft international agreements and memoranda of understanding that the Sultanate intends to sign. It offers its legal opinion on requests to join existing international conventions, and participates in the preparation of periodic reports to be submitted to regional and international organisations.

By virtue of the royal decree that defined its competencies, the Ministry has oversight over the professional affairs of lawyers. It is responsible for their accreditation and registration in the relevant register and for issuance – and withdrawal where warranted – of licences to practice law. The Ministry cooperates with the Higher Judicial Institute in making available training programmes for lawyers.

The Ministry oversees and regulates the work of experts appearing in courts of every standing in the Sultanate. Ministerial Resolution No 52/2022 outlined the specifics of the regulations governing the work of court experts.

The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs communicates with the public and interested parties on matters pertaining to the law, to ensure compliance with its provisions, by means of the Official Gazette, which publishes the official text of decrees, laws, regulations and ministerial decisions announced in the Sultanate, in addition to announcements and other official material required by national legislation to be published in the Gazette. The Gazette can now be viewed on the Ministry's website, a convenience in keeping with the Sultanate's drive to automate government services and the Ministry's part in this move towards full digitalisation of government services.

The Ministry publishes an annual volume of law that incorporates royal decrees, royal orders, laws, regulations and administrative decisions issued during the year.

The Public Prosecution

The decision to merge all branches of the judiciary under a single umbrella, as declared in the form of Royal Decree No. 35/2022 and with its objective of integrating work practices and speeding up access to fair, equitable justice, was in effect a manifestation of an important aspect of Oman 2040. Both motivating visions share a common stake in the creation of an independent, efficient and reliable justice system.

As a pillar of the judicial authority, the Public Prosecution carries out the

work entrusted to it by reference to the powers granted it in the Basic Law of the State, as published on 11 January 2021 by means of Royal Decree No. 6/2021. Article 86 of the decree states that "the Public Prosecution is a component of the judicial authority. It undertakes public action in the name of society, oversees matters of judicial control, ensures the application of the criminal code, the prosecution of the guilty and the execution of judgments in the manner indicated by law."

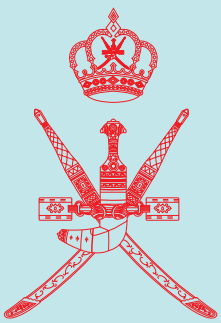
The Public Prosecution is currently endeavouring to streamline its operating process and improve overall performance with a view to meeting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, with its focus on the creation of a judiciary with specialist expertise in the use of future technologies. As such, on 3 November 2022, the Public Prosecution launched 'Burhan', a remote investigation system which engages advanced technical standards to improve the overall quality of the prosecution functions and speed up outcomes.

The addition of the remote investigation system constitutes one stage in a sequence of upgrades that is building a set of highly evolved and beneficial services: simpler procedures for litigants, best practice standards across the board, major reductions in time lost and stress endured by users no longer having to visit the headquarters of the Public Prosecution in person. The remote service benefits all parties to litigation - plaintiffs, witnesses, accused – by enabling interviews to be conducted remotely in a virtual interview room using visual communication technology.

In 2021, the Public Prosecution handled 28,201 cases, of which 1,255 were classed as felonies and 26,630 as misdemeanours. Over the same time period, 15,559 cases were brought before the courts, of which 11,527 were filed. In total 10,350 rulings were delivered and RO20,258,127 (twenty million two hundred and fifty eight thousand one hundred and twenty seven Omani Riyals) collected for the public coffers.

The Public Prosecution's executive functions are conducted by a combined judicial and administrative cadre of 135 Public Prosecution officials and 977 other personnel operating out of 31 departmental units distributed across eleven governorates. The organisational restructuring undergone by the judicial authority as a whole reduced the size of the Public Prosecution by 50% and generated operational cost reductions of some 15%. Contributing to these savings were the introduction of technology in the form of electronic links facilitating communications with government agencies, along with activation of the remote investigation system.

Meanwhile the Sultanate's Public Prosecution Office officially joined the Association of Arab Public Prosecutors, and indeed can be deemed one of its founding member states for having attended earlier meetings. Oman was represented at the second annual meeting of the Association, which took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in mid-November 2022.



6

Foreign affairs .. An unwavering commitment to alliance and dialogue

Since His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur coaxed Oman out of an extended period of isolation into a new and enlightened chapter of its interconnection with the world, the Sultanate has been restored to its once significant position among nations. The strength of this position is embodied in its renewed and ambitious vision, a vision in which the carefully executed strategies of today combine to orchestrate a stable and abundant future for the Sultanate and its people. Underpinning this abundance is a tight network of friendly connections with peoples and countries in the region and beyond, where all relationships are nurtured in harmony and mutual respect.

The Sultanate, after all, earned its reputation as a welcoming haven over long centuries of exchange with other cultures. A vital trading station on the fabled Silk Road, and a thriving Indian Ocean maritime hub, the navigators and merchants of Oman were already exploring connections with the world beyond the ocean from the earliest times. As their sturdy vessels learned to navigate the most challenging seas, they came to know and interact with the civilisations of Eastern China, of India and Mesopotamia, of the eastern Mediterranean and Nile Valley, of Northern and Eastern Africa. Throughout these exchanges and into their contemporary history, Omanis have been known for their open perspective and easy rapport. This preference for goodwill over contention translates at governance level into a politics based on principles of good neighbourliness, of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, of respect for the sovereignty of others; and an equally determined refusal to have others interfere in the internal affairs of Oman. The Sultanate's foreign policy in the Arab and Islamic context is one committed to the principles of honesty, justice, and fairness, to the resolution of disputes by peaceful means. It works to achieve positive dialogue, to promote common and mutual interests with brotherly and friendly countries. It supports all well-intentioned efforts by regional and international organisations to maintain stability between nations.

The policies and positions espoused by the Sultanate are characterised by clarity, frankness and transparency and these principles guide its interactions with Gulf, Arab and international bodies at the bilateral, multilateral and collective levels.

The absolute consistency of these core features of the Sultanate's diplomatic approach, in all circumstances and all negotiations, has earned it universal trust. All parties know that the Omani position is one that values harmony and resolution, attained without artifice and for the benefit of all parties concerned, above all other objectives. As a result, the Sultanate has found a seat at the table wherever genuine attempts to resolve difference are being undertaken; and Muscat continues to be a port of call for regional and world leaders seeking clarity or fair counsel.

Although the Sultanate has not sought out a role in this arena, it almost invariably responds when asked by the principals to act in a mediating role. When it accepts this role it does so in all seriousness, sincerity and resolve to achieve a peaceful outcome. In regional and other such disputes, it has no motive of self-interest, no special agenda. It values only peace, security, stability and harmonious

The government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham has a proud record of search and release success in cases of missing or kidnapped persons in war and conflict zones.

relations, that these might return to the disputing parties and that they might prevail in the region. The Sultanate has never built relations with one party at the expense of another or others. Its relations with all are maintained on the positive side of neutrality, always subject to the principles to which it continues to be resolutely committed.

The Sultanate's interactions with its close Gulf, Arab and regional neighbours and the positions it espouses on matters of international interest equally reflect the guiding principles of its policies of alliance. As an independent, sovereign state, Oman manages its relations in a manner that achieves its national interests without harming the interests of others. It eschews pressure, accepts consequences. Indeed the legacy of events - current, past and distant – validates the wisdom and foresight that infuses the Sultanate's decision-making in matters of diplomacy, as might be acknowledged by its regional neighbours for its soundness over time.

The late Sultan's foreign policy approach is today embodied in the studied perspective of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik under the renewed renaissance. It shares the vision of Oman as a friend to all, an advocate of dialogue and tolerance in addressing all issues. It views Oman as playing an active role in the international community, of investing in goodwill, of sustaining relations that favour security and stability. It promotes economic growth and cultural development as necessary values that serve all without discrimination. His Majesty Sultan Haitham gave early expression to these sentiments in his inaugural address to the Council of Oman on 11 January 2020 shortly after assuming office. At this session, convened jointly with the Defence Council in compliance with the provisions of Article VII of the Basic Law of the State, Sultan Haitham reasserted the key constants established by the late Sultan Qaboos "that define our country's foreign policy [and that are] based on peaceful coexistence between nations and peoples, and good neighbourly relations, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for the sovereignty of states and for international cooperation in diverse areas of endeavour. We will continue, as we pledged to the world throughout the reign of His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos, to be advocates of and contributors to the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, to seeking satisfactory solutions to conflict in a spirit of reconciliation and understanding."

His Majesty's reassurances were appreciated as confirmation that the Sultanate's pacifistic status was to be protected, that Oman would maintain its positive perspective on mutually beneficial cooperation with all. In practical terms, this perspective manifested in a series of personal exchanges, as represented by His Majesty's several formal visits overseas and an equivalent number of arrivals in the Sultanate by visiting heads of state and other foreign dignitaries.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham joined his Bahraini counterpart, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, for bilateral discussions, where the two leaders explored the benefits to both countries of shared development initiatives.

Insofar as concerns Gulf affairs, Sultan Haitham affirmed the Sultanate's commitment to pursue **"with our brothers, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council states, the processes shared by our individual countries to see the aspirations of our peoples fulfilled, while the successes of the Cooperation Council are advanced."** He paid an official visit on 24-25 October 2022 to the Kingdom of Bahrain, where he joined His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa for discussions in the presence of the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. Both sides emphasised the importance of nurturing the manifestation of shared opportunity, especially in the economic, trade and investment fields. Such summit-level exchanges will only serve to reassure and expand the horizons of cooperation between the private sectors of Oman and Bahrain, where every exchange of commercial delegations and extension of trade adds value to the aspirations of both states.

Several mutually satisfactory agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed between the two countries, along with executive programmes in diverse areas of common interest, which will cement the bonds

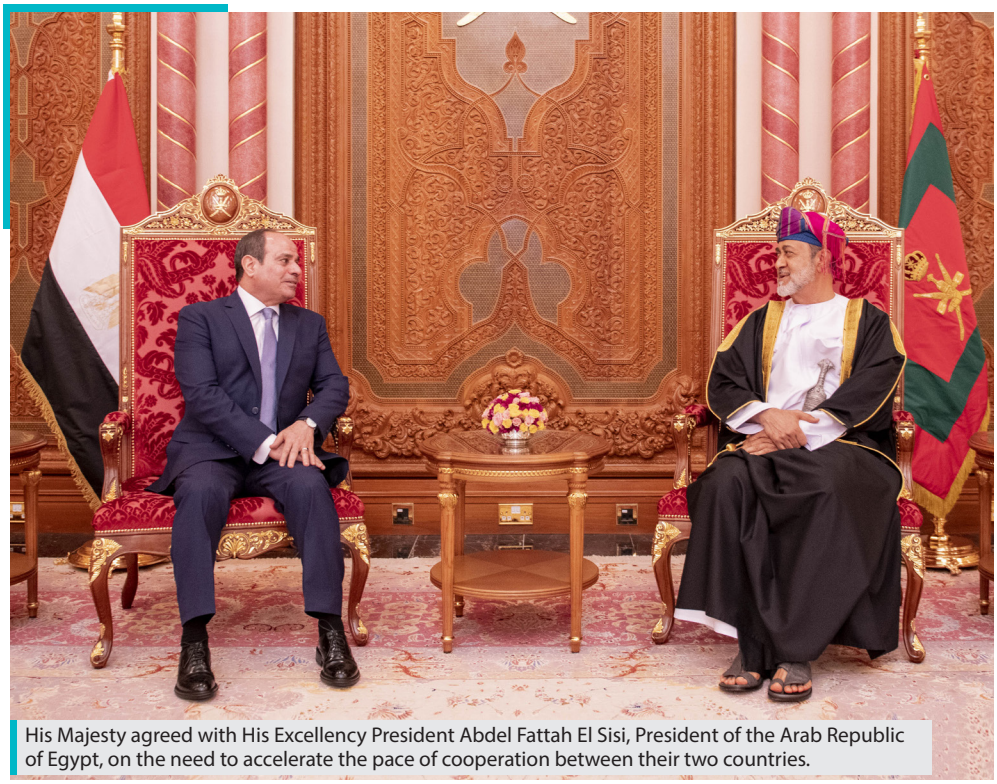
His Majesty welcomed His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

established and strengthen these to the benefit of both.

The government and people of the Sultanate have strong historical ties of friendship and neighbourly alliance with the government and people of the United Arab Emirates. In a mark of those deep-rooted ties, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, paid a state visit to the Sultanate of Oman at the head of a high-level delegation on 27-28 September 2022.

The leaders of the two countries held in-depth discussions that were dominated by a spirit of friendship, goodwill and understanding. Both shared their belief in collaboration in the pursuit of common interest and voiced their satisfaction at the levels of mutually beneficial coordination that had been achieved between them in the political, security, economic and cultural fields.

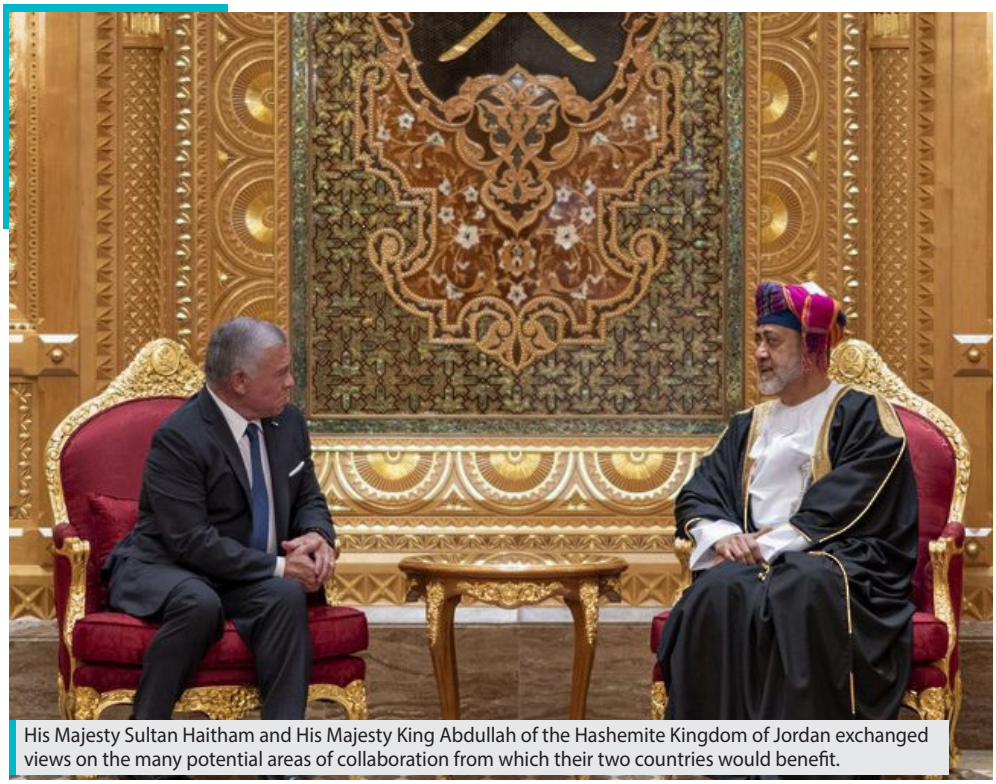
Both emphasised the significant role of the Joint Higher Committee, and welcomed the effective lines of communication that exist between their Highnesses and Excellencies, cabinet ministers of the respective countries, in their discussions on common issues. Such discussions are characterised by a joint focus on the advancement of



His Majesty agreed with His Excellency President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on the need to accelerate the pace of cooperation between their two countries.

bilateral relations in the economic, trade, investment, cultural, diplomatic and educational fields; on shared objectives affecting the environment, food security, advanced technology and innovation; on vital energy and renewable energy projects; on industry, health and the status of the pharmaceutical sector; on real estate development, tourism, petrochemicals and other manufacturing industries; on matters affecting supply chains and transportation and that are served by logistical partnerships; on the impact and development of information technology and financial technology; and on all matters that benefit the individual and common interests of the two countries and that promote prosperity for their peoples. To these ends, the two sides welcomed the signing of a number of memoranda of understanding on multiple and multi-faceted aspects of cooperation.

On Arab affairs, His Majesty has reasserted the Sultanate's continued support for the League of Arab States and its position of cooperation with "our brothers, the leaders of the Arab countries, with a view to achieving the goals of the League of Arab States, to improving the lives of our citizens, to distancing this region from conflict and disagreement. We will work," he said, "to achieve such



His Majesty Sultan Haitham and His Majesty King Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan exchanged views on the many potential areas of collaboration from which their two countries would benefit.

economic integration as serves the aspirations of the Arab peoples." The Sultanate has enjoyed a long and fruitful chapter of collaboration and exchange with Egypt, and on 27-27 June 2022, His Excellency President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, paid an official visit to the Sultanate at the head of a high-level delegation.

During the official talks that took place between His Majesty and the Egyptian President, the two leaders expressed their determination to increase the pace of economic cooperation between their two countries and to renew their commitment to strong bilateral ties. Both identified the strong role of the Joint Committee and of the Omani-Egyptian Business Council in the path to expanded fields of cooperation.

In a reaffirmation of the long and uninterrupted friendship that binds the Sultanate and the Jordanian Kingdom, His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, accompanied by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II, paid an official visit to the Sultanate on 4-5 October 2022.

In the course the visit, the two leaders held in-depth discussions

His Majesty met with His Majesty King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, during the latter's official visit to the Sultanate.

that were characterised by a spirit of shared Arab kinship and brotherhood, and at which they both expressed their resolve to continue developing bilateral cooperation across all fields that serve the interests of their countries and peoples. Jordan and Oman are united by a long history of concordant policies and views, reaffirmed today by an intensifying pace of communication and exchanged visits between representative entities of their respective governments. New opportunities are now being sought for ever more comprehensive levels of bilateral cooperation.

Voicing their satisfaction at the public validation of their bond represented in the royal visit, Their Majesties welcomed the signing of several memoranda of understanding and announcement of a rollout of executive programmes in such varied fields as industrial cooperation, mining, labour, trade protection, anti-monopoly, archival matters, higher education, scientific research and innovation, consumer protection, tourism cooperation and the insurance sector.

On the broader world scale, the Sultanate cemented bonds with the friendly Kingdom of Belgium, welcoming a visit by His Majesty King Philippe

His Majesty Sultan Haitham held formal talks with His Excellency Ayatollah Dr Syed Ibrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at which the two leaders discussed avenues of greater bilateral cooperation.

Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, and his wife, Her Majesty Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislain, Queen of the Belgians, on 2 February 2022. At formal meetings with Sultan Haitham, the two sides celebrated the positive status of relations between the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Belgium and the fruitful cooperation that continues between them in diverse areas of common interest. They also exchanged views on matters of current interest on the international scene.

The Sultanate and the Islamic Republic of Iran have many layers of historical and current connection, as have their peoples many interlocking cultural traditions and values. The leaderships of both countries continue to maintain close bilateral relations and regularly reaffirm their mutual appreciation and respect, grounded in values of faith, brotherhood and good neighbourliness. His Excellency Ayatollah Dr Syed Ibrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, paid an official visit to the Sultanate on 23 May 2022.

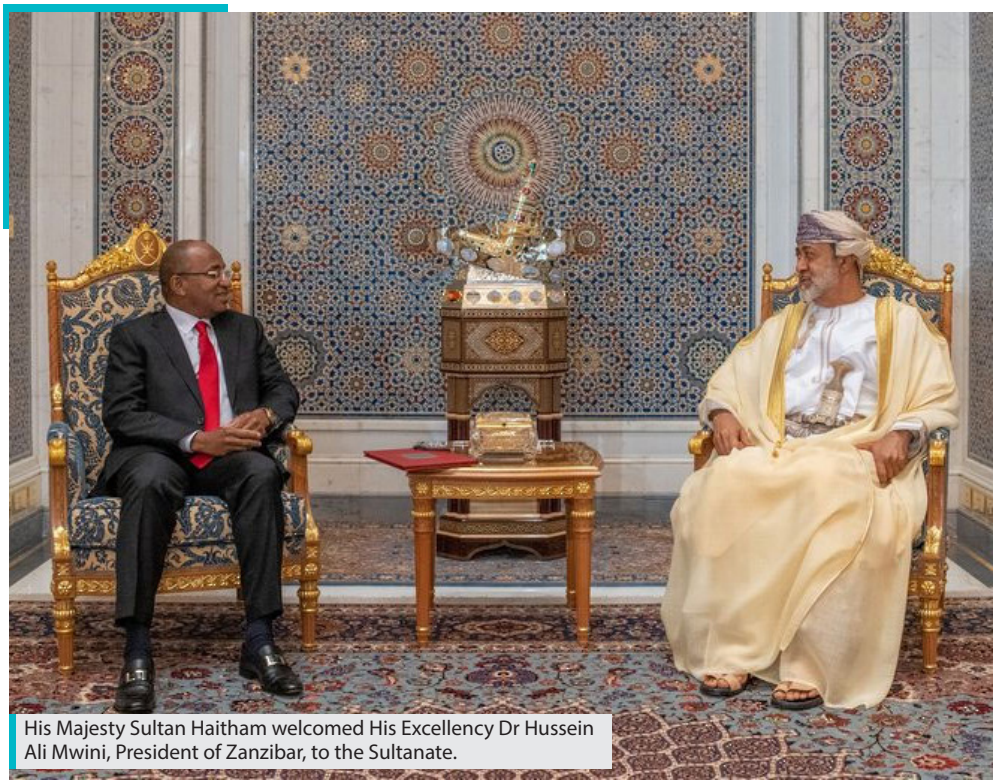
An official session of talks was held between His Majesty Sultan Haitham and His Excellency Dr Raisi, during which they reviewed prospects for further bilateral cooperation, especially in areas

His Majesty Sultan Haitham met with Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, during the latter's visit to Oman.

of trade and investment cooperation and coordination in diverse matters of mutual interest and benefit. The two leaders welcomed the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding that will frame cooperation in investment, sport, fishing, crop and livestock resources, maritime transport, ports, the logistics sector, and oil and gas.

On the African front, the Sultanate also nurtures longstanding ties of friendship with the United Republic of Tanzania. In the context of extending these ties into the future, Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, paid a state visit to the Sultanate at the head of a high-level delegation from 12 to 14 June 2022.

With the conclusion of the official talks that took place between President Hassan and Sultan Haitham came an agreement on the establishment of a joint investment project funded by the two countries that would research and identify feasible projects of benefit to both in several sectors. An associated agreement initialled by the two governments would both prevent tax duplication and eliminate tax evasion. The two sides also signed memoranda of understanding in multiple fields, including energy, higher



His Majesty Sultan Haitham welcomed His Excellency Dr Hussein Ali Mwini, President of Zanzibar, to the Sultanate.

education and training, tourism and natural resources, industry and trade, investment promotion, foodstuffs, airport management, oil services, national museums, livestock and meat products. In addition, an MOU underwrote a strategic partnership agreed between Oman Post, Asyad Express and Tanzania Post, under which the three services would cooperate in the development of e-commerce solutions and logistical services. These initiatives would, among other advantages, enable Omani entrepreneurs to increase trade exchange between the Sultanate and Tanzania and thus enhance their presence in the African market. Also agreed was a joint project to issue postage stamps celebrating the historical and cultural ties that have bound the two countries across the ages.

In a consolidation of extensive, meaningful historical and cultural ties between the Sultanate and Zanzibar and to expand the horizons of their current relationship, His Majesty Sultan Haitham on 12 October 2022 welcomed His Excellency Dr Hussein Ali Mwini, President of Zanzibar, to the Sultanate. During their formal talks, the two leaders explored areas of outstanding linkage between the two countries and the potential that exists to maximise this connection for their mutual benefit. Other issues of common interest

His Majesty held formal talks with Their Excellencies the President and Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, at which the two sides discussed prospects for broadening cooperation to the mutual advantage of their respective countries.

were also discussed in a shared desire to promote further growth, development and prosperity for their respective peoples.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom have enjoyed a relationship of long and distinguished standing that is important to both sides, a connection valued for its pursuit of all avenues that lead to greater prosperity for their respective peoples. His Majesty Sultan Haitham travelled to the United Kingdom on a private visit on 5 July 2022, and took the occasion to share talks with his British hosts on matters of mutual and international concern. Following the UK visit, His Majesty began an official 3-day visit to the Federal Republic of Germany on 13 July 2022. The visit took place in the context of the goodwill and good relations that exist between the Sultanate and the Federal Republic.

During the visit, His Majesty held formal talks with His Excellency Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Olaf Scholz, the Federal Republic's Chancellor, where the two sides discussed prospects for joint cooperation and means of broadening this cooperation to mutual advantage. The two leaders also addressed issues of common concern and interest of a regional and international dimension.

His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, headed the Sultanate's delegation to the 31st Ordinary Arab summit in Algiers.

Sultan Haitham returned to the United Kingdom on 17 September 2022 to offer his condolences on the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and congratulations to His Majesty King Charles III on his accession to the throne of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and as Head of the Commonwealth.

On behalf of Sultan Haitham, His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs, headed the Sultanate's delegation to the 43rd Session of the Supreme Council of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the Gulf-China Summit for Gulf Cooperation and Development, and the Arab-China Summit for Cooperation and Development, which convened in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on 9 December 2022.

On 16 July 2022, His Majesty named His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, to head the Sultanate's delegation to the Jeddah Summit for Security and Development.

On behalf of His Majesty, His Highness Sayid Asaad bin Tarik Al Said later headed the Sultanate's delegation to Algiers to participate in the work of the 31st

His Majesty Sultan Haitham delegated His Excellency Dr Muhammad bin Saeed Al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, to attend the International Meeting for Peace in Rome on behalf of Oman.

Ordinary Arab summit that was held In the Algerian capital on 1-2 November 2022 and attended by a number of national leaders and heads of government.

The Sultanate affirmed its commitment to the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence with its participation in the activities of the International Meeting for Peace held in Rome on 23-25 October 2022. His Majesty Sultan Haitham delegated His Excellency Dr Muhammad bin Saeed Al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, to attend on behalf of Oman. Participants, including national leaders and their representatives, discussed means of promoting dialogue in the resolution of conflict and other paths to harmony among the peoples of the world.

His Majesty delegated His Excellency Engineer Salem bin Nasser Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, to represent the Sultanate at the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The event was hosted by the city of Sharm El Sheikh in the Arab Republic of Egypt from 6-18 November 2022.

The Sultanate has a long tradition of assisting in negotiations and search efforts for hostages and other persons

In its message to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Sultanate reasserted its commitment to the principles of peace, harmony and friendship between nations.

missing in the context of war or conflict and Sultan Haitham has ensured that this contribution is strongly maintained. Oman is fully and actively committed to identifying and working to eliminate human rights violations, wherever they occur and whatever their motive and cause. It will always work diligently in the quest for stability, prosperity and justice for all nations and all peoples.

The Sultanate's approach is discreet and diplomatic, an approach that secures an opening to a more evolved level of international relations. Oman's counsel is as it has always been: live and let live, in peace, harmony and brotherhood.

In its message to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, delivered on 26 September 2022, the Sultanate affirmed "the constants of its foreign policy in standing with truth and justice, promoting positive cooperation, strengthening ties of acquaintance and friendship, and contributing to consolidating the foundations of international peace and security." The Sultanate is certain that peace is the most significant component of a world that will secure the betterment of life for its people; and equally certain that that peace can only be maintained if based on the solid foundations of justice, cooperation and accord among nations.

مجلس الدولة
سلطنة عمان

مجلس الشورى

7

Council of Oman .. Legislative and oversight powers that enhance the Shura process

The Sultanate's shura status today is the product of many complex stages, enacted over successive decades with deliberate and focused intent. The process began ten years into the modern renaissance pioneered by His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur, with the establishment of the State Consultative Council in 1981, to be followed by the elected Shura Council in 1991. Successive developments over the years culminated in today's bicameral system, incorporating the appointed State Council (Majlis al Dawla) and the elected Shura, or Consultation, Council (Majlis al Shura). The two Councils share responsibilities under the umbrella of the Council of Oman, with each enjoying a separate legal personality and financial and administrative independence.

Royal Decree No. 6/2021 of 11 January 2021 introducing the Basic Law of the State set the stage for a reboot of the Sultanate's parliamentary system. Its provisions embody both the vision of Oman 2040 and the aspirations of the renewed renaissance initiated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The Council of Oman Law, promulgated by means of Royal Decree No 7/2021, extends the work advanced by the Council of Oman, defining legislative and supervisory powers, with certain amendments, and clearing the path for further development of the parliamentary process in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Basic Law of the State is composed of eight articles that describe a general framework for the Council of Oman. It was against the constitutional backdrop of the Basic Law that the Council of Oman Law was drafted and published. It embodies 78 articles under seven chapter headings, introduced by general principles, followed by a chapter

on the State Council, a chapter on the Shura Council, a chapter on provisions shared by the two chambers, a chapter defining roles of assembly and terms of reference, a chapter on follow-up procedures as prescribed for the Shura Council and a chapter on transitional and final provisions.

Article 12 of the Basic Law of the State defines the unifying values and basic components of the system of governance in the Sultanate. It stipulates that governance be based on justice, consultation, equality and the prescribed rights of citizens to participate in public affairs. Article 76 stipulates that "the rule of law is the basis of governance in the State." Article 68 of Chapter Five defines the Council of Oman as a bicameral body consisting of the State and Shura Councils; and Articles 69 to 75 lay out the powers of the Council of Oman, while regulating the mechanism of appointment for members of the State Council and of election for members of the Shura Council, the latter mechanism defined as a process of direct secret ballot.

It also grants specific legislative and oversight powers to each Council, including the approval or amendment of draft legislation referred by government. The Councils make independent recommendations on projected development schemes and on the State's general budget.

The Council of Oman building in Muscat's Bustan district. The Council of Oman embodies the two arms of the Sultanate's bicameral system, the elected Shura Council and the appointed State Council, each branch having legal and administrative autonomy.

These recommendations are then returned to the Council of Ministers, which is mandated to notify the two parliamentary Councils where recommendations they have made have not been taken into consideration, providing explanatory reasons for their decisions.

Council of Oman (Majlis Oman)

The establishment of the Council of Oman by means of Royal Decree No 86/1997 of 16 December 1997 was a significant milestone in the advancing shura process. It greatly expanded the basis of participation in decision-making, which now benefited from the expertise of scholars and specialists. This was crucial to the successful exploration of appropriate strategies for implementing ambitious development programmes and serving the public interest.

The Council of Oman Law issued under Royal Decree No 7/2021 of 11 January 2021 offers a critical framework for the work of achieving the goals set of Oman Vision 2040. Among these goals is the creation of flexible legislation on the one hand and an independent legislative authority with full powers on the other.

The Council of Oman, as stipulated in Article 68 of the Basic Law of the State and Article 1 of the Council of Oman Law, consists of the State Council, the members of which are appointed by His Majesty the Sultan from a select pool of experts, and the Shura Council, to which Omani citizens elect representatives of their constitutencies. The Council of Oman meets at the invitation of His Majesty the Sultan during the month of November of each year. In addition, as an exception to the terms of Article 38 of the Council of Oman Law, "The Sultan summons the Council of Oman to an inaugural meeting following the Shura Council general election, to convene within one month of the date on which the election results were announced." Finally, "the Sultan invites the Council of Oman to meet in extraordinary session in such situations as he deems appropriate."

As directed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pursuant to the provisions of Article 38 of the Council of Oman Law No. 7/2021, the State Council convened on 6 November 2022, launching the fourth annual session 2022-2023 of its seventh term (2019-2023 AD). On the same day, the Shura Council initiated the third annual session (2022-2023) of its ninth term (2019-2023).

State Council (Majlis al Dawla) … setting the pace of national action

The Sultanate's State Council is a nexus of national action. Its legislative and financial powers, outlined in the Basic Law of the State, the Council of Oman Law and its own internal regulations, provide the framework within which it conducts its regular sessions and oversees the work of six standing committees and their respective sub-committees, along with the various working groups emanating from the standing committees.

The State Council enjoys a separate legal personality and financial and administrative independence. It includes in its membership an elite cohort of experts and specialists, as stipulated in the Council of Oman Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 7/2021.

The State Council has important leadership functions in the programme of national action.

Special functions of the State Council

Article 72 of the Basic Law of the State bearing on the Council of Oman defines the powers of the Council, which are to approve or amend draft laws, debate development plans and the state's general budget, make recommendations as appropriate, and propose new legislation as befits the limits of its authority.

The State Council also studies and debates matters bearing on the implementation of development plans, and submits proposals to government that it views as beneficial to the country's broad development agenda. It proffers proposals and studies that validate and empower the traditional values of Omani society, that protect its successes, and that voice appropriate solutions to many economic and social issues.

The State Council sits for a term of four years, and conducts four annual sessions, each of a duration of not less than eight months, commencing with the annual inauguration of the Council of Oman.

The State Council debates development strategies and the state budget and delivers appropriate opinions on these and other matters of national significance.

Structure of the State Council

The main organs of the State Council, as described in Article 31 of the Council of Oman Law, consist of the Council Chairman, the Council Office, Standing Committees and the Secretariat-General.

The Council of Oman Law clarified the powers of the Council Chairman, and stipulated that the State Council's internal regulations should establish the procedures for formation of the Council Office and committees, and define their respective competencies. The same law clarified the functions and responsibilities of the Secretariat-General, and the powers of the Secretary-General.

The Council Chairman: The Council Chairman represents the State Council in its relations with others and before the judiciary. Insofar as concerns financial, administrative and personnel affairs, he wields the authority of a head of department as defined in legislation and royal decree.

The Council Chairman presides over plenary sessions, as well as over joint sessions with the Shura Council.

Council Office: The Council of Oman Law assigns authority to the Council's internal regulations to determine such procedures as concern the structure of the Council Office and its competencies. These internal regulations include determination of the number of constituent personnel of the Council Office and procedures for its formation. Its functions and tasks are outlined in the Council's articles of association.

The Standing Committees: The Council of Oman Law delegates to the State Council the responsibility for

The State Council building is part of the Council of Oman complex in Muscat's Bustan district.

drafting its own procedures for the establishment of standing committees and describing their functions. The internal regulations stipulate that the Council establish standing committees at the start of every term. For its seventh term, the relevant committees are: the Legal Committee, the Economic Committee, the Social Committee, the Culture, Media and Tourism Committee, the Education and Research Committee, and the Technology and Innovation Committee.

These committees exercise the powers of the Council, each in its field of competence. Such powers include the study of proposals referred to the Council, the tabling of draft legislation, a review of extant legislation and submission of proposals, review of development plans and of the State's general budget, and submission of proposals and studies of relevance to the Council.

Secretariat-General: The State Council is administered by a Secretariat-General consisting of a Secretary-General, assistants to the Secretary-General, and an adequate quota of personnel. The Secretary- General of the State Council is appointed by royal decree.

The Secretariat-General carries out the necessary work of enabling the Council and its affiliates to exercise their functions and responsibilities, and does so in a manner conformant with the organisational code determined by the Council Chairman.

The Secretary-General has a set of specific tasks, which include overall management of the Secretariat-General and its personnel, assessment of general job performance, preparation of the Council sessions, preparation of the agendas approved by the Office by coordination with the Chairman, and review of the minutes of Council sessions and Council Office meetings.

Achievements born of focused activity

The third ordinary session (2021/2022) of the State Council's seventh term (2019-2023) was marked by significant legislative events exercised through plenary sessions, meetings of the Council's office, and of its committees and sub-committees. Three draft laws were referred to the Council of Ministers and the Council presented eight studies to the government for consideration in its deliberations, in addition to the draft General State Budget for fiscal 2022.

Over the course of the third ordinary session, the Council convened on six occasions, during which sessions it discussed 16 matters and approved a series of studies and proposals submitted by the Council's committees. It debated several bills, as well as the State's Draft General Budget for fiscal 2022. The bills discussed were the draft law "amending some provisions of the Documents and Archives Law," issued by means of Royal Decree No. 60/2007; the draft law "amending some provisions of the Book of Justice," issued by means of Royal Decree No. 40/2003; and the Draft Securities Law.

The Council Office held four meetings during the third ordinary session, during which it discussed 62 matters, resulting in 40 decisions taken by the Office. During its meetings, the Office hosted committee chairmen and rapporteurs with the purpose of addressing studies and proposals submitted by the respective committees. In total, seven studies were debated in this manner. In addition the Council Office handled multiple reports, proposals, communications and enquiries received by it from various quarters.

The Council of Oman Law, published by means of Royal Decree No. 7/2021, confirmed the strategy of expanding areas of collaboration between the Council of Ministers and the State Council. Such coordination is crucial to the smooth attainment of common objectives, as summarised in advancement of the Sultanate's path to comprehensive development. In this context, a joint meeting was held at the headquarters of the Council of Ministers in Muscat between the Council of Ministers and the Office of the State Council. The meeting dealt with the pre-eminence of the joint vision of the two entities and the State Council's primary responsibilities,

encapsulated in its dual roles of facilitating the general policies of the state and ensuring provision of the best possible service to citizens. The meeting also addressed the overall government message of promoting constructive dialogue with the supreme interests of the country as the underlying goal.

The Council committees convened for 50 full meetings and the sub-committees for 66 meetings over the course of the third ordinary session, to discuss a list of matters outstanding. These meetings incorporated input from a total of 45 guest experts from the public and private sectors, evidencing the strong partnerships that exist between the Council and the country's various authorities. The Council also approved a set of proposals submitted by its committees during the session, including the Legal Committee's proposal to study the internal regulations of the State Council.

The third session also saw the Council committees present a total of eight completed studies, viz: a study entitled "The reality of scientific research in the Sultanate of Oman and the role of the public and private sectors and international companies in supporting and developing this;" a study entitled "Promoting water, mountain and desert sports;" a study entitled "The Cyber Defence Centre System," as established by means of Royal Decree No. 64/2020; a study entitled "Regulatory and legislative frameworks for artificial intelligence technology;" a study entitled "Strengthening the legislative and regulatory frameworks for real estate financing activities, financial leasing and consumer financing;" a study entitled "Empowering the Omani teacher;" a study entitled "Small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman: challenges, opportunities and proposals;" and a study entitled "Emerging technological enterprises: their reality and the nature of investment in these."

The committees also submitted four proposals during the third session: a study proposal entitled "The agricultural sector: economic return and competitiveness;" a study proposal entitled "The efficiency of public spending in the Sultanate of Oman;" a study proposal entitled "The future of water in the Sultanate of Oman;" and a study proposal entitled "Legislative frameworks for compulsory education in the Sultanate of Oman." The Council committees have several other ongoing studies in the course of preparation."

Shura (Consultation) Council… legislation that carries the hopes of nation and citizens

The Shura Council leads a path to national action and change in the Sultanate, partnering with its sister institutions of the administration in advancing national aspirations and manifesting the development objectives of Oman Vision 2040. It cherishes its commitment to its constituents, encouraging public participation in the decision-making process through the dedicated exercise of its legislative and follow-up responsibilities.

Since the launch of Oman Vision 2040, the Shura's principal focus has been on translating its own work, in the form of the general and specific-purpose tasks built into the mandate of the Council and Secretariat-General, into programmes compatible with the Vision and its goals. This it effects by streamlining its own work and that of its standing committees through clearly defined channels: viz. legislation and law; economy and development; education, youth and culture; and public services. The Council perspective emphasises the pre-eminence of legislation, of judiciary and oversight, of governance within the

The Shura Council has the function of representing its public constituency in the drafting of legislation and decisions of national interest.

state's administrative apparatus, and of resources and projects. In practical terms, the Council and its Secretariat-General seek to achieve these priorities through active participation in the legislative system, fully exercising the powers made available to them in the Council of Oman Law published under Royal Decree No. 7/2021. The Law has afforded the Shura Council strong support in the guise of powers to follow up decisions benefiting the Vision and the overall common good

Structure of the Shura Council

The term of the Shura Council is four years, commencing on the announcement date of the official results of the Shura Council elections, and extending until 30 September of the fourth year of the Council's term.

The Council exercises its powers and competencies through its four main organs: the Council Chairman, the Council Office, the Standing Committees, and the Secretariat-General.

The Council Chairman: The Chairman oversees the work of the Council, manages its sessions, represents it in its communications with other bodies, and speaks on its behalf. He has the right to summon an extraordinary session as necessary. The Chairman and his two deputies are elected at an extraordinary session at the invitation of His Majesty the Sultan, pursuant to Article 17 of the Council of Oman Law issued by means of Royal Decree No 7/2021.

Council Office: The Office draws up the Council's work plan, the dates of regular sessions and their respective agendas, in light of the activities of the various Council committees and the matters referred to them or presented directly to the Council. The Office also manages the Council's workload between sittings and follows up on ministerial responses to the questions drafted during Council sittings and put to them in writing.

Standing Committees: For its ninth term, the Shura Council Office approved the formation of the Council's main committees, namely: the Legislative and Legal Committee, the Economic and Financial Committee, the Health and Environmental Committee, the Education and Scientific Research Committee, the Services and Social Development Committee, the Youth and Human Resources Committee, the Food and Water Security Committee, and the Information and Culture Committee.

The Secretariat-General: The Secretariat-General of the Shura Council consists of the Secretary- General, who is appointed by a royal decree, and a cohort of staff and specialist personnel. The Secretariat-General assists the Council and its organs in the exercise of their responsibilities, facilitating all matters of an organisational and administrative nature. As such, the role of the Secretariat-General is critical to the success of the Council's work.

Legislative and oversight activities

The third annual session (2021-2022) of the Shura Council's ninth term (2019-2023) was a particularly active one, spurred by the new powers afforded it under the restructured Basic Law of the State (6/2021), and Council of Oman Law (7/2021). Members of the Council and of the standing committees were kept busy researching, discussing and processing draft laws, reports and follow-up procedures through 16 regular sessions. Five ministerial statements were debated at length, as well as 10 draft laws and agreements referred by government.

Council members familiarised themselves with the exercise of follow-up tools granted them under the Council of Oman law, applying these to current issues of a social or economic nature. As such, they ventured into more direct interaction with citizens and the general public, accustomed in the past to exchanging views on such matters of direct concern to their daily lives through social media and similar communication platforms. In all, 15 urgent statements were submitted.

Council members harnessed a range of tools to clarify issues demanding elaborations and responses from the relevant authorities to specific written submissions. In all, 43 submissions were processed during the course of the third annual session, in addition to 89 briefing requests targeting government performance by way of proposals that would enhance the

As part of its mission, the Shura Council during its regular sessions processes draft legislation, reports on matters of national interest and monitors execution of its decisions.

delivery of services to the public. The Council endorsed 29 such propositions.

During its third annual session, the Shura debated five ministerial statements at length, during which discussions questions and observations were submitted surrounding the efforts of specific government agencies. The overriding sentiment over the course of the year was one of seeking the most appropriate, cost-effective solutions to challenges facing development plans. The five relevant statements debated were those by the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

National partnership with state institutions

In its enactment of the powers granted to it under the Basic Law of the State and the Council of Oman Law, the Shura Council continues to promote the integration of national policies and goals with other state institutions. With its sights set on the vision of Oman 2040 and on the advantages of coordinated action with sister entities pursuing the same overall development agenda, the Shura Council set up a series of meetings with the Council of Ministers , addressing such matters as shared social and economic responsibilities and optimal performance levels.

In addition to two full meetings with the Council of Ministers held during the course of the third annual session of the ninth term, two additional meetings were held with the Ministerial Coordinating Committee. The latter discussions focused on the value of a strong partnership between the Council of Ministers and the Shura Council, as well as reviewing the government's plans to diversify sources of income and increase national production broadly.

Municipal councils… advanced systems for the development of the provinces

The modern renaissance that is receiving new energy under His Majesty Sultan Haitham has adopted a decentralised approach that redirects attention towards the particular strengths and resources of the Sultanate's respective governorates. With the additional executive powers acquired by governors comes a requirement for more expanded community participation in the development of their local areas, and hence more attention to the election of members of municipal councils.

Legislation has thus been redrafted and adaptive regulations issued to develop the work of municipal councils. The Municipal Councils Law, the System of the Governorates and the reorganisation of municipal affairs are among the achievements of Oman Vision 2040 as it pertains to the national priority of developing the governorates. These legislative advances have been a constant refrain in Sultan Haitham's exchanges with provincial leaders. He actively promoted an increase in the allocations to the Governorates Development Programme, from OMR10 million to OMR20 million for each governorate over the course of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). The increased allocations were rolled out from 2022, and cover the implementation of development projects additional to those already approved in the 2021-25 Plan. In total, more than OMR650 million will be distributed for spending in the remaining years of the Plan on approved projects in all development sectors. This largesse removes pressure from the various development budgets, increasing liquidity by an amount approximating OMR200 million. In all, a fund of over OMR1.1 billion will incentivise the comparative advantages of the respective governorates, stimulating attractive developments within their regional economies and expanding the scope of programmes and projects that they have long wished to implement.

As partners in the wheel of development, the municipal councils will draft construction and reconstruction plans as befits the scope of their resources and competence in each of the Sultanate's governorates. This approach respects the particular strengths and opportunities offered by each of the country's 11 provinces, offering them support and encouragement as best suits their specific needs. His Majesty is an enthusiastic proponent of this broader perspective on governance, which gives greater autonomy in local decision-making to the municipal councils. Councils will be more active, with legislation pushing them towards more collaborative partnerships with government in municipal affairs. Overall, this shift will greatly benefit the process of construction and development in the provinces, and these will in turn become stronger forces in the grand national action plan that constitutes Oman Vision 2040. The new law outlining the functions of the municipal councils was issued as Royal Decree No. 126/2020, and some of its provisions were later amended in the form of Royal Decree No. 38/2022. These two decrees defined the competence of the councils, which were henceforth to be granted participation in reviewing draft development plans within the scope of the governorate; in reviewing other local development projects; reviewing the performance of government service units locally; reviewing proposed sites for development, service, and economic projects; urban plans; as well as the governorate's public service facility requirements, government services, and related projects.

The councils are concerned with making recommendations related to public health; with proposing regulations in relation to requirements for public health activities; with participating with the competent authorities in determining public benefit as emanates from development projects, from structural and public urban plans, and from special plans in residential, commercial, industrial and tourist areas in the governorate. They are also directly involved in the organisation of cultural, entertainment and tourism festivals, and in following up the implementation of service and development projects, and reviewing the success of these initiatives.

They are also concerned with approving programmes that help eligible groups and care for orphans and persons with disabilities, coordinating in these projects with the concerned authorities, proposing programmes to help those affected by natural disasters and weather episodes, and projects related to the development of tourist destinations in the governorate.

Municipal councils also have a social function, represented in the study of social issues and negative phenomena reported in the governorate; in proposing appropriate solutions to these in cooperation with the competent authorities; and in working to educate the local community on the importance of preserving natural reserves and wildlife.

The municipal council, during its term of four years in each governorate, is chaired by the governor, and with members appointed by their job descriptions or elected to represent the governorates' states or wilayat - two members from each wilayah, and two competent persons from the governorate; it being a proviso that the latter not be employees of any unit of the administrative apparatus of the state.

In accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Councils Law, its executive regulations, and the regulations governing the election of members of the municipal council, on 25 December 2022, elections for municipal council membership took place across the Sultanate for the council's third term. The voting process was carried out electronically, after the tools and procedures governing the election process were updated in line with Oman's vision 2040. The current emphasis on digital transformation, on automation of all stages of the electoral process - from registration applications to candidacy, to the voting and counting processes, facilitated by new high-accuracy applications - was evident throughout. Total confidentiality and security were guaranteed to voters. The system relies entirely on artificial intelligence technology, with smart phones being central to the voting process inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. All in all, the automated system saves time, effort and cost. It simplifies procedures for voters and candidates and for the committees supervising the elections.

8

Guardians of the nation's borders, its people and its achievements

Over the more than five decades of the modern renaissance, the Sultanate has advanced steadily upwards in the ranks of international safety indicators, reaching the top position globally in certain categories. In the Global Terrorism Index for 2022, Oman was classified as one of the countries least exposed to terrorism worldwide, having once again occupied 93rd place on the scale of threat.

The ranking maintained by the Sultanate since the Index was launched in 2012 represents peak safety insofar as concerns terrorist threat, as confirmed by the leading global think tank and research centre, the Institute for Economics and Peace.

Credit for this achievement comes largely from values shared by Omanis across the generations, from the historical and cultural heritage of the Sultanate that has always renounced fanaticism and anti-social sentiments generally. These values have enabled the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Royal Oman Police and other military and security agencies to easily maintain stability in their respective spheres of operation, and helped foster Oman's enduring image as an oasis of calm in a turbulent world. Omanis have been known throughout history as a modest, moderate people who interact with one another and with others in a spirit of friendly goodwill. This goodwill has infused the advance of the modern renaissance, from its foundation by His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said through to its renewal by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who confirmed his resolve To "move Oman to the level that represents and manifests the aspirations and hopes of its citizens."

As Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, His Majesty oversaw the spectacular military parade that marked the Sultanate's 52nd National Day since the launch of the modern renaissance. The parade took place at Al Nasr Square in Dhofar on 18 November 2022 and was a fitting reflection of the care and attention enjoyed by the Sultan's Armed Forces, whose representatives marched proudly displaying weapons, ranks and special capabilities.

قوات السلطان المسلحة

الجيش السلطاني العماني

سلاح الجو السلطاني العماني

البحرية السلطانية العمانية

الحرس السلطاني العماني

شرطة عمان السلطانية

A proud force with a noble mission The Sultan's Armed Forces

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) continue to enjoy the many fruits of Oman's recent development, the progress and prosperity that advanced through the renaissance to new levels of success under the generous patronage of their Supreme Commander, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The SAF is a force that is passionate in the pursuit of its mission to protect and preserve, and it is formidably equipped for the task. Fully committed and superbly armed and trained, the men of the SAF engage with their task with an unconquerable sense of destiny, ever ready to defend their beloved homeland and ensure that its flag will continue to fly high and proud in the skies above Oman.

The Sultan's Armed Forces are a powerful symbol of the Sultanate's renaissance and its achievements. The foundations of that renaissance were laid by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said and it advances today under the direction of Supreme Commander, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. Speaking of his commitment to maintaining the vision and pace of development at his address to the nation on 23 February 2020, His Majesty acknowledged the work of the security services: "We would like to express our deepest thanks and gratitude to all of the intrepid personnel of our armed forces, who serve in the military and security sectors, who shoulder the burden of defending this dear homeland and all that it has achieved. We reaffirm to you our careful attention, so that you may continue to be the bulwark that protects this country from end to end."

The SAF is a cornerstone of the stability that has underpinned the rollout of the Sultanate's development strategy. Its commitment to defending the nation's territorial integrity is unassailable, as is its commitment to discipline and high performance within its ranks. It is a force that has pursued a methodical path to its own development, acquiring weapons and equipment of ever greater sophistication as that development progressed. It has placed itself at the service of ambitious national projects, as it has pursued equally ambitious internal goals, constantly testing and retraining its personnel to standards worthy of their role as protectors of their country's development endeavours and successes.

The Royal Army of Oman

After many years of upgrading and modernisation over the course of the renaissance, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) has become a strong military force, a source of pride for Oman. In the meantime, special training programmes are being conducted to enhance the combat capability of the military personnel and introduce them to the latest systems applicable in war, such as armoured personnel carriers, modern artillery and air defence systems, armoured vehicles, signals systems, transport vehicles and maintenance workshops. These brigades and formations have become an integrated and high-performance force, with efficient operational, administrative and technical systems in place.

The firqat forces have also undergone significant improvements in their organisation, installations, service facilities and telecommunications systems.

The arsenal is constantly reviewed and restocked in line with the operational requirements of the Royal Army of Oman as appropriate to its national responsibilities and in keeping with the fully integrated system favoured by Oman's overall military strategy. Combat units are streamlined for more efficient deployment, and new elite special-purpose units created and professionally trained.

An uninterrupted exercise schedule enhances the combat capabilities of the Royal Army of Oman.

The Royal Air Force of Oman

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAF0) has undergone transformational changes that have turned it today into a highly structured and disciplined contemporary air force, armed with modern fighter craft, advanced equipment and qualified manpower fully capable of safeguarding the tangible and intangible integrity of their homeland. As a proven and efficient arm of Oman's defence structure, RAFO has been entrusted with state-of-the-art aircraft, including combat and logistical transport aircraft, helicopters, and an air defence system that incorporates anti-aircraft missile batteries and radars, training aircraft and training simulators. It has also concluded several forward-looking agreements designed to meet incoming challenges as well as to raise its current technical capability through constant upgrading of the military technology at its disposal. It operates air bases fitted with sophisticated systems capable of functioning in all circumstances and conditions.

RAFO's weapons systems and equipment, transport facilities and manpower are constantly being upgraded to ensure the highest levels of combat proficiency and readiness as it performs its role of protecting Oman's skies and supporting the other wings of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

The Sultan Qaboos Air Academy is one of RAFO'S most outstanding training facilities.

The Royal Air Force of Oman is a modern, highly disciplined and well-armed air force.

The Royal Navy of Oman

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has a strong fleet of modern special-purpose vessels with advanced armament capabilities. Notable in this efficient and strategically selected line-up is a range of surface vessels, including artillery ships, fast missile boats, and support, training and marine (hydrographic) vessels, all collaborating seamlessly to protect the Omani coastline, secure its regional and economic waters and monitor the safe passage of ships and oil tankers through the strategic Strait of Hormuz. The RNO has the specific and vital function of securing passage for units of the Sultan's Armed Forces along the coasts of the Sultanate. Among its other tasks on the high seas are defensive assignments, the protection of fisheries and support tasks for joint amphibious operations and military operations. Its men and women are uniquely qualified to deal with the challenges they face in the performance of their national duties.

The Royal Navy of Oman also includes among the many services it offers both to its own personnel and to civilians nationwide access to a pressure chamber at the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Unit. The unit specialises in treating the effects of diving incidents, but also chronic diseases that benefit from hyperbaric treatment.

The Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy provides the fleet with highly qualified cadres. It holds regular courses geared towards refining the skills and abilities of its personnel, training them in marine sciences related to their routine duties, or designed to develop skills that will increase general competence and efficiency in work performance.

The Royal Navy of Oman fleet is experienced in the use of advanced weapons systems.

The Royal Guard of Oman

The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), as an important component of the modern Omani military system, is afforded commensurate status in the Sultanate's overall coordinated military defence system. It has attained high levels of efficiency and combat ability, and its infantry and support units are fully and adequately armed with the equipment they need to maintain these levels. In addition, it maintains training, technical and administrative support units. The RGO attaches priority to training and retraining and the programmes offered are tailored to the optimal use of the sophisticated equipment afforded the RGO for its use.

The Royal Guard Technical College supplies the RGO and other state bodies with technologically qualified manpower trained to international standards, while the highly regarded Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra draws the flower of Oman's young musical talent.

The RGO's bands perform at military, national and international events, and the RGO Cavalry demonstrates its skills in displays of horsemanship and show jumping competitions and on various national and military occasions, including graduation and passing out ceremonies.

The Royal Guard of Oman units carry out tactical exercises throughout the year, in addition to participating in annual shooting competitions. The RGO also participates in joint military exercises with other branches of the Sultan's Armed Forces, and its free-fall parachute team takes part in a range of regional and international events.

The Royal Guard of Oman is a lean force known for its efficiency and combat readiness.

Training to raise combat efficiency

In keeping with the continual development and modernisation of the Sultan's Armed Forces combat ability, many educational and training facilities have been established to qualify officers and individuals in the use of weapons and systems. All training is approached from the perspectives of science, technology and military strategy.

The Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies was established by Royal Decree No. 27/2022 of 5 May 2022 and adds a new support dimension to the infrastructure of the state as it advances into the renewed renaissance. Reporting to the Ministry of Defence, the Academy brings together under its umbrella the resources and personnel of, respectively, the National Defence College, the Joint Command and Staff College and the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies.

The National Defence College, which was established by Royal Decree No. 2/2013, is the highest strategic academic institution concerned with preparing national cadres in the skills of strategic thinking and planning, at national, regional and international levels, as relates to security and defence. Here also they are trained in the ability to unify, integrate and coordinate actions to accord with the broader framework of national endeavour.

The College, which turned out its ninth batch of graduates on 21 July 2022, has managed over time to acquire a strong reputation both regionally and internationally. It has done so by attracting and hosting senior and internationally respected decision-makers, including politicians, economists, military leaders and academics in possession of scientific and practical expertise. The College conducted its annual strategic exercise (Decision Making 9) on 7 July 2022, successfully managed by the participants in the ninth National Defence Course. The College continues to disseminate its national message with the launch of its tenth session and new academic year on 1 September 2022.

The Joint Command and Staff College is a distinguished military educational institution of long standing. It offers graduates a Bachelor's degree in Military Sciences. The College provides the Sultan's Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman and other security agencies with qualified officers solidly trained in leadership skills. The College

also annually attracts a contingent of officers from friendly countries outside the Sultanate who apply for some of its course offerings. Such trusted collaborations arise directly from the positive relations the Sultanate maintains with other countries, along with the broadly acknowledged reputation of this august institution. On 5 September 2022, the College celebrated the launch of its 36th course of study for officers.

The Military Technical College, meanwhile, is generally regarded as a beacon of modern specialised science, offering advanced curricula and practical training qualifications, as well as regular advanced training seminars. These, and its respected academic administration, have combined to enable the College to fulfil with honour the national goals for which it was established. The College offers qualification levels up to bachelor's degree level and takes in a growing contingent annually of school-leavers emerging from the national general education system.

In its commitment to achieve and maintain the highest levels of qualification for both officers and non-military personnel, all are encouraged to avail of opportunity. For the many relevant military, scientific and technical disciplines, multi-level training is readily available, whether in the Sultanate or in the universities and colleges of sisterly Arab and friendly countries.

The SAF are at the forefront in providing young Omanis with employment in specialist military, technical and related professional fields. Successive batches of these soldiers are absorbed annually into the services dedicated to the honourable task of defending their beloved country. Meanwhile, recruitment endeavours continue apace at all branches of the SAF and the various departments of the Ministry of Defence.

Joint military exercises are designed to help maintain readiness and high efficiency, to advance the SAF in the exercise of its national tasks and duties. They constitute a reinforcement of the training received, and an opportunity to strengthen bonds of communication and cooperation. In this context, and in line with the underlying strategy of the SAF to maintain optimal levels of readiness, joint exercises and joint operational processes are implemented involving the various units and command levels of the SAF and the Royal Guard of Oman. Such exercises and operations provide the occasion for testing the efficiency of equipment, of personnel and of the capability of personnel to handle advanced weapons.

Social, medical and engineering services

The Social Services division of the Sultan's Armed Forces provides social welfare to the officers and men of the SAF with the aim of maintaining social stability for them and their families. It offers housing loans and supervises the associated building works, along with other social services. These services are extended also to service veterans of the SAF.

The SAF Medical Services division provide treatment services to members of the Sultan's Armed Forces and their families. SAF Medical Services also provide medical care and support for evacuation operations, play an active role in the health aspects of the development process and provide emergency flying doctor services. The Medical Services division is supported in its many functions by access to the finest medical equipment in existence, facilitating it in its diagnostic, testing, laboratory analysis, surgery and treatment practices.

The Ministry of Defence's engineering services ensure that all systems are prepared to meet all contingencies.

The Armed Forces Medical Services School is one of the training edifices that provide the Sultan's Armed Forces with qualified medical and technical cadres. Under the banner of intelligent modernisation, the Armed Forces Medical Services, on 31 March 2022 celebrated the opening of the new expanded wing of the Armed Forces Hospital in Al-Khoudh and the opening of the Medical Supply Unit. These additions each bring value to the quality of the specialised health care services offered to the Ministry of Defence, the Sultan's Armed Forces and other military and security agencies.

The Defence Ministry's Engineering Services division - one of the SAF's main support wings - plays a vital role in providing technical and engineering backup during military exercises, as well as providing essential services such as water, electric power, sewerage and other infrastructure facilities at military camps, bases and installations. Further, in the context of the Ministry of Defence's contribution to the national development effort, it frequently assists in the design and construction oversight of local and national projects and maintenance works, and helps maintain various infrastructural networks and facilities, including in-camp and external road systems that extend throughout the Sultanate.

As the body responsible for the military media, the Morale Guidance section has the function of maintaining morale and highlighting both the role of the SAF and its personnel and their high levels of proficiency in carrying out their national duties, as well as media coverage of social, cultural and sporting events, which it publishes in the various print, audio, visual and electronic media.

Military radio serves the function of interpreting for the public the roles performed by the Sultan's Armed Forces and by the Ministry of Defence generally. It defines the SAF's notable military achievements and broader contribution to national development on the one hand, as well as acknowledging and validating its sacred national duty to defend the homeland and protect its achievements.

Radio Al-Sumoud celebrates the dedication and readiness achieved by the Sultan's Armed Forces and the high levels of training, education and qualification enjoyed by its members from the outset of the modern renaissance. It reassures the public of the commitment of their government and of the SAF to maintaining a culture of material, intellectual and moral strength within the forces that defend their country.

The National Survey Authority (NSA) is the central body responsible for the production of military and civilian maps. It also carries out aerial photography operations in every part of the Sultanate, sets the criteria for topographical surveys and maintains the national geographical archives. Its modern printing presses, sophisticated computer programmes and photographic and other advanced equipment ensure that its aeronautical charts, geographical data and satellite surveys are produced to the highest

The National Survey Authority is responsible for the production of maps and for maintenance of the National Archive of Geographical Materials.

standards of accuracy before being made available to users or uploaded onto the national database.

The Maritime Security Centre concerns itself with maintaining the security of the Omani coastal environment and addressing any and all marine security risks found to fall within the Sultanate's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone. As such it is responsible for confronting maritime piracy, illegal immigration, smuggling and other related activities. The Centre coordinates policy with all military, security and civil authorities with a view to sharing in a joint response to such illegal activities.

The Ministry of Defence Pension Fund, since its establishment by Royal Decree 93/87, with set goals in mind. These goals include being able to provide service to retired former personnel and to the families of deceased employees of the Ministry of Defence. The Fund is also involved in the creation of industrial and service companies that contribute to advancing the national economy and generating employment for Omanis.

The light weapons ammunition factory in the wilayah of Sumail is an enterprising project without close competitor in the region, with its high-efficiency and high-tech production values. It was set up by the Sultanate's military and security pension funds as a closed joint stock company and its mission is to meet the light ammunition requirements of the SAF and the Sultanate's other security services.

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum narrates the military history of Oman across the ages through photographic and other exhibit models such as that of the historic Bait al Falaj fortress, which was built during the reign of Sayyid Said bin Sultan in 1845. The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum is the only military museum in the Sultanate where visitors can peruse the history of the Omani military all the way from the pre-Islamic period to the era of the modern renaissance. The Museum's halls contain displays of weaponry, photographs and historical documents that chronicle that long history and evoke the buried memory of illustrious battlefield victories and events. Visitors will be particularly struck by the transformative advances made by the Omani military since 1970.

The Shabab Oman II

The RNV Shabab Oman II continues to fulfil its mission, originally performed by the RNV Shabab Oman, of building bridges of friendship between the Sultanate and other countries around the world. With its young Omani crew and message of cultural harmony, the elegant Shabab calls into foreign ports on its journey of peace, establishing bonds and introducing Oman and its people. It has earned the Friendship Award at the Historical Seas Race in Greece, the International Friendship Award for Long Sailing for the seventh time, the International Friendship Award at the Freedom Festival of Sailing in the Netherlands. Its predecessor, the Shabab Oman, was the recipient of more prestigious international awards than any other vessel of its kind.

On 11 April 2022, the Shabab II set sail for Europe on its sixth international voyage under the banner 'Oman, Land of Peace'. The Shabab berthed at the port of Antwerp in Belgium on 21 July 2022 for a four day visit.

In the course of its sixth voyage, the ship garnered multiple accolades, including the award for 'best ship in the

The Shabab Oman II helps build bridges of communication and friendship connecting the Sultanate with the countries of the world.

port' during the first stage of the tall ship races in the Dutch port of Harlingen. Further endorsement came in the form of a public vote which named the Shabab as the 'best visitor experience' during the popular event. A further citation followed, as the ship that had travelled the longest distance to take part in the tall ship sailing races in the Danish city of Esbjerg.

On 5 August 2022, the Shabab II was crowned in Denmark with the International Friendship Cup for Tall Ships for the year 2022. The award is the highest of its kind internationally.

An indefatigable force

The Sultan's Armed Forces are in an ongoing process of modernisation. As the unbreakable defenders of the homeland, they are pledged to engage all means, all material and human capability, in order to protect the homeland from any and all aggression arriving from land, sea or air. A motivated and determined force, they are constant in their commitment to remain effective and ready to meet all challenges to Oman's stability, to defend its accomplishments and protect its citizens and residents.

As directed by their Supreme Commander, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the SAF is committed to meeting all challenges as they arise, to serving their beloved country as loyal soldiers, to honouring their pledge to His Majesty to guard and protect the hard-earned advances made over the past half century and the forward visions of the renewed renaissance. Theirs is a noble mission, one in which they are tested to place their dreams, and perhaps their lives, in the honourable service of the security, prosperity and stability of their country,

The Royal Oman Police … backbone of security and order

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) operates under a mandate to maintain security and order in the community. An ambitious and highly successful force, its aspirational vision is to develop constantly the performance of its system and personnel to keep pace with current and incoming challenges. Guiding the force in its long-term strategies are the broad objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and for this purpose it has developed its systems across all fields of police work.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led celebrations marking the ROP's annual day on 5 January 2022, reflecting his support for maintenance of a strong police force, enabled by effective work systems and the powerful background training

role of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences.

The ROP provides security coverage at all locations nationwide through a vast network of police stations. It provides traffic, passport and civil status services through service centres in the various wilayat, in addition to maintaining special task units that are trained and qualified to face all emergencies and provide back-up support to all Royal Oman Police formations.

The General Command of the Police has developed training programmes commensurate with the nature of the tasks entrusted to its members, and that are in line with emerging security challenges. These are delivered through the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences and the training departments and sections of the various formations of the Royal Oman Police, where educational course material and practical applications are kept up to date.

Scientific research and innovation are crucial to efficient police work in the fast-evolving and complex world of today, and in September 2022 the ROP hosted a scientific conference at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences under the title 'Fifty Years of Achievements and Aspirations.' Attending were researchers, academics, experts and specialists from the Royal Oman Police, from Sultan Qaboos University and from a number of private universities and colleges, gathered with the shared aim of reviewing a half century of progress in the field of police work. The ROP presented its experience with new technology and with the ambitious, highly-focused training methods and practical applications it

The Royal Oman Police have a key role to play in maintaining security and protecting public safety.

views as indispensable to creating an efficient, contemporary police force. New challenges to the security process were presented and assessed, in parallel with a discussion on extant legislation and such legislative reform as could facilitate police performance and enforcement.

With the rapid development and steady growth of the customs sector, a need exists for regular assessment and readjustment of the procedures followed in security audits and customs inspections. In this context, the ROP introduced in early 2022 the unified security and customs system for ports. The system is already positively impacting security performance across the customs sector and securing safe entry to the Sultanate through its many land, air and seaports.

This system is fitted with smart monitoring devices that quickly identify and verify data relevant to vehicles and passengers prior to their arrival, thus simplifying and speeding up customs procedures. An outstanding benefit from this innovation will be its role in the stimulation of economic and tourist activity. Moreover it is fully in harmony with the Sultanate's mission to develop accurate security control systems and secure safe and fast customs inspection.

The Sultanate continues its drive to deepen bonds of brotherhood and cooperation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and on 8 December 2021 the ROP completed linkage of the Empty Quarter portal, which borders the two countries, into the security system for the management of land ports. This has already had the effect of facilitating the movement of traffic and goods and increasing the volume of trade exchange between the partner countries. The Empty Quarter port is a conduit of growing importance to the economic, tourism and investment sectors.

In furtherance of the digital transformation, the ROP has updated its electronic application for smart devices. The app is an easy-to-use, efficient and quality platform that enables the processing of multiple transactions.

The app provides users with a digital identity and processes digital data such as personal photos, QR codes and other basic input as they appear in the civil ID card, electronic driver's licence and licences for electric vehicles for personal use.

A new update to the ROP app provides services for driving instructors. Certain app interfaces and the electronic reporting service have also been updated with reporting features specific to accidents, injuries, fires, medical incidents, loss of life, leakage of hazardous materials, or cases of public nuisance and disorder. Additionally, traffic reports can be viewed through the interactive map.

The Directorate-General of Information Technology has been active developing and updating upwards of 30 electronic sub-systems that feed into the overall system and provide integrated services digitally to citizens and residents through several channels.

The Directorate-General of Passports and Civil Status provides service to citizens and residents by way of the electronic interface that enables the processing of applications for renewal of civil ID cards for Omanis and of residence cards for resident visa holders. Users can also update passport and civil status data linked to phone number, e-mail or electricity account and this can be processed electronically via the ROP app or via its website.

The electronic visa system allows for the submission of visa applications of all kinds through a single electronic window. It also enables the processing of electronic applications for passport renewal and requests for issuance of new passports for Omanis.

Initiatives pioneered by the ROP have been beneficial to the commercial community and to the movement of traded goods between the ports of the Sultanate and the world at large. Most outstanding of these innovations is the Safe Customs Corridor initiative, which links air and sea ports with the Sultanate's various free zones. Another highly regarded initiative is the system of pre-clearance of goods before they reach the Sultanate's sea and airports. The TIR universal transit system serves as a passport for the transit of goods. The Approved Economic Operator programme has had the effect of building partnership and mutual trust between customs and private sector institutions. The introduction of bonded warehouses facilitates the suspension of customs duty payments pending onward processing.

The electronic customs declaration system offers users a package of e-services via a portal with access to 53 government agencies. Services available through the system include the application process for registration, fast track clearance, electronic payments, advance and deferred payment of customs duty, tax refunds, processing of guarantees and renewal of customs clearance licences, as well as applications for temporary import clearance and for the sub-division of goods.

The ROP's Directorate-General of Traffic is responsible for traffic control and general road safety and operates with extensive use of patrols and a comprehensive traffic oversight system. It is intensely focused on the issue of safety and employs a sophisticated automated vehicle inspection system as a prerequisite to licensing that tests rigorously for roadworthiness. There are 50 technical inspection stations in the Sultanate of Oman outfitted with leading-edge equipment and technology. The ROP has now activated the e-service that enables the delivery of private vehicle driving licences using the police services app accessible via smart phone or through the ROP website.

The ROP's road safety campaigns and procedures have had a major impact on the accident toll on the national roads, with a formidable 84% decrease in total accidents, a 70% drop in injuries and a 67% drop in fatalities represented in the statistics for the years 2012-2020.

Traffic safety institutes have been established in each of the Sultanate's governorates, born out of a conviction by the ROP General Command that greater road safety awareness was the key to reducing death and destruction on the roads. The institutes offer courses and seminars which are practically oriented, with assistance from simulators which give trainees the experience of driving in the traffic environment of the Sultanate.

The Police Coast Guard Command has specific functions connected with the prevention and control of crime on the high seas, including smuggling, piracy and human trafficking. It also has responsibility for maintaining security and order in the nation's ports and maritime facilities. The Coast Guard collaborates with the relevant authorities in their efforts to combat marine pollution, and its trained teams are available to provide assistance to seafarers in distress.

The Directorate-General of Police Aviation, meanwhile, supports task units on regular air patrols of the Oman coastline, monitoring suspicious activity inside territorial waters. It also assists in personnel transfers to remote locations or rough terrain locations with a need for a continuous security presence. It conducts search and rescue operations and medical evacuations from inaccessible places, and transports food supplies and other necessities to residents of mountainous regions.

The Royal Oman Police are convinced of the value of involving the public in their mission to maintain order and prevent crime. Awareness campaigns sponsored by the force actively foster a culture of public responsibility that discourages anti-

The Coast Guard Police Command is a powerful enforcer in the war against smuggling, piracy and infiltration.

social behaviour. Information relevant to security issues is made freely available within the community and regular surveys monitor public satisfaction levels with the services provided by the ROP, thus keeping them in touch with current and pending challenges to the social order.

The ROP uses every available medium to engage with the public and disseminate its message, communicating in Arabic, English and other relevant languages in order to access all segments of the community. Its core objective is to ensure that truth and fact are not obscured by rumour and misinformation, in particular during times of crisis or emergency.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority... protecting lives and property

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance was established as a constituent of the overall public security structure, as defined by Article 16 of Royal Decree No 68/2014, and assigned the function of protecting lives and property, preserving public safety, reducing the risks of natural and industrial disasters and mitigating their impact where they occur, and implementing measures and procedures related to civil defence and ambulance work.

In 2021, Royal Decree No 39/2021 was announced, bearing on the work of the Authority. It amended the name from Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance to Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.

The fire service is one of the most critical services provided by the Authority. Its highly trained firefighting teams are qualified to handle all categories of fire and they are well supported with the best equipment modern industry has to offer to assist them in their courageous work of protecting lives and property.

The Land Rescue Service is closely linked to the Fire Service and the two frequently collaborate when incidents related to land rescue are being handled, such as those involving the evacuation of victims of traffic accidents trapped inside vehicles. The Water Rescue Service is another affiliate of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority which has particular responsibility for rescuing people from beaches, dams, wells and water springs, as well as extracting people trapped in sewer channels. It also supports search and rescue teams during searches for persons missing in flooded streams.

The Authority has specially trained cadres to deal with incidents involving hazardous materials and these are fully outfitted for purpose, both in terms of specialist knowledge and protective apparel and equipment. It maintains a website for institutions and companies that handle hazardous materials in the course of their business to ensure that it is kept up to date with their nature, storage locations and volumes, so as to maintain

readiness in the event of accident or leakage.

The Directorate-General of Civil Protection is engaged in an active collaboration with other institutional partners seeking paths to simplify and speed up procedures related to the issuance of licences and civil protection certificates for commercial and industrial establishments. Civil protection services are now linked to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion through the Invest Easy e-services programme.

On 6 February 2022, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority launched the Home Ambulance Service, which provides emergency medical care to critical home cases before transferring them to the nearest and most appropriate health facility. It is currently operating in several governorates, having initiated service in those most densely populated, and will ultimately be extended nationwide.

Under the current pattern of expansion being experienced by the Sultanate, and coinciding with the opening of the Empty Quarter border crossing on the highway connecting the Sultanate with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Authority inaugurated a Civil Defence and Ambulance Centre at the Empty Quarter port in Al Dhahirah Governorate on 8 December 2021. The Centre provides fire and rescue services, and introduced a fleet of vehicles and support mechanisms, notably firefighting, rescue and ambulance vehicles, in the same year to enable its field teams deal with potential incidents.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority makes an outstanding contribution to the protection of lives and property.

9

The Omani media .. a fair and balanced message

The revolutionary advances embodied in the modern, and subsequently renewed, Omani renaissance have been accompanied in their execution by a media narrative that explained and justified each step of the process to the public, clearly and in real time. The Sultanate's audio, visual and print media view this significant function as being at the heart of their raison d'être, part of a constructive national obligation. It is a perspective that expresses much about the Omani personality, about its desire to inform in a respectful way, to be open to diverse ideas, to value friendship with other peoples and cultures.

Such sentiments have been responsible for a sustained media policy that is exceptionally balanced in its delivery. The vision is broad, reflecting broad national principles; and programming tends to align with strategies and policies that are manifesting across the Sultanate. The media message serves to create and then spread awareness of these policies and of their consequences, and to encourage open discussion in a spirit of free speech, for it is only in a climate of free expression that the media can hope to maintain its high level of performance. Media studies are in constant search of breakthroughs in technology or presentation that will keep the many branches of the media, which now include social media in all formats, relevant and connected. Indeed the Sultanate has been particularly active on the latter front, activating new applications on social media platforms for broader access to the public. Media legislation, meanwhile, has kept pace with the changes, and new professional charters regulate the conduct of media work. At stake is the valuable reputation of the Omani media, indeed of the Sultanate itself. Oman is proud of its contributions, past and present, to civilisation, and of its ability to influence local, regional and global opinion.

A clear media vision

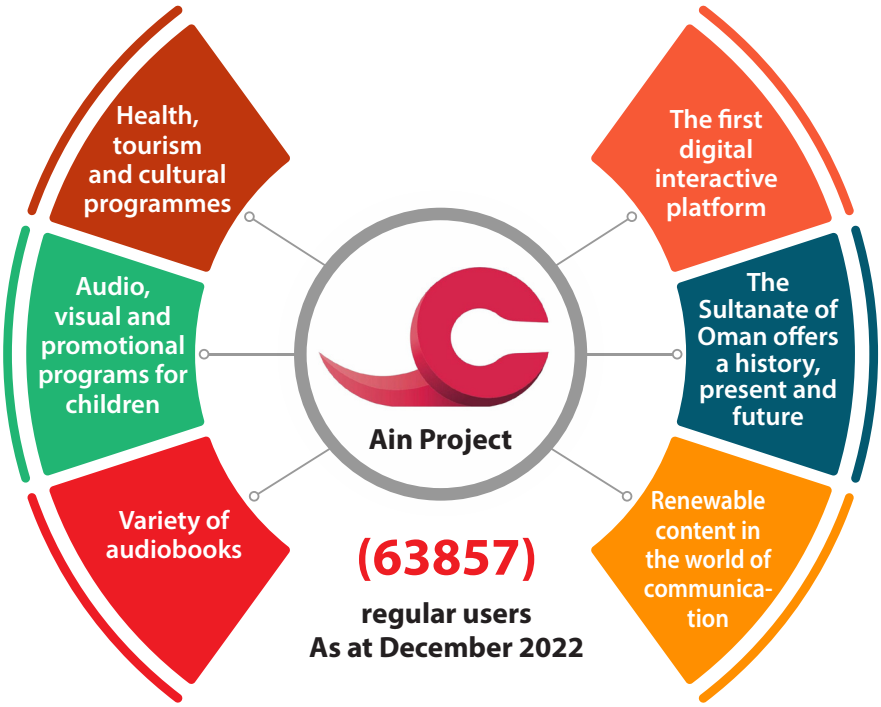
The Ministry of Information has embraced a media policy that is fully focused on public priorities, with an emphasis on quality and diversity. It is paying particular attention to enhancing electronic content, with objectivity, credibility and responsibility as guiding principles, whether dealing with the public at home or with the international community in its overseas interactions. In the policies adopted in its espousal of the digital age, the Ministry has multiple objectives, among them the priority of establishing a strong presence for the Sultanate in the various electronic media. This presence can be used to create an awareness of Oman's unique identity and recent achievements, or to promote specific sectors of the economy or culture, always with an eye to maintaining or improving the quality of Omani content. The Ministry seeks to be a trustworthy source of information by disseminating reliable data about the country and by interacting with the public to provide information requested about the Sultanate.

In pursuit of its long term objective of providing an effective digital

Oman's mass media maintains a confident approach to its mission.

media service that embodies the national identity and culture of the Sultanate, meets audience aspirations and reflects future prospects, the Ministry has expanded its electronic endeavours to aspects of production, publishing and the promotion of media content of every kind. This it is accomplishing through social media sites, websites, applications and smart devices. The Directorate-General of Electronic Media has taken on the task of building the social communication strategy of the Ministry of Information, a 3ER2pioneering media project that is motivated to maximise the return on its investment in social networking sites. The strategy is laying the foundation for the successful rollout of interactive electronic media. It will standardise the mood of electronic media content to one that is consistent with the visions of the Ministry of Information, while keeping pace with technical developments and media formats into the third millennium.

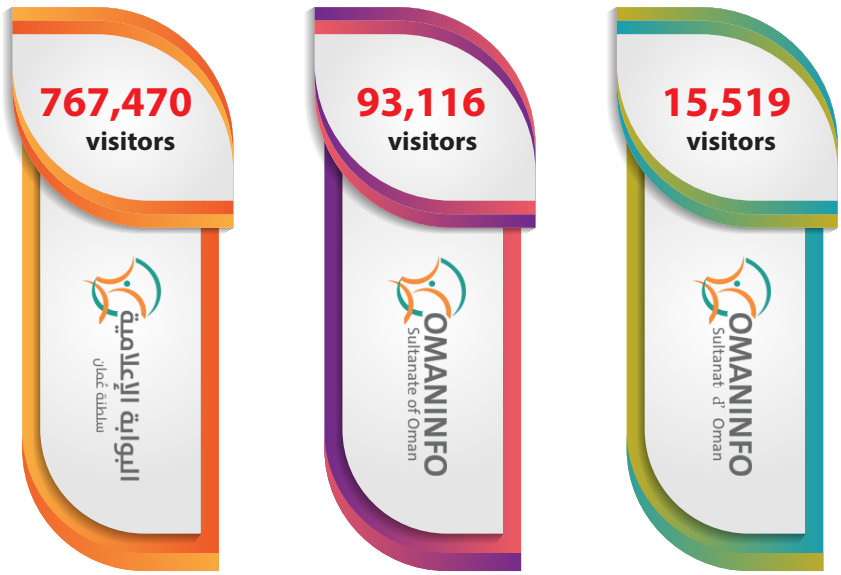
The Ain project was launched formally by the Ministry in January 2022, following a trial rollout in 2021, as the Sultanate's first interactive digital platform. It offers novel content and features that are in lockstep with fast-changing developments in the field and geared to present the Sultanate, its past, its present and its future visions



in a format that magnifies the appeal and impact of the presentation. As the year progressed, the platform delivered video-on-demand content on such topics as health, tourism and culture that met the most challenging competitive standards in the digital field. Along on offer were audio books in multiple categories, original children's content and audio and video clips of diverse nature. The Ministry has created and continues to build the Sultanate's first public audio library of Omani books as an integral part of its media services development strategy, under the umbrella of the national digital transformation project. As at December 2022, Ain had accumulated 63,857 regular users.

The Sultanate of Oman Media Portal occupies an increasingly prominent position in the areas of publishing and of documenting digital media material via the website of the Ministry of Information. The Portal publishes news, data and development information about Oman and has become a destination of choice for researchers interested in learning more about the Sultanate through its wealth of content – diverse, integrated and instantly available in three languages: Arabic, English and French.

The Portal had been visited, at December 2022



Arabic-Speaking **English-Speaking** **French-Speaking**

Spreading the word about the Sultanate abroad

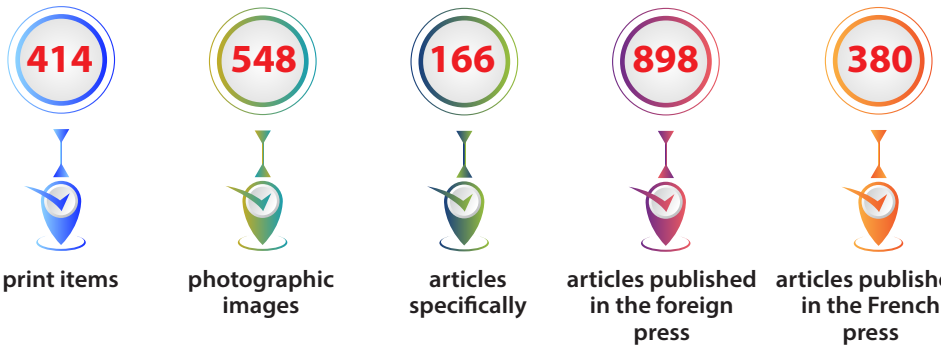
The Ministry of Information has as an important part of its brief the responsibility for presenting the Sultanate in a positive light to the widest possible audience, for reporting on its impressive development endeavours, for communicating this information overseas and ensuring that the Sultanate's many contributions to civilisation are recognised. It manages this task through a variety of channels, illustrating Oman's cultural, educational, environmental and healthcare successes, its pristine environment, rich heritage and tourist attractions through such well-attended events as book fairs, media occasions and other activities that take place in the Arab world and far beyond.

The Ministry also actively seeks out routes to cooperation and friendly exchange with other countries by, amongst other means, signing agreements and memorandums of understanding in matters relevant to the media.

An aspect of the Sultanate's public profile that is of particular interest to the Ministry in its endeavours is its practice of approaching all issues of international

A tireless commitment to communication and to sharing Oman's cultural heritage with others.

or local concern with a view to peaceful resolution. Another of its key interests is the fair portrayal of Oman's contributions to science, culture and civilisation across the centuries. The Ministry of Information maintains relationships with media outlets in the Arab world and beyond, including websites and social media, and monitors the frequency of media references to Oman in these and other media entities on a regular basis. In the period from January to September of 2022.



In addition to the efforts made from within the Sultanate to export its image abroad, invitations are issued regularly to Arab and foreign journalists and media professionals to come and see for themselves and make their own judgments about the reality of the Sultanate's development progress in the political, economic, cultural and other spheres. Others are invited to attend national occasions or events organised by individual government ministries or agencies. Between January and November 2022, 70 media professionals from around the world had visited Oman and reported on their experience in the overseas media.

Acutely aware of the influence of the external media and its potential to present the Sultanate to overseas audiences from a respected neutral standpoint, the Ministry has been expanding its channels of communication abroad. In this context the Sultanate's media attachés in, respectively, Cairo, London and Washington have a particularly important role to play in representing Oman, in clarifying its policies and positions and outlining the background to these in a manner that preserves the deservedly positive image of their country that inspires them.

The Omani-American Press Forum is a prominent event in the media and cultural calendar of the US capital. Jointly sponsored by the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in Washington DC and the Omani Journalists' Association, the Forum was established in a salute to the historical friendship that continues to thrive between Oman and the United States. It celebrates the heritage and history of the Sultanate, its cultural foundations and economic and tourist potential. Forum discussions are accompanied by a packed agenda of media, cultural and artistic activities.

The Oman News Agency

Since its establishment in 1986, the Oman News Agency (ONA), as the Sultanate's official news source, has fulfilled the task of providing a constant stream of news and information, assembled and re-broadcast in alignment with the media policy of the Sultanate of Oman. That policy is one that is characterised by transparency, clarity, impartiality – and a conscious avoidance of the sensational in both its content and delivery.

Given that the domestic news industry is a priority for ONA, it sets its Omani readers at the very centre of the events and activities it covers across the wilayat and governorates of the Sultanate. At the same time It serves the Sultanate's many media and press institutions, giving them access to its coverage of all newsworthy events taking place both in the Sultanate and internationally through its network of local and foreign correspondents.

The Omani News Agency supplies materials, photographic images, news reports and features in both Arabic and English. It broadcasts via satellite through the agency's website.

In March 2022, ONA launched its new website, supplementing its earlier offerings with audio, visual and print bulletins broadcast on an ongoing basis. The upgrade had the early effect of expanding its support base in the form of new followers eager to be kept abreast of events and developments.

The Omani press

The Omani press is trained and equipped to respond to rapid developments in media and communications at international level. It is equally conscious of its mission to fulfil the demand for real and relevant news by the Omani public, while providing a forum for the open discussion of citizen concerns.

Perhaps one of the most prominent distinguishing features of the Omani press is that it is wholly owned by the private sector, with the exception of Oman newspaper and the Oman Daily Observer. The work of press institutions in the Sultanate, as well as procedures for press publication, the foundation of publishing establishments, printing presses and advertising companies, is regulated by the Press and Publication Law, as amended by Royal Decree No 87/2004.

The Sultanate publishes a fleet of newspapers, magazines and bulletins

- daily, weekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, half-yearly and yearly in addition to free trade journals, responding to ever more sophisticated demand from a fast-evolving society with fast-evolving concerns. In addition, ministries and agencies publish magazines or publications concerned with their own activities or special interest matters.

Oman's Arabic-language dailies are Oman, Al Watan, Al Shabiba and Al Ruwaya. Published daily in the English language also are the Oman Daily Observer, Times of Oman and Muscat Daily. In addition, several tabloid format weeklies dominated by entertainment, sport and advertising themes are delivered free of charge with their parent newspapers or distributed individually.

During 2022, the Ministry of Information, represented by the Media Licensing Department, approved some 69 submissions from press and media entities, including applications for electronic press and audio-visual platform licences, licences to practice journalism by existing and prospective media professionals hoping to work for a variety of print and

The technology available to the domestic print media is the best in its field (Ministry of Information Printing Press).

digital establishments, as well as for private radio and television channels.

The Directorate-General of Press, Publication and Advertising, meanwhile, is distinguished by the professional quality of the coverage of local and international developments in its affiliated publications, principal among them the Arabic-language Oman daily, the English-language Oman Observer daily and the quarterly cultural magazine Nizwa. It maintains an active research unit, which publishes studies of significance to the sector, as well as providing printing and publicity services.

In its overall brief, the Directorate supervises the issuance and publication of newspapers, magazines, periodicals and books, and the work of printing, distribution and marketing both inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Government Communication

The Government Communication Centre has as its core mission the improvement of government communication by providing support to the media departments affiliated to government institutions, and evaluating their communication activities on an ongoing basis to ensure their continued effectiveness.

In addition, the Centre has a participating role in formulating strategies, guidelines and

regulatory frameworks for communication processes with a view to attaining best practice standards. The Centre monitors talking points of relevance to government services that are circulating in the media and assesses the public response to government decisions and projects.

In the period from January to October 2022, the Centre worked on multiple issues in collaborations with concerned institutions operating in the media, political, economic, cultural and other fields.

Radio and television... a message both honest and purposeful

Radio and television channels in Oman are riding the crest of a wave of positive growth. Programming trends are full of optimism and hope for the future, promoting feelings of national belonging and a will to engage with the grand development project that is taking the Sultanate forward with confidence to an abundant future. The achievements of the state, including its peace-oriented foreign policy achievements, are properly celebrated.

While many radio and television programmes explore formats for conveying the broad and specific successes of the development process, they also actively encourage viewer and listener participation in the process, through talk shows, panel discussions, phone-ins and online dialogues. Young people are particularly active in this sphere and their interaction is nurtured by programming strategies that focus intently on activities that interest them, on publicly celebrating their academic, sporting and other achievements and dreams. Offsetting this validation is the message that reminds young people of their responsibility to contribute to the advance of their nation. Youth are its most precious and most valuable resource.

The Ministry of Information had some of its achievements recognised in 2022 in the form of awards earned at contested events internationally. Accolades included two major successes at the 15th Gulf Radio and Television Festival held in Manama, Bahrain, where Sultanate of Oman Radio won the Golden Sail Award in the Community Drama category for its Some People series, and the Silver Sail Award in the Religious Radio category for its Atheer al Arabiya programme. Youth Radio won the award for the Best Arab Tourism Radio Programme at the Arab Tourism Media Awards which took place in Dhofar Governorate, for its production covering tourism in the Sultanate entitled Sweet Oman.

The audio sector… where quality intersects with credibility

Sultanate of Oman Radio has responsibility for managing the message conveyed to listeners at home and abroad under uniformly controlled, high-quality standards of content and presentation.

Since it began broadcasting, it has energetically taken on technical, transmission and other challenges to enable its reach to extend to every Omani listener, wherever he or she is located, with programming that matches divergent and accelerating interests. Today, Sultanate of Oman Radio is heard across the world, thanks on the one hand to the explosive growth of the digital industry, but also to the continuous improvement and diversification of its radio productions.

Notable advances made in 2022 include the launch of visual broadcasts by Sultanate of Oman Radio on the social networking platforms YouTube and Twitter. Meanwhile, the results of a study conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information and published in September 2022 that examined reading, listening and viewing rates for the Sultanate's home-grown media demonstrated that Youth Radio had the highest listenership among local radio channels, accounting for 33% of the overall numbers, and with a particular appeal to young people.

73%

of Omanis listen to local radio channels in the Sultanate of Oman.

71%

Those who listen to local radio channels listen to them on the radio, while only 5% of them listen to them on social media.

33%

Al-Shabab Radio is the most listened-to radio channel by Omanis with 33% of the total listeners to local channels, followed by Al-Wesal channel with 7%.

Public Radio

إذاعة سلطنة عمان

The first radio station in the Sultanate, Public Radio began broadcasting on 30 July 1970, documenting the very earliest steps of the modern Renaissance. It sees its dual mission as, on the one hand, helping to inculcate values of good citizenship, while contributing to raising the standard of publicly-disseminated information.

Public Radio articulates its public service mission with a programming schedule that revolves around social, cultural, intellectual, economic and religious issues of general interest. It encourages dialogue on these issues and reinforces the emerging ethos of self-motivation and engagement with the broad horizons of national development.

The ethos of Public Radio draws on the principles of moderate Islam and on the authentic Arab customs and traditions that have moulded the open-minded tolerance of the Omani personality.

Omani media professionals take pride in delivering a message devoid of sensationalism.

Youth Radio

إذاعة الشباب

Youth (Al Shabab) Radio first came on the air in July 2003, coinciding with the Sultanate's celebration of Renaissance Day on 23 July. Initially known as the Youth Programme, it was specifically aimed at the younger generation in its content and youthful presentation.

Al Shabab began to broadcast around the clock on 1 January 2014 and airs in all governorates.

In 2022, the Channel produced a set of recorded and live programmes especially for Ramadan, and these proved to be extremely popular with radio audiences. Equally popular was its decision to limit programme breaks to no more than a minute and a half in duration, a factor that helped sustain continuity and listener satisfaction; and to opt for round the clock broadcasting for the season.

Holy Quran Radio

إذاعة القرآن الكريم

Holy Qur'an Radio is dedicated to the Holy Qur'an and its teachings, and its broadcasts include recitations from the Holy Book in the various styles, along with programmes of special interest to Muslims or students of Islam. The programming ethos is one of moderation and tolerance, and its content promotes these Islamic values. As features also of the Omani character, they are values that resonate strongly with Omanis and with their interpretation of Islam historically. This interpretation respects freedom of worship and rejects all forms of extremism.

Holy Qur'an Radio was launched on 28 July 2006, broadcasting for seven hours a day, and moved to its current 24-hour schedule on 1 January 2014.

Holy Qur'an Radio completed its recording project of the Holy Book and of various Qur'anic recitations in 2022, in addition to 6 recordings broadcast during the month of Ramadan.

English Radio

الإذاعة الإنجليزية

Established on 15 December 1975, it aims to communicate, interact and promote dialogue between Omani society and the non-Arabic speaking English communities residing or visiting the Sultanate. On 1 January 2015, English radio broadcasting began around the clock.

In 2022, English Radio initiated a project to develop its content in a bid to widen its audience, and undertook a major revamp of its programming schedule, with contributing expertise from seasoned Omani professionals. Part of the project involved the airing of English Radio's first visual broadcast, which had drawn upwards of 230,000 followers on Instagram within a short five-month period. On 1 October 2022, English Radio opened a YouTube account for the first time.

Local radio stations channel the mood and values of their audience.

Classical Music Radio

إذاعة الموسيقى الكلاسيكية

Classical Music Radio took to the airwaves on 22 July 2010 and has been broadcasting to appreciative audiences ever since. It presents an eclectic programme schedule of music derived from the creative output of the world's greatest classical music geniuses past and present. Musical presentations are preceded and followed by brief commentaries in Arabic and English. The channel now broadcasts for 19 hours a day, starting at 6.00 am and continuing all the way through to 1.00 am.

Television.. Diversity and quality in the visual image

In its programming philosophy, Sultanate of Oman TV aims to fulfil diversity and quality standards in both content and presentation without sacrificing elements of either. It has, meanwhile, been keeping pace with the accelerated development globally of the social media phenomenon. Responding to demand, both domestically and from overseas, for more widespread access to content, the national TV broadcast provider has extended its connection to social media, so that no one is left out. Sultanate of Oman TV broadcasts original content of social, youth and local interest, as well as a broad schedule of documentary reports and features in the family and children's, sports, entertainment, health and tourism categories.

Sultanate of Oman TV broadcasts to all of Oman via satellite or internet, facilitating access for all viewers. It incorporates the Public Channel , the Sports Channel, Oman Direct (or Oman Mubasher), and the Oman Cultural Channel.

Sultanate of Oman TV keeps abreast of media advances and has access to the best technology to enhance delivery.

The Public Channel

The Public Channel occupies a special public service position in its function of presenting and explaining the renewed renaissance being energised by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. It devotes considerable air time to documenting the successes achieved so far and outlining upcoming phases. It celebrates Omani values and indigenous customs and traditions. Its programmes convey an image of Omanis as both products of their rich history and creators of their current forward-looking reality. It promotes values of citizenship, tolerance, peace and moderation, confirming the unifying sentiments the Sultanate has always brought to its interactions with the outside world, with its peoples and with its cultures.

Extensive coverage of Omani projects, successes, events, and cultural matters occupied much of the Channel's programming schedule in 2022, rolled out alongside its regular roster of scientific, religious, cultural, economic, youth, health, children's and light entertainment programmes. The Public Channel is well regarded for its diverse, yet comprehensive, offerings that help maintain its high viewing numbers. Contributing to its universal popularity is a light entertainment programme range that secures a regular turnover of the latest productions emanating from local, Arab and foreign originators.

Most of the content broadcast by the Public Channel is replayed via its social network accounts with YouTube and Twitter. In addition, all programmes are streamed on the Periscope platform (check), the result of another Ministry of Information initiative motivated by the need to ensure that its message is being delivered by all available means.

All of the Public Channel's visual content is duplicated on its social networking accounts.

The Oman Cultural Channel

The Cultural Channel continues to honour the ideals which guided its foundation in 2016, promoting Omani culture to its viewers, highlighting the Sultanate's unique tangible and intangible heritage, while demonstrating its openness to other cultures through a programming schedule that spans the wonderful diversity of human cultures across history, geography and environment. A forum for the visual presentation of craft and custom and art, the Channel also serves as a unique space for the celebration of Arab literature past and present.

Its round-the-clock broadcasts treat viewers to an intellectually satisfying daily menu of original productions that pay tribute to the creative Omani tradition

as it manifested in every area of life and lifestyle. And with its customary balance, the Channel gives equal attention to the traditions and crafts of other cultures, ancient and modern, that show so clearly both the diversity and similarity of humans everywhere.

The Oman Cultural Channel broadcasts a daily bulletin of cultural news, covering newsworthy cultural events taking place both within the Sultanate and in the world at large. The Channel also devotes time slots for segments of an educational dimension in the context of a distance learning initiative conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Information.

The Sports Channel

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The Sports Channel offers broad coverage of local and international sporting events in a variety of formats, with daily, weekly and seasonal coverage and commentary, as well as daily roundups, attuned to viewer preferences, with specific focus on youth preferences. One area of particular interest is, of course, Omani sporting events and achievements. The Sports Channel celebrates the magnificent state-sponsored sporting infrastructure erected across the country. It fosters the competitive instincts that add excitement to sporting events, pitting clubs and teams against one another in the drive for outstanding performance. It furthers ethics in sport and the link between sport, fitness and all-round healthy living.

Among the Sport Channel's notable successes in 2022 was the programme 'Hebat Reeh' (Gust of Wind), which won the Silver Sail in the TV Sports Programmes category at the 15th Gulf Radio and Television Awards in Manama.

Up-to-the-minute sports news from home and abroad is available on the Sports Channel.

The Oman Direct Channel

The Oman Mubasher (Oman Direct) channel was launched in January 2014 to cover political, social and cultural events, conferences, festivals, seminars, poetry and literary gatherings, student graduation ceremonies, military parades and press conferences. Oman Direct also airs the 'Life Lesson' programme and offers a variety of other scheduled entertainment slots. The Channel broadcasts round the clock.

The private sector and radio and television broadcasting

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

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

- Hala FM Radio in Arabic and Radio Hi FM in English, both of which are owned by the Entertainment Media Network.

- Muscat FM Radio in Arabic, owned by the Muttrah Media Services Company. Muscat FM is a public service provider broadcasting to the entire territory of the Sultanate on the FM frequency band.

- Al Shabiba FM in Arabic, and TFM in English, both of which are affiliated to the Muscat Space Media Company, one of the media arms of the Muscat Media Group.

- Al Wasal Radio in Arabic, Merge FM and Virgin Radio Oman in English, owned by SABCO Media Corporation.

In addition to these radio stations, which have extended the scope of their broadcasting service to all governorates, the Ministry of Information, represented by the Department of Private Radio, Television and Electronic Broadcasting Establishments, granted broadcasting licences between October 2021 and the end of 2022 to: Marsa's electronic channel, Baida; Al-Salam Electronic Radio; Shababiah Electronic Channel; Al Bahja Electronic Radio; Al Shater Media Channel; and Al Ahqaf Media Channel.

Private radio channels monitor events of interest to Omanis in all spheres of activity.

Private ownership of radio channels expanded the ability of the broadcasting sector to spread awareness of important media messages.

Private radio stations now broadcast in all governorates.

Variety in the programming approach of foreign private radio is designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of the Sultanate's expatriate community.

Local private radio draws in large audiences through its multilingual programming policy.

The Private Institutions Radio and Television Law opened up the broadcasting industry to the Omani private sector, enabling private institutions to own and manage radio and television channels.

SABCO Media Corporation
الوصل
merge 104.8
Virgin RADIO OMAN
Entertain-ment Media Network
Muscat Space Media Company
Hi 95.9 FM
Muttrah Media Services Company
FM

10

Sustainable development .. with an ambitious future vision

As the renewed Omani renaissance gathers pace, Omanis are waking up to an ever expanding landscape of opportunity opening up for them, for their country, and for the upcoming generations. His Majesty Sultan Haitham has returned frequently in his public comments to the overriding aspiration of this renaissance, after introducing it in his inaugural address on 11 February 2020 and cementing the idea two weeks later in his first major address to the nation on 23 February 2020. "Oman is always the intended beneficiary in all that we do and all that we seek to achieve." He called on "every citizen, without exception, to strive to preserve the gains of the renaissance and to take an active part in seeing to fulfilment, by the Grace of God, the higher goals of development."

If education is the means to the evolution of society, the engine of its future and the sustainability of that future, then education, His Majesty insisted, must be a national priority. Education will be the agent through which children will learn the skills to build Oman's future, to create the world which they and future generations will inhabit.

As befits this commitment, His Majesty pioneered by royal directive a collaboration between the general educational and vocational training sectors and a selection of international institutions with a view to achieving greater integration, by adapting curricular content in each to incorporate elements of the other, or bringing skills from the technical track into the general education curriculum and vice versa.

Respected studies of the Sultanate's educational system indicate that it is keeping pace with sustainable development trends, and that great strides have been made in upgrading that system to the point of student parity with global competition standards. Meanwhile the third level sector is acknowledged as having achieved excellent performance levels, as represented in international indices that measure and compare

standards across the world. No fewer than five private universities in the Sultanate have been afforded QS rankings for the Arab region. The labour market is maintaining a balance between regulation to meet growth requirements and employment needs. At the same time, Omanisation and replacement policies are accelerating, spurred by the launch of the National Employment Programme and the phased implementation of Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty has classed as a national priority and pre-eminent concern of government the task of generating adequate employment for Omanis. In this context, on 5 July 2021, he chaired a meeting at Al Baraka al Amer Palace of the Supervisory Committee of the National Employment Programme, where he was briefed on the most important challenges facing the current labour market, the likely direction of these challenges and government efforts to resolve them.

Labour statistics show the Sultanate having attained

These statistics confirm the steady gains of the Omanisation trend, and the overall success of the government's strategy of achieving full employment for a well-qualified Omani manpower stock.

Education

Education is absolutely crucial to the Sultanate's futuristic plans and Sultan Haitham has emphasised this in his public addresses as well as in meetings with government. In his 23 February 2020 address to the nation, he cited education as a national priority of the highest order if the rising generation is to contribute adequately to the manifestation of the future they desire and deserve. His Majesty has given practical expression to this commitment in a series of directives targeting the education sector for the most ambitious upgrades, bringing it fully into line with the goals of Oman 2040. He has ordered the speedy completion of preliminaries for the construction of 76 school buildings across the Sultanate as development projects incorporated into the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

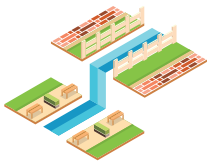
Furthermore, His Majesty has instructed the refurbishment and maintenance of an additional 105 school buildings within the general education system at a financial cost of RO7,073,500.

An aspect of His Majesty's concern for the quality of education relates to its value to job seekers in enabling them to access rewarding employment. It is this aspect that motivated his directives to introduce a technical and vocational dimension to the eleventh and twelfth grade curricula at post-primary level. He has instructed the Ministry of Education to expedite measures to draft a well-studied, integrated blueprint for the execution of this initiative such that it may equip school-leavers with skills adequate to the demands of current and future career opportunities.

If technical skills are necessary to better qualify job seekers for recruitment opportunities, no technical skill is more relevant in today's labour market than an easy acquaintance with information technology. His Majesty's proposal to facilitate the transfer of these skills has been to direct the provision of 60,000 tablet computers to pupils from families benefiting from social security support for the 2020/2021 academic year. With Oman

60.000

tablet computers to pupils from families benefiting from social security support



105

school buildings within the general education system

76

school buildings across the Sultanate as development projects incorporated

2040 as the guiding vision, he has sought greater investment in the education sector generally, to be channelled in line with the above-referenced diagnosis of the greatest challenges facing it and facing school-leavers emerging from it.

Of equal importance to healthy learning is access to a healthy diet and pupils from the categories of social security and limited income families are provided with school meals in a gesture proposed by His Majesty, and confirming the practical and generous sentiments he brings to the broad understanding of education.

These royal directives parallel the programmes and initiatives proposed and approved by the Ministry of Education in the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). The Ministry's strategy can be viewed as four-fold, addressing the overall quality of education and performance; governance and development of the structure of the educational system; infrastructure and protection of physical assets; and educational economics and financial sustainability.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan for education covers the most ambitious of the agreed infrastructure projects, including the construction of 251 integrated school buildings, the expansion of 300 existing school buildings, the restoration, maintenance and outfitting of some 650

Education is a top national priority in Oman, since it constitutes the basis for the success of all present and future objectives.

school buildings, and the rehabilitation of 200 science laboratories.

The Ministry of Education has rolled out a long-term national strategy for school-level education covering the quarter century 2016-2040 which amounts to a road map for the evolution of school education in the Sultanate to meet the goals of Oman 2040.

Education Indicators in the 2019 Global Competitiveness Report published by the World Economic Forum placed the Sultanate in 6th position for the Arab world and 53rd globally from an analysis of 141 participating countries. Oman also ranked 38th in Pillar 6 of the Report (Skills), which examines amongst other factors five education indicators, as represented in: mean years of schooling; school life expectancy; critical thinking in teaching; pupil-to-teacher ratio in primary education (basic education); and skillset of graduates.

The 2021 report of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), meantime, demonstrated the advances made by the Sultanate's educational system through indicators such as the quality of education and the harmonised test scores index. Oman was ranked fourth among Arab and Gulf countries, and 76th globally out of 164 participating countries.

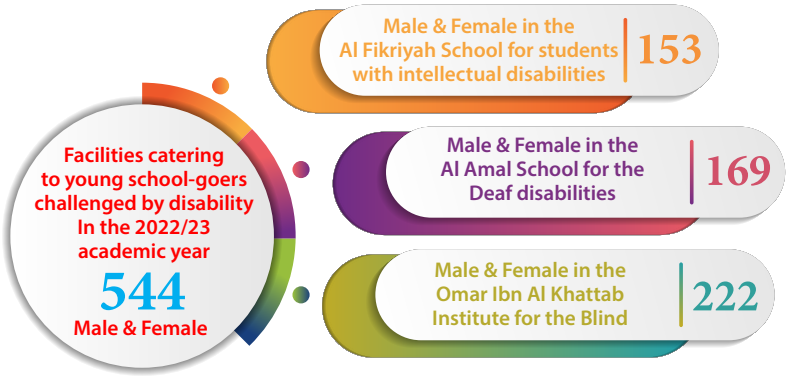
Statistics show an increase of 35,810 pupils enrolled in government schools for the 2022/2023 academic year over the previous year, or a total of 742,875 pupils in 1,241 schools nationwide. The same school year saw 58,347 male and female teachers and 10,612 administrators and technicians employed by the system. Of the total teaching staff numbers, 3,207 represented either permanent or contract staff, of whom 526 were male and 2,681 female. In certain disciplines, the Omanisation rate was an impressive 100%.

The vision of Oman 2040, which has enshrined education as a key priority, shares a deep respect for the values of the Islamic religion and of the Omani identity, inspired by the Sultanate's history and heritage. These principles are not only fundamental to the requirements of a healthy society, they support a sustainable approach to development, while providing the skills to implement it. As such, the Ministry of Education has included in its five-year curriculum development strategy a series of system enhancements that will bring education in the Sultanate into full alignment with global trends. School-leavers must have the capabilities and skills to compete regionally and globally and this is being achieved through such significant programmes as completing the global series in science and mathematics, applying the global series in the subjects of English language and information technology, and completing the adaptation of special educational curricula.

Insofar as concerns the improvement of special needs educational services, e-learning and new learning platforms

have been introduced to the facilities catering to young school-goers challenged by disability. In the 2022/23 academic year, Oman had 544 male and female pupils enrolled at special needs facilities, of whom 153 were attending the Al Fikriyah School for students with intellectual disabilities, 169 attending the Al Amal School for the Deaf, and 222 pupils attending the Omar Ibn Al Khattab Institute for the Blind.

There were 1,744 enrolments in integrated programmes serving pupils challenged by auditory or mental disability, 486 of these in the auditory merged category and 1,258 in programmes facilitating pupils with mental health needs. All in all, there were 9,990 pupils with learning difficulties enrolled at a variety of facilities and 412 attending speech therapy programmes.



Private school education in the Sultanate of Oman has expanded and blossomed over the past two decades. In the 2022/23 academic year alone, 268 private schools distributed across the nation were added to the total for 2021/22, representing a phenomenal growth rate of 38%. This increase was accompanied by an increase in the number of pupils attending private schools, to a total of 122,942 across the nation. These schools were staffed by an aggregate 2,885 administrative personnel and 12,543 teachers.

On the basis that a healthy mind resides in a healthy body, the Oman Association for School Sports has emerged as a significant contributor to the youth fitness culture, overseeing a broad raft of sports activities built into the school schedule. In parallel with its contributions, the Career Guidance and Student Counselling Centre is actively involved in the promotion of sports activity within the school context. In 2022, the Oman School Sports Association published its five-year strategy (2022-2027), in which it laid out what it hoped to achieve, in terms of redirected mental and physical energy, from a tightly focused schedule of physical education, guided by best practice in the field.

Developing curricula and updating the study schedule so as to match international trends and develop students' abilities and skills accordingly.

Higher education, scientific research and innovation

Higher education represents the highest level of educational stages, and includes all types of education that comes after secondary education, whether it is in universities, or other educational institutions concerned with education, training, or scientific research. Higher education has a prominent role in preparing qualified national cadres at the highest levels to be able to participate effectively in advancing the development movement in the Sultanate of Oman.

The establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation brings attention to the importance of these sectors in building well rounded human beings. People are the very raison d'être of the development process, and their evolution is the principal indicator of its progress. The need for focus on these

Preparing national cadres to the highest levels of qualification, enabling them to become effective leaders of the development process.

areas of advancement has never been more important in the context of goals envisioned in Oman 2040. Institutions of higher education and scientific research have become hubs for cultural and scientific decision-making, primary resources in the search for strategic direction, and incubators for the enlightened minds that will advance the balanced progress of the country and of the national economy.

The Sultanate is acutely aware of its ongoing need to invest in the rising generation, to ensure a smooth flow of energetic and well qualified young Omani cadres emerging from the educational system. Good students are encouraged to pursue their chosen specialties, to seek out the educational institutions that best align with their scholarly ambitions. As such, flexible programmes have been developed within the internal scholarship system that facilitate choice for exceptional students, granting them the opportunity to choose both field of study and educational institution as a reward for competitive success.

In a further integration of the private educational sector into partnership and social responsibilities, the number of grants offered by private third level institutions has been expanded, to a current figure of 1,000 scholarships available for bachelor degrees in various disciplines. Cooperation with overseas is also being extended steadily in the area of scholarship exchange. The present focus is on postgraduate scholarships, as well as on certain diploma and bachelor qualification programmes made available both inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman as befits the particular requirements and status of qualifying applicants.

The electronic admissions system manages registration and admission to institutions of higher education and allocates scholarships and grants. The scope of the work of the Unified Admissions Centre has expanded over the years and it now supervises four main programmes. In the university admissions programme, undergraduate phase, 88.3% of the places available to general education diploma students or their equivalent were filled in the 2021/2022 academic year. For students with disabilities, the admission rate in the same year was 86.5% of applicants in the category. Meanwhile a 100% admissions rate was achieved in the postgraduate programme, the Omani Programme for Cultural and Scientific Cooperation, and the Educational Qualification Diploma Programme.

The Unified Admission Centre has an additional function in making available statistical data on admissions across the system, a valuable tool in scientific research for scholars, researchers and interested specialists. The analysis and interpretation of such data is crucial to the drafting of future policy and decision-making as they apply to higher education in the Sultanate going forward.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, meanwhile, continues to pioneer initiatives that support researchers and innovators in the Sultanate of Oman. These programmes have been developed to align with both local aspirations and global developments and trends.

Thirteen strategic programmes of relevance to scientific research and innovation were approved in the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), the first of the five-year national plans to be drafted in direct implementation of Oman Vision 2040. The programmes in question are diverse and broad in reach. Some are specifically academic, such as the efficiency-based Institutional Support Programme; some are directed at the government sector, such as that incentivising strategic research projects; or at the industrial sector, exemplified by the Ejaad platform. There are multiple additional initiatives designed to build and empower national capabilities, to foster an environment that stimulates scientific research and innovation, represented in scientific awards, competitions, and participation in local and international events organised around the themes of scientific research, innovation or development.

The Global Innovation Index for 2022 issued by the World Intellectual Property Organisation saw the Sultanate advance a further 5 positions in the Innovation Input and 3 positions in the Innovation Output categories. Oman ranked 79th globally on the Index listing of 132 participating countries for 2022, where it took top place in the human capital and research pillar. Its lowest score was registered in the pillar representing the business environment.

The 2022 report demonstrated progress by the Sultanate in a number of sub-indicators, with advanced positions in the region and globally. In the education rankings, the Sultanate achieved top position again in the indicator measuring the ratio of science and engineering graduates to total graduates; third place globally in the indicator of government spending per student; and 29th place globally in the indicator of spending on education.

In the Technology Adoption categories, the Sultanate scored 15th place globally in the metrics measuring access to information and communications technology, 16th globally for mobile app creation, and 24th globally for government online service. It achieved advanced ranks in several business environment indicators, with 19th position globally under policies for doing business, and 19th globally for capital flows as measured by net foreign direct investment as a percentage of GDP. In 2022, the Sultanate rose 19 places in the category measuring expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP to reach the position of 71st globally, from 90th place in the previous Index.

Sultan Qaboos university

Sultan Qaboos University has entered the second medium-term executive phase (2021-2025) of its long-term strategic plan (2016-2040), intended to take the University to the year 2040 in a manner consistent with broad national aspirations.

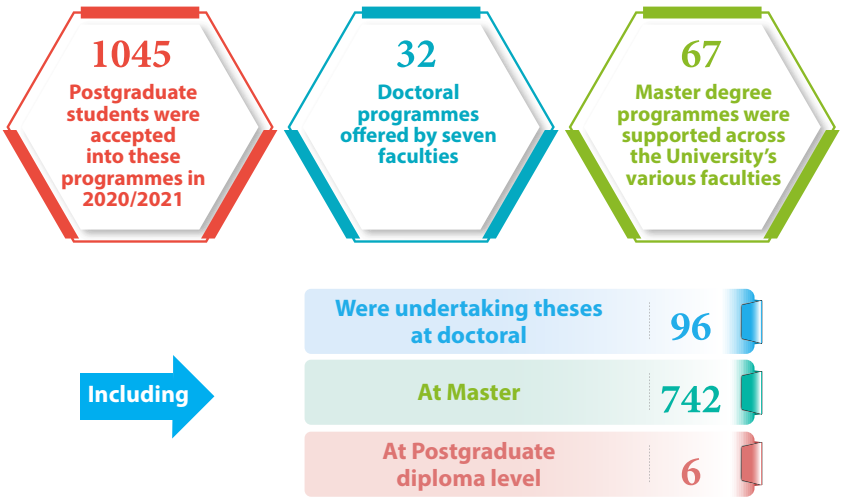
All efforts devoted to manifesting the goals of this 25-year plan are realistically derived from the University's existing capacities and expertise, as demonstrated by its already realised scientific and innovative successes. The University offers real support to researchers, most notably through the His Majesty Trust Fund grant for strategic research projects. This latter grant is recognised in the field as one of the most significant contributors to harmonisation of the University's scientific research with national social and economic imperatives.

The publication of scientific scholarship is one of the most significant indicators of the energy driving an institution's academic contribution. For the year 2021, the Scopus database logged 1,367 scientific papers produced by university researchers in Oman. The Scientific Publishing Council published 16 issues of the University's six peer-reviewed scientific journals, containing a total of 216 scientific papers.

Sultan Qaboos University provides private and public sector institutions with graduates who are at the top of their field in scientific research and innovation.

SQU takes its role in incentivising innovation very seriously and is diligent about securing intellectual property rights through patent registration for original work by its undergraduate and graduate research bodies. The University's Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer examined 17 invention disclosures submitted from various faculties in 2021. Meanwhile, two international patent applications were filed, and three patent licensing agreements signed with private sector institutions.

Postgraduate programmes provide academic institutions, and consequently society, with ground breaking intellectual contributions and Sultan Qaboos University affords its brightest students an enticing range of programme options. In the 2020/2021 academic year, 67 master degree programmes were supported across the University's various faculties, along with 32 doctoral programmes offered by seven faculties. In all, 1,045 postgraduate students were accepted into these programmes in 2020/2021, of whom 96 were undertaking theses at doctoral, 742 at master, and 6 at postgraduate diploma level.



The University supports postgraduate study with 120 scholarships available for master and doctoral students. In addition, the Ministry of Education offers 25 scholarships of its own in the form of exemption from tuition fees, and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs offers two full scholarships. Two full scholarships are also allocated specifically for Palestinian students. Petroleum Development Oman provided five full scholarships for master's level students in the 2020/2021 academic year, and global technology company CGG provided one tuition-free scholarship at master level. Finally, the Oman Oil Marketing Company funded three tuition-free scholarships for master level students.

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences

جامعة التقنية
والعلوم التطبيقية
University of Technology
and Applied Sciences

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences was established by Royal Decree No 76/2020 and arose from a merger of technical colleges and colleges of applied science, along with the College of Education in Rustaq, all henceforth absorbed into the new University to make it the largest government-run institution of higher education in the country. It had a student body in excess of 45,000 in the 2021/2022 academic year, 12 branches distributed across the Sultanate, and one specialist college.

Oman 2040 has as a core objective a balancing out of development across all governorates. Facilitating this vision is a policy of decentralised decision-making that enables individual governorates to manifest projects that engage their specific strengths, employing their natural and human resources to best effect. In keeping with this approach, the Council of Ministers decided to introduce a branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences to the Governorate of Musandam, the first branch of a public university to be established in the governorate. The practical focus of its academic activity will be principally on areas of use and benefit to marine ecotourism, transportation services, renewable energy, and the fisheries sector.

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences is creating a supportive environment for scientific research, innovation and entrepreneurship that in turn is fuelling new initiatives in the knowledge industry and building competitive national capacities. The university has funded scientific research projects in every one of its branches, relying for its funding decisions on recommendations by the respective faculty departmental units. Projects requiring funding in excess of RO1,000 are approved by the Scientific Research Committee. In 2021, under the competency-based scheme designed to promote science and innovation, a total of 141 scientific research projects were funded for a combined cost of RO547,599. Areas covered by the grant scheme included 43 research projects, 85 student research papers and 12 graduate research papers.

Private higher education

The private higher education sector in the Sultanate is witnessing rapid growth, in terms of both the number and quality of established third level institutions, as well as in their geographical distribution. The diversity of the courses on offer broadens with every passing year, as does their network of connections in the scientific and academic world, both inside and outside the Sultanate.

The private third level sector has moved quickly to attain excellent performance levels, as judged against internationally approved standards. Perhaps its most impressive achievement has been the awarding of QS status to five of the Sultanate's private universities in the Arab university rankings. The ranking is published annually by the British institution Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and is the most widely viewed ranking system worldwide. The status of universities is published on the QS website and the Sultanate's private university status is listed there for the year 2023.

Meanwhile, 14 private educational institutions succeeded in obtaining institutional accreditation from the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education in return for their commitment to institutional accreditation standards.

The year 2022 also saw the appointment of many highly qualified Omanis to senior academic positions in private third level institutions, from a total of 543 academic staff appointments across the various disciplines. Ten very senior positions at the level of college president or faculty dean were filled by Omanis in the same year.

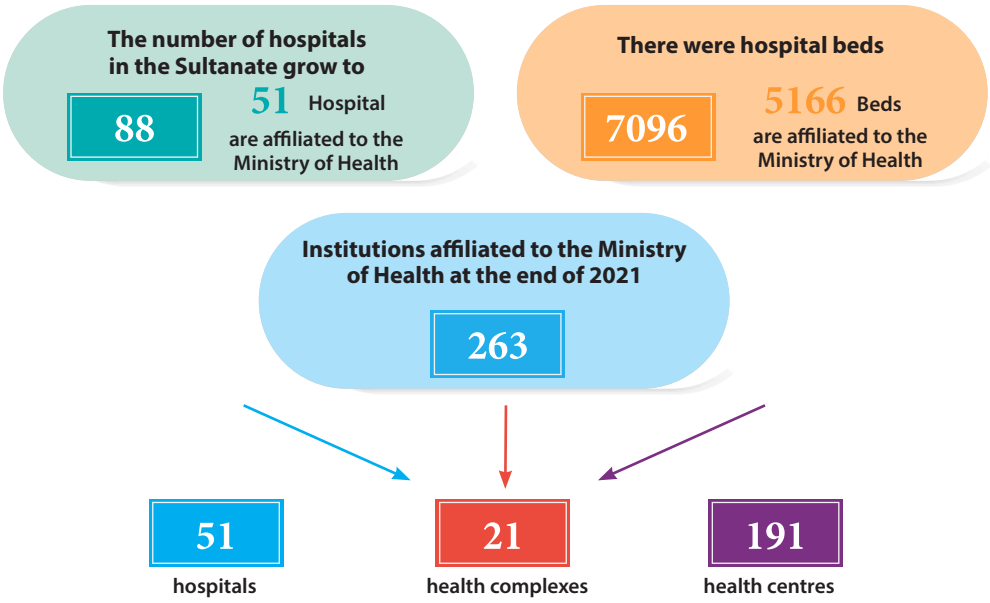
The private higher education sector in the Sultanate has undergone rapid growth in recent years, and without cost to quality.

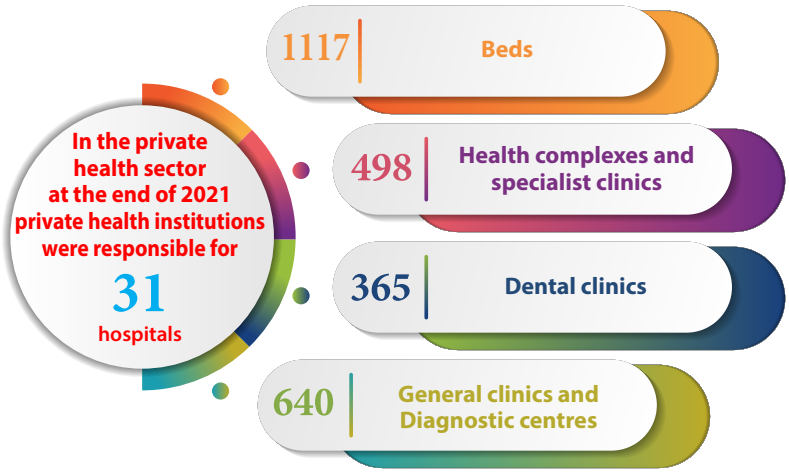
Health

The Sultanate's health sector continues to shine, achieving regular quantum leaps in the quality and timely delivery of healthcare nationally. Its successes are reflected in the health indicators measured annually by international observers. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) showed accelerated growth and development in the quality and performance efficiency of the health sector and this valuable data was used in the preparation of the health development aspect of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), which was largely aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. It aligns also with the six building blocks that describe the vision for the health system in 2050. The path to Health 2050 will see the system upgraded in successive steps over the coming years to bring it into line with the most advanced worldwide, ensuring a healthy, sustainable future for Omanis and for Omani society as a whole.

The tenth five-year plan for health (2021-2025) entered its second year in 2022 AD and has several strategic goals, all aimed at achieving a society that enjoys sustainable health, that espouses a culture of personal responsibility for health and that is broadly protected from health hazards.

The Annual Health Report for 2021





(883) **Private pharmacies were distributed throughout the Sultanate**

The annual health report for 2021 saw the number of hospitals in the Sultanate grow to 88, of which 51 are affiliated to the Ministry of Health. There were 7,096 hospital beds, of which 5,166 were in Ministry of Health facilities. In total, there were 263 institutions affiliated to the Ministry of Health at the end of 2021, of which 51 were hospitals, 21 were health complexes, and 191 health centres.

In the private health sector at the end of 2021, 31 private health institutions were responsible for 1,117 beds, while 498 health complexes and specialist clinics, 365 dental clinics, 640 general clinics and diagnostic centres and 883 private pharmacies were distributed throughout the Sultanate.

The total national health cohort at the end of 2021 was 56,119 personnel, of whom 37,732 were employed by the Ministry of Health. An Omanisation rate of 73% was achieved across the sector. The end-of-year report logged 5,807 doctors working for the Ministry of Health, along with 14,361 nurses and 782 pharmacists. The Omanisation rate for these three personnel categories was 36.7%, 65%, and 96% respectively. In addition to the above total, some 11,000 paramedics were also employed across the health industry.

In its earlier, development phase, the health system in the Sultanate was concerned with limiting the spread of infectious diseases and relied on a number of strategies, the most important of which was a system established to monitor infectious diseases. These strategies were successful in bringing to heel many endemic infectious diseases.

The coronavirus pandemic that broke out at the end of 2019 was to result in over

291million cases worldwide and 5 million deaths by 31 December 2021. In the Sultanate, there were 305,000 laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 cases, of which 27,745 required hospitalisation, 7,142 required intensive care, and 4,100 culminated in death.

The pandemic affected all health services in 2021 and led to 12.5 million outpatient visits at Ministry of Health institutions, a drop from the 15.7 million outpatient visits in 2019.

Inpatient numbers at Ministry of Health hospitals dropped from 331,000 in 2019 to some 226,000 in 2021, with an associated drop in the number of surgeries and other services, such as medical laboratory and radiology services.

By international standards, the Sultanate of Oman maintains its status as a developed country in terms of its successes in improving the quality of life of its population. It occupies an advanced position in the protection of children. Notwithstanding the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, which raised the crude death rate for Omanis to 3.6 per 1,000 population in 2021, and although the mortality rate for children under one year and under five years was, respectively, 8.1 and 10.1 per 1,000 live births, international organisations continue to validate the progress made by the Sultanate of Oman in advancing infant survival and healthy growth. Credit for the improvement is attributed to its success in combating dangerous childhood diseases by means of expanded immunisation programmes that have targeted pulmonary tuberculosis, acute poliomyelitis, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and measles. Also added to the child immunisation schedule are vaccines against viral hepatitis, rubella, mumps and Haemophilus influenzae type b.

The Sultanate has also freed itself of such serious infectious diseases as polio, plague, diphtheria and yellow fever. The Ministry of Health's conviction that the quality of healthcare available depends heavily on the availability of adequate numbers of qualified manpower in the various required specialisations, it has given great attention to the development of its health workforce in aiming for top quality health services in the Sultanate.

Both the Oman College of Medicine and Health Sciences and the Higher Institute of Health Specialties were established by means of Royal Decree No 18/2018, replacing several existing health institutes. In 2021, 581 paramedics graduated from the Oman College of Medicine and Health Sciences in various specialisations. Meanwhile, successive batches of Omani physicians are graduating annually from Sultan Qaboos University and other third level institutions, along with nurses and other ancillaries from their various academies. Finally, a programme has been introduced to build a national team qualified in quality assurance with specific reference to the health service. The initiative includes scholarships for suitable existing personnel to undertake master and doctoral degrees in quality management.

The business sector

Royal Decree No 89/2020 establishing the Ministry of Labour was motivated by a desire to develop both arms of the labour market – the job-creation arm on the one hand and the human resources arm to supply the market on the other. The Ministry is tasked with creating policies that optimise employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors and encouraging growth in the latter. Its work is intertwined with the national task of upgrading the administrative apparatus of the state and its various entities. The Ministry is also tasked with proposing general policy for the national workforce, to ensure the optimal use of available human and financial resources. Its proposals are then presented to the Council of Ministers for approval. Its contribution to the development of the national workforce is key to the growth plans of the national economy, to the certain achievement of the goals of Oman 2040. The incoming knowledge-based economy will revolve on a confident, qualified workforce, and all well-considered investment in building the required skills and talent will be well repaid as the Sultanate moves smoothly into a new labour paradigm.

Within the terms of reference assigned to it, the Ministry of Labour has been laying the foundational structure and standards necessary to move the system in the direction of more focused career planning

People are fundamental to advancing development in the Sultanate, as well as its prime beneficiaries.

and more efficient administration practices driven by performance goals. This new work culture is being applied across the system, in both public and private sectors. One branch of the Ministry's activity concerns Omanisation, the gradual transfer of jobs occupied by expatriates to Omani nationals, and this is occurring in parallel with training and rehabilitation programmes, which it runs in coordination with the relevant training entities.

Recent statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicate that replacement and Omanisation policies in the government sector resulted in a significant drop in the number of expatriate job occupancies within the civil service, which declined by 33% in the months from January to end October 2022. The government sector currently employs some 25,000 expatriate personnel, down from more than 38,000 at the end of 2021. Meanwhile, 172,000 Omanis are covered within the public sector pension fund scheme, bringing the total workforce in the public sector to around 197,000 Omanis and expatriates. This puts the Omanisation ratio in the public service sector at more than 83%, and the expectation is that Omanisation will continue to rise as a result of continuing efforts in this direction.

The number of insured Omani citizens working for private sector companies and institutions grew during 2022 to a record 284,000, an impressive increase suggesting that of the new jobs created in the private sector since the end of 2021, 22,000 were taken up by Omanis.

As the Omanisation strategy gathers pace across all sectors of the economy and administration, a major new initiative in the form of the National Employment Programme has its sights firmly set on the manpower requirements of the future. It is anticipated that the Omanisation process will yield further results as the timeframe for ending expatriate recruitment in private sector job descriptions that have undergone Omanisation nears a close. Qualitative training and requalification programmes continue, meanwhile, and legislation regulating the labour market is reviewed, supporting the evolution of skilled Omani cadres, while preparing students about to graduate for easy access to jobs by aligning their academic qualifications with real market needs.

To ensure the success of the Omanisation drive, Omani job seekers are being empowered to slot into every level of management position in the public and private sectors. This is of particular importance in the private sector, where so many jobs have now been Omanised.

The Ministry of Labour announced an economic stimulus package for establishments bearing on recruitment licence fees relating to the hiring and renewal of work contracts for non-Omani workers. The measures, contained in

Ministerial Resolution No 12/2021, make particular reference to senior and middle-level professional positions, along with technical and specialist positions. The stimulus package includes a fee reduction of 25% for establishments employing Omanis, and up to 50% for establishments achieving specific localisation rates that reflect a broad distribution of personnel across the various economic activities of the establishment.

The Omanisation plans are designed both to maximise employment and to bring more Omanis into middle and senior management positions in the private sector. There is particular emphasis on creating new job opportunities in the private sector, and empowering this enterprising section of the economy to become the primary engine of economic growth and a partner with government in development. Alongside the incentivisation of replacement, and Omanisation generally, the private sector has been granted facilities to support its recovery from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to further its expansion and creation of new job vacancies. Some of these incentives are specific to the levels of Omanisation achieved in the various job sectors. Other initiatives aim to stimulate growth in the sector, and the most important of these initiatives involve public-private partnership projects. Yet others involve investment incentives, with particular emphasis on enterprises that represent economic diversification, or a re-pricing of government services. It has recently been decided to cancel, reduce or merge further government service fees in a gesture of support to struggling economic sectors or those contributing to growth. These moves will both enhance the competitiveness and ease up on bureaucratic procedures.

Through all of these transformative changes, the labour market in the Sultanate is gearing up to meet the demands of future trends. What is emerging is a flexible, nimble workforce, well qualified to adjust to incoming challenges. The National Employment Programme, with its sights set on Oman Vision 2040, may expect to see a self-sustaining economy offering near full employment, and in a sustainable manner.

The Programme, which was launched with the blessing of His Majesty Sultan Haitham on 5 February 2021, is equally focused on the supply and demand arms of the labour market, and on growth patterns that evolve, and yet remain sustainable.

Its methodology is to apply careful scientific analysis to value chains and supply chains across all sectors of the economy to identify possible job openings or a capacity for job creation therein.

Of increasing importance to the jobs drive is, of course, the option of self-employment, and it is an option to which more young Omanis are being drawn and which the Sultanate is actively promoting with growing success.

Social development

The concept of social development goes beyond its welfare service meaning with its limiting connotations to embrace the principles of equity, social integration, community participation, knowledge and economic empowerment. It is based on the belief that social investment made with the intention of advancing human potential through empowerment of latent capacities can only contribute to accomplishing the shift towards self-fulfilled, independent living. A culture that celebrates individual responsibility will bring enormous benefit to the larger community. In order for such a culture to come fully into being, the dynamism generated by institutions working together in harmony is essential.

The social care sector encompasses a set of programmes and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development to groups and cases in need of care and assistance to enable them to lead dignified lives and to achieve a standard of living adequate to their needs, as befits the ideal of cohesive families prospering in a cohesive society.

The social care sector encompasses a set of programmes and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development to groups and cases in need of care and assistance to enable them lead dignified lives. The number of separate cases in receipt of the social security allowance stood at 72,675 at the end of 2021, in respect of which an aggregate RO109,828,261 was disbursed, benefiting 129,475 individuals in all.

Under the scheme devised to secure employment for members of families benefiting from social security payments and persons challenged with disability, 2021 saw job opportunities created for 114 members of social security families and for 12 individuals challenged by disability.

'Tamkeen' is a programme that targets individuals and family groups surviving on limited income or who are in receipt of social security support. Its purpose is to alter their status, so that they become fully self-reliant. It invests in capabilities, promotes the concept of self-employment and reduced reliance on social security. The Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre was established to care for and rehabilitate persons suffering from mental disabilities but whose condition is amenable to vocational rehabilitation.

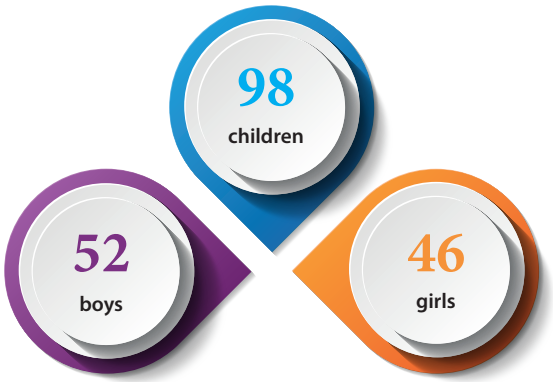
At the heart of the Ministry's social mission is a desire to protect the family structure, to support its cohesion and create a social environment that empowers and celebrates family values. At a practical level, Ministerial policy sponsors such ground-level programmes as counselling services for individuals and families undergoing social, economic or psychological problems. It views these underlying problems as obstacles to the stability essential to creating a better life and their resolution as positive markers

on the path to family cohesion, especially in light of the resounding changes society is facing.

The Child Care Centre takes care of children who have been deprived of normal family lives as a consequence of social upheaval of one form or another. It affords full residential care, in addition to educational, social, cultural and recreational programmes and other childhood activities. At the end of 2021, the Centre was caring for 98 children, 52 boys and 46 girls. Meanwhile, 'youth integration homes' have been established for adolescent males in the 14-20 age group who have been separated from normal family life. The system is at present caring for 64 such young men.

For infants and young children aged from 6 months to 31/2 years, social, educational and cultural services are provided by nurseries or kindergarten facilities across the country. At the end of 2021, Oman had 320 nurseries with 6,073 children enrolled, of whom 3,365 were boys and 2,708 girls.

At the end of 2021, the Centre was caring for



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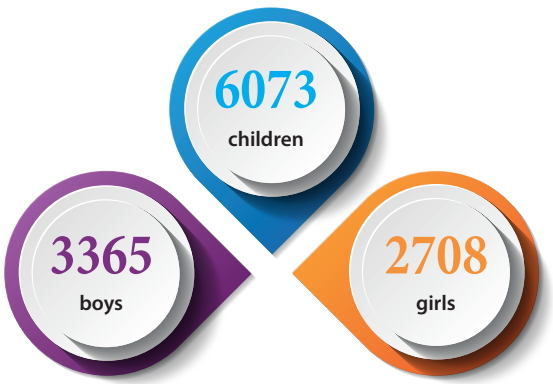
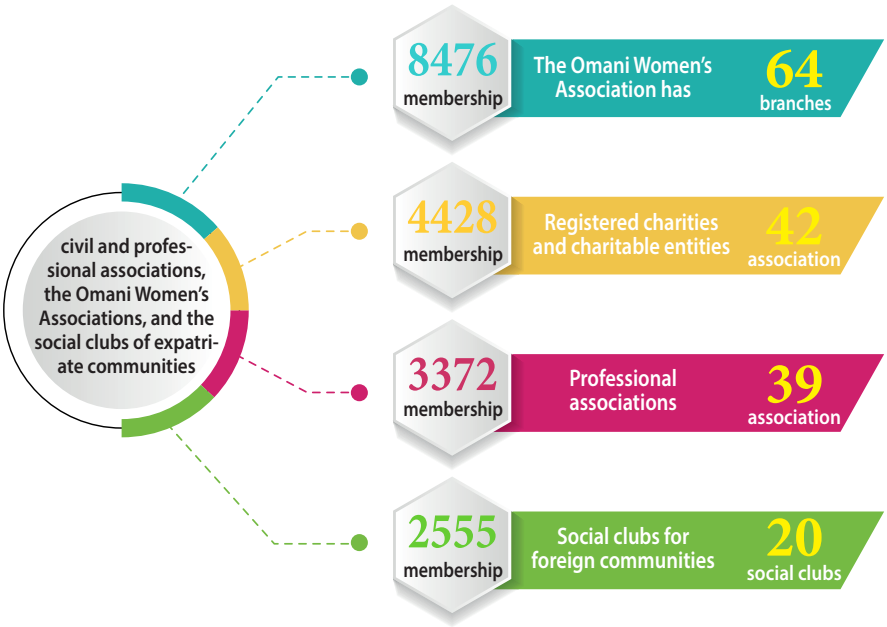


The Ministry of Social Development supervises civil and professional associations, the Omani Women's Associations, and the social clubs of expatriate communities. It follows up on the work of these associations to ensure their compliance with the provisions of the relevant legislation and of the decisions and regulations issued by the Ministry that bear on their work:



It supervises the meetings of their general assemblies. The Omani Women's Association has 64 branches and affiliates and an aggregate membership of 8,476. The Sultanate also has 42 registered charities and charitable entities with a combined membership of 4,428; as well as 39 professional associations with an aggregate membership of 3,372; and 20 social clubs for foreign communities with a combined membership of 2,555.

For its part in the digital revolution, the Ministry of Social Development launched the first phase of its digital transformation project in March 2022. The package launched covers the social security service, the social assistance service and 20 sub-services affiliated to the two, and meets the Ministry's desired timeframe for digital rollout. Furthermore it meets the Sultanate's overall schedule for introducing digital solutions to improve the quality of government services. The state's e-government agenda anticipates tighter controls, higher standards and greatly reduced backlogs in the delivery of services and greater integration with other government institutions involved in transactions. The social care sector was chosen to pioneer the rollout given the broad segment of the population that it serves. Digitalisation will facilitate interaction with the public via online processing and raise overall efficiency. The portal can be securely accessed from any digital device – computer, smartphone or tablet – with confidentiality assured through an electronic authentication feature or electronically validated phone chip.

Sports and youth

Those who have followed the progress of the modern Omani renaissance from its earliest days know that its mission was built around the talented contributions and long term aspirations of the rising generations. If the principal product of the renaissance, and now of the renewed renaissance, is to be a bountiful future for today's young Omanis, then it will be the youth of Oman who will co-create it. His Majesty Sultan Haitham is particularly keen to engage the younger generation in the manifestation of their own aspirations, working in a genuine and effective partnership with government.

His Majesty spoke of youth in inspirational terms in one of his earliest addresses as Sultan, that is on 23 February 2020: "Young people represent the nation's rich resource, its inexhaustible wealth, the very nucleus of its future vision. They are its present and its future, and we will hear what they have to say and we will fulfil their needs and their aspirations; they will be afforded the care that they deserve." And as recently as 12 October 2022, he directed ministers at a cabinet meeting to find the most efficient channels of communication both to enlighten the rising generation on the urgent needs of the development

Young sportsmen and women have brought honour to Oman at multiple international sports events.

process and to hear them describe their own vision of the future.

This focused attention on the potential and aspirations of youth was what motivated the creation by royal decree of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth with its brief to become the guardian of their evolution into healthy, responsible and creative adults, respectful of their heritage. The Ministry's functions are broad-ranging, with an emphasis on such practical matters as encouraging competitive sport and rewarding and nurturing those who demonstrate excellence. The Ministry also offers support to private sports clubs and associations, overseeing their activities and ensuring their compliance with extant regulations. It organises meetings, matches and competitive events in bodies working in the sports field, controlling and supervising them in accordance with the laws and regulations in force, and organisiing meetings, matches and competitions in all sports and at all venues, domestic , regional and further afield.

His Majesty maintains an interest in the activities of sports and cultural clubs for their unique role in identifying talent and building teamwork and excellence in performance, values of paramount importance to the vision of Oman 2040. He sees the value of encouraging the existence of such facilities across all governorates and municipalities. In this context, the Council of Ministers approved the creation of sports and cultural clubs in Wilayat Amerat in Muscat, Wilayat Nakhl in Batinah South, Wilayat Taqah in Dhofar, Wilayat Izki in Dakhiliyah, Wilayat Dama Al Taiyin in Sharqiyah North, and Wilayat Dhank in Dhahirah. These clubs will serve as incubators for their members, offering a nurturing environment where they may pursue their passions and engage with others of like mind. Moreover the clubs will arrange participation in, and occasionally host, competitive and other activities and events that will in time more than validate the investment in their existence.

Omani women have made their mark in many individual and team sports activities, proving their ability to compete locally, regionally and internationally, in club and field events, and across multiple sports, with courage and honour. Backing their efforts are the supportive entities within the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Oman Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, federations, sports committees and clubs. All are enthusiastic in their backing for women's sports in general and in spreading a culture of women's sports in the Sultanate. Their participation in competitive events is encouraged and their victories celebrated. The influence of leading women sports figures is having an impact on lifestyles, with fitness being given more attention among all age groups, and the dismissal of any notion that women's sports were not in alignment with the finest customs and traditions of Omani society.

The creation of the Women's Club for Sports and Cultural Creativity, announced on 17 October 2021, is consistent also with the objectives of Oman 2040, which envisions women taking on ever more ambitious roles in economic, social, political and civil life. While on the one hand this trend will raise women's status

in society, on the other it will bring an energetic, motivated and much needed resource to bear on national development strategy, which will be heavily dependent on innovative and sustainable approaches.

A new project joined the list of initiatives celebrating youth and incentivising young people to strive for the highest realisation of their positive potential. On 26 October 2022, Oman's Youth Day, Youth Centre spaces were launched, consisting of integrated areas offering services to young people that are creative or innovative in nature. Creative pursuits covered include photography, drawing and music, and facilities are also available for experimenting with emerging technologies and the like. The spaces also house well-equipped studios and laboratories, as well as training and fitness areas and multi-purpose areas. The Youth Centres also house libraries of books and resources to nourish curious young minds. It is hoped that these knowledge and creativity hubs will bring together young people in a spirit of enterprise and resourcefulness, expanding their horizons of both aspiration and achievement.

Also celebrating Youth Day, 26 October was selected as the occasion for announcement of the results of the Youth Excellence Award 2022. The Award is the brainchild of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and has as its principal aim to fuel a spirit of competition amongst Omani youth, to encourage skills-building, and to build an informed, responsible and creative generation.

The values promoted by the Award are in alignment with the axes on which Oman 2040 revolves, viz: entrepreneurship as a map to a competitive economy; youthful innovation as the engine of a creative human society; and concern for the environment as the path to sustainability.

Insofar as concerns youth innovation, the Ministry has been inviting support for its many youth initiatives spread across the governorates. It is looking for expertise, as well as logistical and financial support, to drive forward these community-oriented projects.

Sport has come a long way in the Sultanate in recent decades, thanks to a vast investment in infrastructure and club facilities, and the impetus given to young sports enthusiasts by the many prestigious international events hosted by Oman. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has been heavily involved in the overhaul of the sports infrastructure, upgrading stadiums and gyms and building new quarters for sports clubs. The Sultanate manages 68 government sports facilities that provide a public service to federations, clubs and sports committees, as well as government and private agencies and institutions. Sports clubs are the most prevalent type of facility supported by government, representing 44 of the 68 state-supported entities. In addition to the clubs, Oman has 13 sports centres distributed across the nation and 11 sports complexed.

Data provided by the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows that Omani sports federations played in 87 different competitions and championships locally and internationally in 2021. They also took part in 79 training courses, 35 sports camps and 9 conferences. In all, Omani sportsmen and women brought home 69

Data provided by the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows that Omani sports federations played in 2021

Number of medals achieved by sports committees and federations

medals, including 22 gold, 24 silver and 23 bronze medals.

Investment in the sports sector was up, with data showing 745 individual investments in the Sultanate's sports sector in 2021 AD, of which 95% was by Omani nationals.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth continues to be active in sponsoring and organising international events and championships. The hosting of such events is frequently highly contested internationally, given their significance in raising the profile of a nation or venue. There is a direct link connecting the sponsorship of hotly contested sports that attract media attention and economic stimulus. Sectors such as tourism stand to benefit particularly well. In the case of Oman, there is the additional benefit of portraying the Sultanate as an unusually stable environment for tourism and business and an attractive investment prospect, given its strategic location, smooth infrastructure, and political, economic and social stability.

Oman scored many sporting victories in 2022, at Gulf, Arab and Asian events. Whether individual or team successes, they were earned with the careful support and attention given to sports and to athletes in the Sultanate. This attention has paid off in many other ways too, in the fostering of an accomplished and creative young generation who have given of their best for the honour of raising the flag of the Sultanate of Oman in many international forums.

Omani Achievements

Brilliant young scientist Sumaya bint Said Al Siyabiya won first place in the Stars of Science programme for her environmental proposal entitled "Bio-analysis of microplastics from the perspective of biology and nanotechnology'.

Sumaya's innovation presents a promising solution for the disposal of microplastics in a safe and environmentally friendly manner, using microbial mats and a nano-ZnO catalyst.

While working on her pioneering project, Sumaya was able to overcome several challenges as she progressed

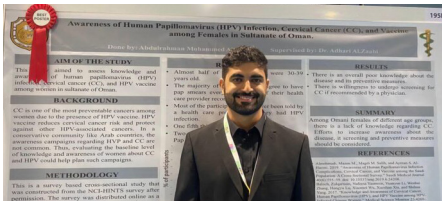
through the successive programme phases, and won the votes of the jury several times on her way to the final.

The Dhofar Education team representing the Sultanate of Oman won two awards at the 2022 FIRST Global Challenge held in the Geneva, Switzerland, namely the Safety Award and the Social Media Challenge Award.

The FIRST Global Challenge addresses two main areas of interest. In the robotics section the team are challenged to build and programme a robot such as to enable it to resolve in engineering terms the tasks presented to it. In the second section, a series of social media challenges are faced.

College of Medicine and Health Sciences student at Sultan Qaboos University, Abdulrahman bin Muhammad Al Mirza, was winner of the Best Scientific Poster Award in the Asian section of the European Conference on Cancer, which was held in Singapore.

The poster addressed the status of women's awareness of the human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer



in the Sultanate. The results of his research identified a broad desire by women to receive more knowledge regarding cervical cancer, its causes, prevention and early detection.

The Sultanate of Oman advanced in several categories in the 2022 Global Innovation Index issued by the World Intellectual Property Organisation. It achieved top position globally in the ratio of science and engineering graduates to total graduates, and third globally in the indicator measuring government spending per student.

The Sultanate advanced a further 5 positions in the Innovation Input and 3 positions in the Innovation Output categories. Overall, Oman ranked 79th globally on the Index listing of 132 participating countries for the year 2022.

In the Technology Adoption categories, the Sultanate scored 15th place globally in the metrics measuring access to information and communications technology, 16th globally for mobile app creation, and 24th globally for government online service.

Talented student Nisal Al Rawahiyya was world runner-up in the International Letter-Writing Competition for Young People organised by the Universal Postal Union. The Competition is held annually and was established to improve education through the art of writing letters. The 2022 theme was 'Climate Crisis.'

The competition is universally acknowledged as an excellent contribution to incentivising children to write letters and thus refining their ability to express

themselves through words. The competition also highlights the social and educational role that the post office plays in our daily lives.

Omani Omar al Ghailani, the world freediving record holder who has blazed a trail for the Sultanate across regional and international forums, has taken home first place in the overall standings of the AIDA FreeDiving World Cup for the second season in a row.

The competition was held in Sharm el Sheikh in the Arab Republic of Egypt in early-August, with 23 freedivers from 19 countries participating.

11

Heritage, Culture and the Arts .. windows on Oman's legacy to civilisation

The cultural contribution of the Sultanate of Oman to the world is an abundant, multi-faceted and venerable one, matured over the centuries out of a deeply ingrained attachment by Omanis to their environment and social order. The modern renaissance, entering its second generation, is a true reflection of this historic tradition, with its respect for culture, for youthful energy, for constant evolution. Ever practical in its execution, the challenges of transformational change globally and of demographic growth at home demanded a structural review of unwieldy state institutions; a need to reorganise work systems, to bring new energy to certain sectors of crucial significance to future visions.

In August 2020, the newly formed Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth joined the administration, its structure and competencies defined and approved, and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture became the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, reflecting shifting roles in the run-up to 2040. The changes were designed to attain more focused effort, more centralisation of policy and thus better performance by eliminating overlap in the functions and responsibilities of the respective Ministries.

Royal Decree No 87/2020 establishing the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth set out its terms of reference insofar as concerns policies and priority programmes, in preparation for presentation to the Council of Ministers for approval. In its cultural role, the new Ministry became responsible for the supervision of public libraries, of cultural centres and like institutions. It has as a principal function the task of collecting, documenting and developing Omani literature, encouraging interest in the work of Omani authors, highlighting their creative contributions and advancing their capabilities. It will sponsor research, scholarship and literary translation. In the broad field of cultural expression, it will host exhibitions, festivals and events that give prominence to Oman's unique culture, to its acknowledged role in fostering rapprochement with the

peoples and civilisations of the world. Overall it is committed to assembling and celebrating Oman's artistic legacy, to documenting, publishing and developing this legacy into new expressions of itself, to the encouragement of creativity and innovation, and to supporting and sponsoring artists in every artistic field.

From a belief in the need to transform the Omani cultural environment into a place of convergence for creativity and diversity reflective of the Sultanate's commitment in this regard, a cultural strategy for the years 2021-2040 was announced on 8 September 2021 that envisions an open source hub of creativity that welcomes input from other cultures. The executive plan of this strategy recognises the need for an unambiguous working methodology that lines up with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040. This vision will be the operating framework within which all cultural policies are structured in the coming decades.

In its implementation, the strategy's approach was to define and analyse the responsibilities of the cultural sector, then draw up a set of policies compatible with the objectives of the 'Oman is a leading cultural destination with a solid identity' vision. In the event, 11 areas reflecting the broad nature of cultural activity in the Sultanate of Oman were identified, and these areas were themselves compatible both with ongoing global transformations of an economic, social, political and cultural nature, and with national and regional realities closer to home .

An active presence in cultural affairs

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has been heavily focused in its cultural endeavours, motivated by a mission to earn validation for the Sultanate's many contributions to civilisation. It is working to present Oman's cultural treasures to both local and international audiences in formats consistent with contemporary presentation techniques and tastes, so as to communicate their full value to the world.

The 26th Muscat International Book Fair took place from 24 February to 5 March 2022, representing a pinnacle of achievement by the Ministry, which had a practical involvement along with other government institutions in the organisation of this annual cultural celebration. The Ministry also shared a place in the integrated pavilion where its publications were displayed; and it sponsored multiple cultural and youth-centred activities on the margins of the event.

The 2022 Muscat International Book Fair hosted 715 publishing houses from 27 countries, including 570 direct participants and a further 145 houses represented indirectly through agencies.

One of the side events that now

takes place in association with the Book Fair is an initiative connected with the campaign to consolidate Oman's position as a cultural destination that embraces creators. At the 2022 Fair, the Ministry announced the winners of the first Sohar Prize for Critical Studies, a valuable award established in 2021. The Prize, which has already generated a flurry of interest in the field, supports the Ministry's strategy of stimulating the creative environment and positioning the Sultanate to take a leading role, regionally and beyond, in the celebration of culture and creativity generally.

Libraries and centres of cultural activity have an honoured place in Oman's overall cultural environment and the Ministry encourages such institutions to be creative in the services they provide. It fosters a spirit of competition among them, spurring them to best efforts and constant evolution. In this context, the Ministry in 2022 launched a contest exclusive to these important institutions, as both evidence of its commitment and as an incentive to them to stand out as beacons of community culture and to innovate in their expressions of that important public service.

Again, in support of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, with their emphasis on scientific and technical innovation, as embodied in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth on 30 October 2022 revealed details of the 9th Clubs Competition for Cultural Creativity, which has been sponsored by the Ministry and its predecessor since 2013. The Competition has had a significant influence in refining the talents of young people and developing their creative skills.

The Literary and Artistic Forum is a much loved annual occasion to mark the cultural revival taking place in the Sultanate and that is discovering and promoting young talent in the literary and artistic fields. Its 25th anniversary cycle took place in Muscat Governorate under Ministerial sponsorship on 19-22 September 2022, where it marked its silver jubilee by hosting more than 55 young men and women in various fields of culture and the arts.

In recognition of the Sultanate's significance as a global destination for culture, literature and the arts, the House of Musical Arts, on 28-31 October 2022, hosted the presentation ceremony of the prestigious 2nd Aga Khan Award for Music at the Royal Opera House Muscat. The much anticipated ceremony was held in conjunction with that presenting the 15th Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

The selection of Oman to host these prominent events aligns with its drive to transform its overall economic, social, political and cultural fabric; and with its developing national, regional and international objectives. Oman is forging a cultural strategy that is grounded in creativity and innovation, in social evolution that has culture at its core, and in a cultural identity that infuses

Hosting the presentation ceremony of the prestigious 2nd Aga Khan Award for Music. Such events validate the status of the Sultanate as an important destination on the global map of culture, literature and the arts.

the development, communication and legislative aspects of Omani society.

On 25-30 October 2022, the Sultanate hosted the 7th International Photography Forum, becoming the first country in the Middle East to host such an event. The Forum is organised by the International Federation of Photographic Art, the pre-eminent body which assembles the work of photographers from all over the world.

The Sultanate's selection for this event was based on the diversity of its landscapes and on the historical, touristic and cultural importance of its sites, long a magnet for professional and amateur photographers. Also influencing the decision was a vote by the membership of the International Federation of Photography.

Internationally, the Sultanate was represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, at the 59th Venice Biennale in Italy. The world-renowned exhibition ran from 22 April to 27 November 2022 and offered Oman an opportunity to introduce its culture at the exhibition itself and internationally through the global coverage the Biennale receives, as well as to communicate with participants and visitors from around the world.

The Omani exhibit included selected works by three generations of Omani artists, whose combined work extends to five decades of modern and contemporary visual art in the Sultanate. It was a unique opportunity to showcase the breadth of Oman's cultural history and tradition in the visual arts.

The Sultanate was also active in the literary field, highlighting Omani authorship and publishing activity at numerous international book fairs. It has

been a regular participant in such events, finding them to be ideal forums for the introduction of Omani intellectual activity to appreciative international audiences. The environment of the book fair is also an occasion where dialogues are established and renewed, where communication is founded in shared cultural aspirations, and thus where the Sultanate can communicate its own unique body of ancient and contemporary wisdom and intellectual awareness to a world without boundaries.

Among the artistic achievements of the year at Gulf, Arab and international levels, the Sultanate was once again successful, for the fifth consecutive year, in bringing home top prizes from the FIAP Youth Digital Biennial in Italy. Two World Cups were secured by young Omani photographers at the 40th Biennial: in the under- 16 category, 13 contestants earned a combined 462 points, having participated with 20 photographic works. In the under-21 category, 13 photographers again obtained a total of 457 points from 20 works submitted.

Some of the young participating photographers won individual awards. In the under-21s, photographer Mohammed bin Suleiman al Shuaili won the gold medal for his study entitled Tafkeer or Thinking. In the under-16s, photographer Maher bin Nussair al Khusaibi won the silver medal for Eltiwa, or Twisting. Zamzam Bani Orraba won bronze for her Talashi, or Fading.

In literature, Omani author Bushra Khalfan's novel Dilshad, the Biography of Hunger and Satisfaction won the Arab Novel Award at the 2022 8th Katara Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2022, qualifying in the category of published fiction.

Meanwhile Omani writer Osama bin Zayed al Shaqsi won first place for his Playing on the Edge of Chess at the 2022-23 Sharjah Prize for Arab Creativity in the Theatrical Texts (for adults) category, and Omani writer Badr bin Said Al Hamdani won second place for his Butterflies. No fewer than eight Omani literary and scientific innovators had their work recognised at the 39th Rashid bin Humaid Award for Culture and Science in Ajman, the results of which were officially announced on 17 October 2022. For her scientific treatise on Nutrition, the Sultanate's Asma bint Muhammad al Fahdiya secured First Prize in the category of Applied Scientific Research and Pure Sciences. In the category of Literary Creativity – Eloquent Modern Poetry , the Runner-up Prize was won by the poet Ibrahim bin Said al Souti. For Popular Poetry, First Prize went to the poet Ali bin Muhammad al Mujaini, and the Runner-up Prize went to Ahmed bin Muhammad al Muqbali. Bashayer bint Habras al Sulaimiya took home First Prize for the Short Story, and the Second Prize went to Fatima bint Said al Zaabiyya. Finally, in the category of Children's Literature – Poetry, the First Prize was won by Khadija bint Ali al Mafarjiyeh and Second Prize by Ashraf bin Ali al Awfi.

Caring for archaeological sites

The Sultanate's heritage and cultural sites have been very fortunate in the unquestioning attention and support they receive. Restoration projects undertaken can avail of scientific methodology and experienced teams, working to internationally approved standards in a mark of respect to the rich legacy they have been privileged to uncover. There are hundreds of sites around the Sultanate where history has been brought back to life in this way, a colourful history that spans many centuries.

While the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism continues its energetic restoration drive across all governorates, refurbishing castles, forts, traditional alleyways, mosques and historical sites, it has also been active in archaeological surveys and excavations. Working alongside local and international academic and scientific institutions, these excavations have helped uncover an archaeological history that spans millennia from its roots in the Stone Age extending up to the pre-Islamic era.

One excavation site that has yielded insights into Iron Age Oman is still active at Dibba in Musandam, where it was first uncovered ten years ago in a collaboration

Protected Heritage sites celebrate Oman's many centuries of history and civilisation. (Husn Bait Al marah.. Wilayat Yanqul)

with an Italian mission from Rome's Sapienza University. Another particularly bountiful site has been that at Navon in Wilayat Duqm in Wusta. Surveys and excavations within the perimeter of the site have uncovered shell middens, fossils and rock inscriptions. A Czech mission from the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences was instrumental in locating and investigating 24 flat rock tables bearing more than 150 inscriptions in the Omani Musnad script with symbolic figures of camels and their riders and the like.

A team from the Sorbonne University is conducting a fourth season of excavation at archaeological sites in the Bisya region of Wilayat Bahla in Dakhiliyah. The team have identified Bronze Age tombs at Bisya, as well as at Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ain in Wilayat Ibri in Dhahirah. The latter is one of the Bronze Age sites associated in particular with the copper trade.

At Rustaq in South Batinah, work is ongoing at the extensive Al Tekha site, which dates to the 3rd millennium BC, and where a joint mission from Sultan Qaboos University and the Italian University of Pisa have revealed evidence of a large settlement. Meanwhile, a French team from the National Centre for Scientific Research has unearthed 4,000-year-old tombs and tower structures at the Al Aridh site in Dhahirah.

Archaeological work continues at Al Khashbah sites in Wilayat Mudhaibi, which are among the Sultanate's most significant Bronze Age sites linked to the copper trade. They encompass a series of tower structures found to date to the 4th millennium BC, and the relevant excavation and survey work continues in cooperation with a German mission from the University of Tübingen.

Meanwhile, excavations are ongoing at Ras al Jinz in Wilayat Sur in Sharqiyah South, an area that is rich in archaeology, with sites uncovered as early as three decades ago. This area is of particular interest for its connection to Bronze Age trade and hunting activity. A Dutch team from the University of Leiden has entered its third season at Ras al Jinz, with particular focus on the RJ3 site. A pre-Islamic site at Al Fulaij in Wilayat Saham in Batinah North is the subject of interest focused around the discovery of a square castle with four corner towers, along with furnaces and a kiln for the manufacture of sarooj, a mortar-like substance used in construction. These facilities have been dated to the 5th century AD. The Ministry is working in a fourth season collaboration with the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University and the British University of Durham to learn more about the Sassanian castle and its function in the region.

The schedule for the 2022/23 season includes further survey and excavation work in the vicinity of Lake Cent in Wilayat Bahla in Dakhiliyah, where a Czech team from Masaryk University has revealed evidence of human settlement dating to the Stone Age. Site work continues, meanwhile at Wadi Bani Khaled in Sharqiyah North, and the Ministry is conducting joint excavations with an Italian mission from the University of Naples at the fortified settlement in central Wadi Bani Khaled that has been dated to the Iron Age, or 1st millennium BC.

Work over several seasons at Khor Kharfout in Dhofar's Wilayat Dhalkut reveals it to have been occupied by consecutive human settlements from the Neolithic age all the way up to the Islamic era. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is working with an American team from Utah University of Technology for the fourth season, documenting evidence of settlement from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages and the Islamic period in the Wadi Siq area adjacent to the site at Khor Kharfout.

Also in Dhofar, survey and excavation work continues at Al Baleed, one of the most important of the coastal sites in the region and one which has given up evidence of continuous settlement from the pre-Islamic period up to the Islamic age. The Ministry is collaborating for a third season with an Italian mission from the University of Naples, working on a detailed topographical survey of the entire archaeological area, as well as conducting excavations around the mosque at the site. The team have recovered artefacts in its vicinity dating to the Middle Ages.

Another significant Dhofar site, at Khor Ruri Samhuram, has revealed evidence of Iron Age settlement. An Italian mission from the University of Pisa is pursuing a fifth season of excavation work at the site. It is also studying settlement at the HAS1 site with a view to arriving at a better understanding of the culture of the coastal region in Dhofar. Similar excavation work continues at Khor Gramma in Wilayat Sur in Sharqiyah South, where early human settlement has been established. Seven Bronze Age tombs have been unearthed by a French mission from the renowned L'Institut des déserts et des steppes, working alongside the Ministry. The work is now in its third season and is focused on excavating the tombs and accurately dating them.

The discovery of the Natif site in Wilayat Sadah in Dhofar can be classed as one of the most important discoveries of the French mission from the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Established as one of the oldest archaeological sites in the Omani Peninsula, Natif has already given up valuable information on social aspects of fishing communities.

Surveys are being conducted at both the Wadi Mukalla Bar site in Sharqiyah South and the Duqm site in Wusta in the third season of a joint mission with an Australian team from La Trobe University. Evidence of human settlement dating to the Paleolithic period was discovered at Wadi Mukalla Bar in Wilayat Sur, providing new information on the relationship between settlement and climate. Samples taken from the Duqm site, moreover, were valuable to a comparative study of life at coastal sites as compared with life in the interior. Some early Stone Age artefacts were unearthed, a rarity in the Sultanate, bringing knowledge to an area of Omani archaeology about which there have been few in-depth studies to date.

The Spanish team in its first season of survey work at the Halban site in Wilayat Nakhl in Batinah South is studying the large burial structures at the site jointly with the Spanish Human Sciences Research Institute. The two teams have a specific interest in the architecture, culture and burial rituals which the survey work is uncovering, including the manner in which the graves were used. They are

planning to complete a comprehensive survey of the area and to fully document one of the burial structures using 3D imaging technology.

On 7 November 2022, the Ministry published news of an early Bronze Age discovery in the Dahwa region of Wilayat Saham in Batinah North, where five distinct archaeological sites have been identified. The area undergoing excavation has remnants of settlement dating to the Umm al Nar era (2600-2000 BC). These discoveries can now claim to be the oldest known permanent settlements in northern Oman. Uncovered to date are stone buildings of various function, including warehouses, industrial buildings for the processing of copper ore, administrative buildings, and ritual buildings that are the first of their kind found dating to prehistoric Oman. A mass grave from the 3rd millennium BC was also unearthed, consisting of six burial chambers, in which skeletal remains were identified. Moreover, the site has yielded up a substantial hoard of local and imported pottery vessels, soapstone artefacts, and some jewellery.

The Cultural Heritage Law published by means of Royal Decree No 35/2019 stipulates the need for creation and maintenance of a precise record of Oman's cultural heritage. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has consequently unveiled an initiative that will document every historical and archaeological monument in the Sultanate of Oman and study their origin and purpose – whether defensive, civil or religious – as a first step towards ensuring their preservation for future generations.

The Sultanate has invested heavily in the protection of its architectural heritage, and that commitment has advanced strongly in recent years, when 22 historical landmarks and archaeological sites were tendered for investment. So far, six contracts have been signed, including one for Muttrah Fort in Muscat, one for Bahla Castle in Dakhiliyah, one for Nakhl Fort in Batinah South, one for Kut Beit al Askar in Wilayat Taqah, and one for Wadi Dawkah Reserve in Wilayat Thumrait in Dhofar. The latter is one of the Land of Frankincense sites included on the World Heritage List.

Museums – windows on past glory

The Sultanate has a well-earned reputation for investing in its heritage, and taking exceptional care of its historical treasures. It recognises the role museums play in reflecting the dialogue of culture, language, history and civilisation. Museums can avail of state-of-the-art tools to illustrate to maximum effect the interaction of past cultures and how they have influenced society, bringing knowledge, linking people and preserving human history.

The National Museum is the Sultanate's most prominent cultural edifice. It is dedicated to highlighting the nation's many-faceted heritage, from the birth pangs of human settlement in the Arabian Peninsula many millennia ago and up to the present day.

The National Museum was established by Royal Decree No 62/2013, promulgated on 20 November 2013. It was officially opened on 15 December 2015. The museum houses more than seven thousand archaeological artefacts, most of them of rare or unique value, as well as tens of thousands of other display items systematically arranged to illustrate the narrative of human evolution in Oman from its earliest days to the present time.

On 12 May 2022, the National Museum inaugurated the Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur room in its Renaissance Hall. The collection of display items was selected to convey aspects of the personality of the late Sultan, of his tenure as Sultan of Oman, and of his standing as an international role model for peaceful coexistence. It includes a selection of his personal belongings, as well as gifts given to the late Sultan by leaders from overseas. It tells the story of his life, from birth and upbringing to university studies to the responsibilities of leadership, illustrating the journey with glimpses into his personal hobbies and interests and into the germination of the ideas that gave rise to Oman's modern renaissance. These ideas were to culminate in the establishment of the state of institutions and the rule of law, but were unique too in their balanced patronage of both heritage and modernity. Sultan Qaboos' personal stamp is evident in the nature of the modern state that describes Oman today, where internal stability and public welfare are matched by the peaceful nature of its external relationships. The country inherited by the current generation bears the personal stamp of the late Sultan, and this message is clearly conveyed in the display.

Museums are both windows on the past and important archives of a society's culture.

In addition to the National Museum, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture oversees several other publicly-supported museums, including the Natural History Museum, opened in 1985, which showcases the many diverse aspects of the Omani environment through illustrated descriptions of terrain, geology, vegetation, insects, and marine life.

The Children's Museum, which opened in 1990, is a science and technology learning resource that introduces modern inventions and delivers scientific knowledge in a simplified and child-friendly manner that easily conveys a sense of the vital role of science in life.

The Omani-French Museum was inaugurated in Muscat in 1992, with a mission to highlight the historical relations between 18th-century France and Oman. It is located in the building that was once the French consulate and consists of eight halls. The museum houses a collection of documents that chronicle Omani-French relations, alongside traditional costumes from the two countries, a selection of jewellery and antiques, and models of Omani and French ships.

In Sohar Fort, a museum was opened in 1993 and its contents deal with the history of the city of Sohar and its cultural and economic relations. In 2008, the Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum was inaugurated.

The Ministry of Defence oversees the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, which was opened in 1988 at the Bait al Falaj Fort in Ruwi. The museum contains exhibits that illustrate the highlights of Oman's military history.

The Muscat Gate Museum, which takes the visitor on a tour of Muscat, highlights the city's growth from a commercial harbour to a prosperous capital city. It contains displays illustrating the city's development from ancient times.

The Land of Frankincense Museum, inaugurated on 23 July 2007 within the perimeter of the Al Baleed archaeological site in Dhofar, includes a historical hall with six sections documenting Oman's history across the ages, and a maritime hall devoted to Oman's illustrious seafaring and boatbuilding history.

The Oil and Gas Exhibition Centre portrays the history of the formation of oil over different periods and the stages of its extraction and narrates the story of oil discovery, in the Sultanate in particular.

The Central Bank of Oman's Currency Museum, situated within the bank's premises, reviews the chronology of currency exchange in the Sultanate and showcases both old and modern currencies, including banknotes and coins which were exchanged during the early stages of the Islamic era.

There are privately-owned museums, such as Bait al Zubair Museum in Muscat, which opened in 1998 and houses valuable displays of collectibles and costumes from the various governorates of the Sultanate. Ghaliya's Museum of Modern Art, opened in 2011 on the Muttrah corniche, has rooms representing the typical modern house in the period from the beginning of the 1950s to the mid-1970s.

On 8 January 2014, the Education Museum at the Saidia School in Muscat

was opened. The museum documents the evolution of public education in the Sultanate. The Saidia School itself occupies a prime and prestigious position in this story and was the inspiration for the foundation of the museum.

On 1 November 2021, the Fatah al Khair Centre opened its doors to the public in Sur. The Centre is an information portal for visitors, where they can peruse five display halls to learn about the heritage of this illustrious city. More than 400 items of interest related to the city's heritage are on display, including shipbuilding tools, navigational aids, photographs, books, letters and documents, household items, clothing, jewellery, and craft tools and materials.

A rich storehouse of culture

A nation's archive is a valuable, indeed essential, repository of research and knowledge. It houses important information about history, civilisation and the human sciences. Scientific research is a cornerstone of true development in any society, providing as it does viable truths that contribute to the success of national plans.

Since its creation by means of Royal Decree No 60/2007, the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) has grown steadily, advancing without interruption in its mission to preserve, collect, classify and archive records of significant value to the nation. It has placed in the service of this operation tools and methodologies tested for excellence in the processes of preserving records of all relevant types. The NRAA is scientific in its approach, as it is dedicated in its mission, and it has taken responsibility for managing the documentary records of government agencies and other official bodies. It is constantly examining the results of innovative scientific and technological research techniques in the field in pursuit of optimal preservation methods, while ensuring ease of access to the archive by scholars, academics and interested parties

The NRAA stores more than six million documents, both printed and digital, in various storage formats. The archive is growing constantly, reflecting both the efforts made by the NRAA and the growth in the volume of documents emanating from the various authorities in the Sultanate. Alongside the official state archive is the historic and contemporary folk record of the Omani people, in the latter case a substantial archive of some 400,000 printed documents and 177,000 manuscripts.

Under the terms of reference assigned to it, the NRAA authority is the Sultanate's representative body in maintaining an open flow of exchange with like institutions in other countries and it has been responsible to date for the sponsorship of 22 major scientific conferences and seminars. Exhibitions rank as one of the most important direct channels by which the NRAA connects

with domestic and overseas audiences. To date the Authority has either hosted or attended upwards of 100 document exhibitions, both at home and abroad.

Since 2012, the NRAA has been engaged in a race to record and preserve for posterity the rich fund of wisdom contained in the collective 'oral memory' of the nation, and it has fitted out a dedicated studio for the purpose with audio and visual aids that have greatly facilitated and accelerated the collection process. As of September 2022, it had conducted 517 interviews with 509 individuals, amounting to a total 1,088 hours of audio and visual record. The interviews are later transcribed for ease of storage and circulation.

In the processing of archival documents prior to their storage, restoration is frequently necessary, with the goal of returning them to their original condition, or as near to that state as possible. Having analysed a manuscript for its composition, including the specifications of the paper and inks used, suitable chemical treatments are selected for the task. In this manner, a total of 256,299 pages, representing 80,201 documents, had been restored, in addition to 1,906 manuscripts, 169,050 book pages, 131 files constituting 6,025 pages, 99 pamphlets and 924 maps.

Institutions of cultural enrichment

The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, for its part, has been responsible for adding much value to the Sultanate's cultural, literary and artistic movements. It functions under the mandate of Royal Decree No 52/2012, which established it as a cultural and scientific body with functions related to the protection of culture, science and the arts. It fosters cooperation with cultural institutions in other countries, introducing Omani culture in a receptive environment. Royal Decree No 69/2021 reassigned the affiliation of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science to the Diwan of Royal Court.

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Arabic Speakers provides a valuable service in facilitating communication and thereby strengthening bonds between the many language cultures that inhabit the Sultanate's human landscape. In 2022, the College welcomed 88 male and female students from countries around the world and designed special courses for them to frame their language studies at the College.

The Sultan Qaboos Awards for Culture, Arts and Literature bring recognition to intellectual achievement and creative endeavour, from a respect for these gifts deep-rooted in Omani culture, along with a belief in the value of continuity between past and present in a way that enriches the current intellectual and literary environment

The Sultan Qaboos Awards for Culture, Arts and Literature are overseen by the

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Arabic Speakers has proven to be an effective tool in promoting communication with non-Arabic speakers both within Oman and overseas.

Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science and are among the most coveted marks of recognition available to Omani and Arab intellectuals, artists and writers. The Awards are granted in acknowledgement of contributions to the renewal of thought and the advancement of human conscience through culture, art and literature. They are presented in alternating years, in the first of which the contest restricts participation to Omanis, and in the second is broadened to the entire Arab world, including Oman itself.

On 9 November 2022, the winners of the 9th Awards cycle, dedicated to Omani participants, were announced in the three award categories. In the Culture category, Harith bin Muhammad al Battashi won for a study examining the Omani social heritage. The Al Dann performance group won in the Arts category for their dramatic repertoire. And writer Mona Bint Habras al Salimiyya took the Literature Award for her essay-writing body of work.

The 30th Sultan Qaboos Competition for Memorisation of the Holy Qur'an Competition returned after a two-year hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, attracting 2,881 participants to the highly contested event.

Reading is a profound source of intellectual and scientific nourishment, in particular for young people, and the 'Let's Read Programme' competition is a popular annual event that incentivises reading as a rewarding pastime and motivation to self-expression in writing. The programme has been responsible for popularising interaction with public libraries and ingraining the reading habit. It has other positive side benefits too, such as consolidating values of good citizenship and patriotism. The

competition extends to all governorates and 2,652 contestants took part in the 2022 event.

The magnificent Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) stands as a bridge between cultures, both within Oman and between Oman and the outside world. It represents the vision with which His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said set out to recognise and celebrate authentic Omani values and the Arab and Islamic identity of Oman. From this solid ground can rise a generation confident enough to be open to the cultures of the world and aware of their great diversity and beauty.

Publication of the ROHM's seasonal programme of performances and events is a much-anticipated occasion and each season seeks to make a mark in the form of new departures and qualitative shifts. The House's activities are no longer limited to performances, but instead favour greater public engagement, achieved by way of creative initiatives and innovative programming that fuel cultural vitality, draw out talent, and promote cultural tourism and healthy global exchange.

On 22 September 2022, the ROHM published its 2022-2023 schedule, which included a calendar of 43 artistic productions, from symphony concerts to international opera performances to musical and lyrical plays. A performance of military music, from Oman and around the world, features for the first time, and a festival of popular music, as well as evenings of Sufi devotional chanting.

The Cultural Club is a driver of the Sultanate's intellectual revival, with its mission to harmonise literary, cultural, intellectual and scientific events. The combined effect serves the advancement of intellectual and cultural dialogue internally and enhances Oman's contribution to broader trends regionally and internationally. The Civilization Studies Centre, meanwhile, was established in conjunction with the restructuring of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and youth. Its multi-pronged mission is to conduct research into Omani civilisation and culture, with a focus on scientific output that has not been broadly recognised; knowledge-based reconstruction; a respectful empowerment of research and research workers; and the cultivation of a generation motivated to specialise in the advancement of culture in general and of Omani civilisation in particular.

The Omani Society for Writers and Literati (OSWL) is a powerful presence on the literary scene, influencing written culture by way of a regular succession of events, conferences, symposia and celebrations to honour talented writers. It also publishes books and periodicals, and in 2022 was responsible for 46 literary publications, encompassing poetry, fiction in the form of novels and short stories, drama, essays, scientific studies, reviews, children's literature and new studies on the economic and social history of the Sultanate.

A popular OSWL event is the annual Cultural Creativity award, which continues to grow in stature among writers in Oman and to strengthen its position amid the various awards that acknowledge cultural excellence in the Sultanate.

12

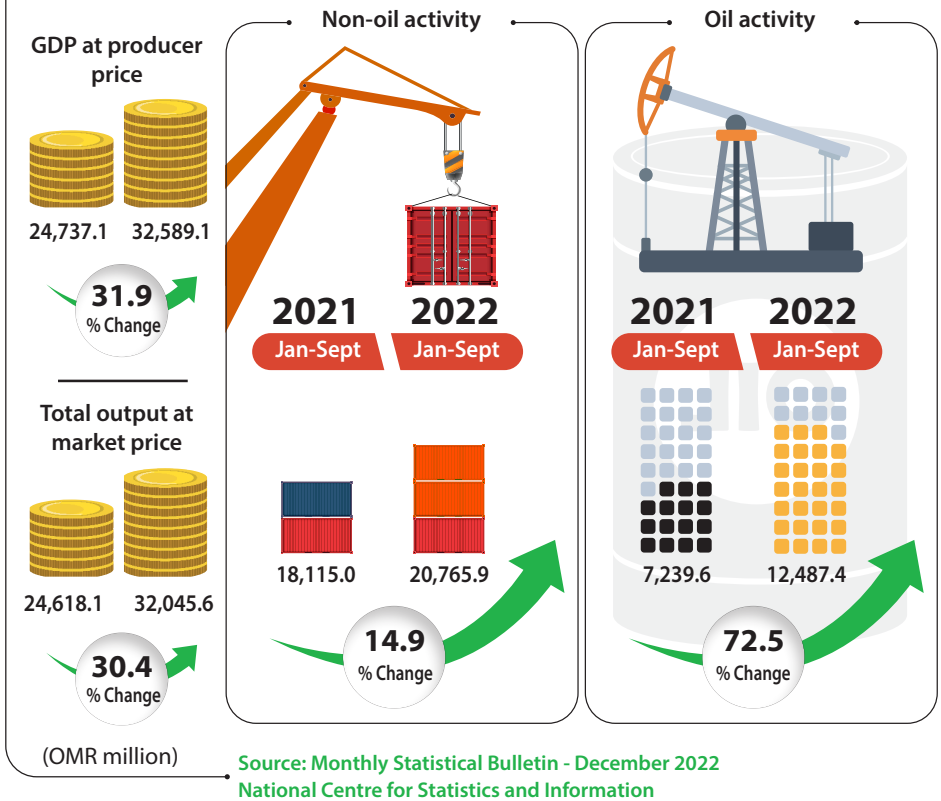
The Omani economy .. new horizons of sustainable growth

The Omani economy achieved high levels of growth in 2022, with excellent public finance management, an improvement in the country's credit rating, and increases in GDP and in oil and non-oil revenues. Foreign trade was robust, indicators were broadly positive across the labour market, and inflation was under control at the safe and acceptable level of 2.8% at end November 2022.

This satisfactory outcome was driven by the Sultanate's adoption of fiscal and economic policies that tightened performance in key areas at a time when the government was focused on the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The latter had had a major impact on employment and on retail and other economic activity and the policies leading the recovery targeted oil and gas revenues for optimal exploitation. Also in their sights was the growth potential of an expanded private sector, and of broader investment goals. Several major development projects were singled out for accelerated completion. And in the crucial matter of public spending and public debt levels, the constant drive for further efficiencies was seen as a priority.

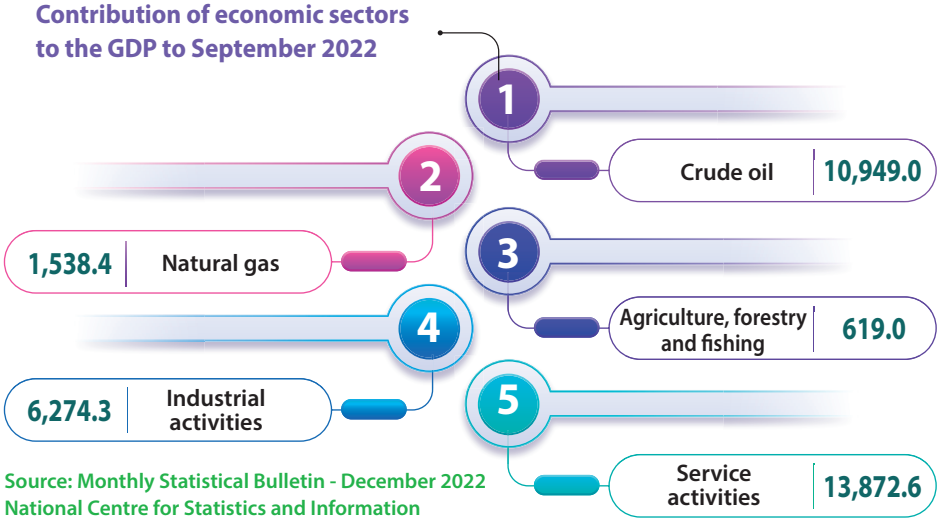
Oman's economy has experienced high levels of growth, as confirmed by recognised economic indicators.

GDP at current prices to September 2022



Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin - December 2022
National Centre for Statistics and Information

Contribution of economic sectors to the GDP to September 2022

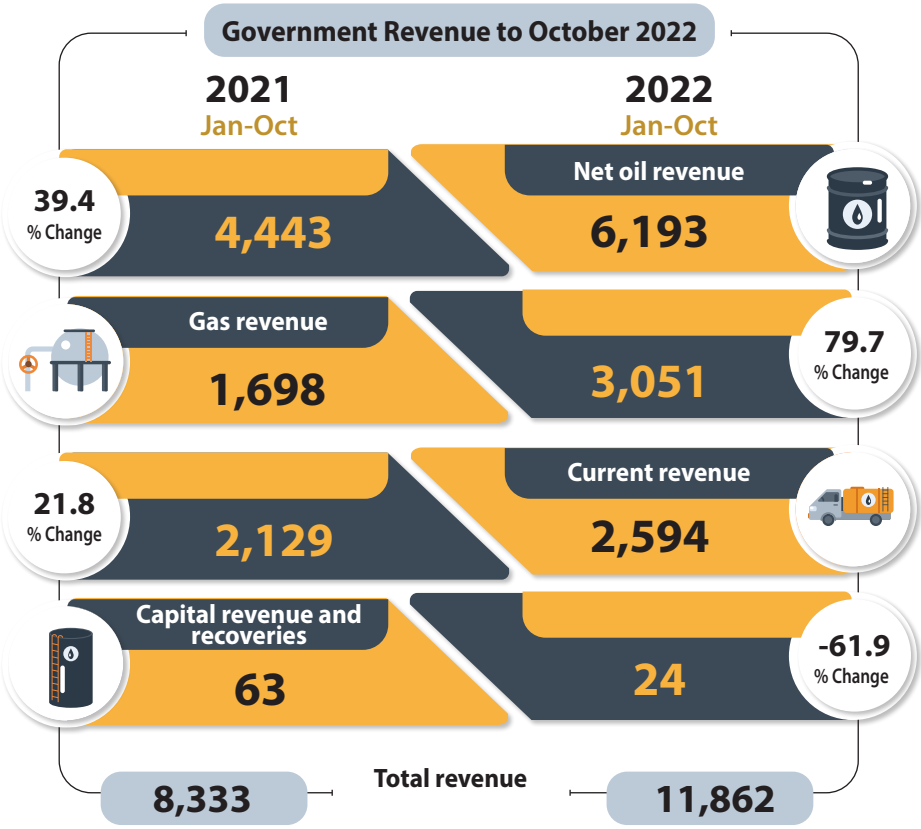


Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin - December 2022
National Centre for Statistics and Information

Government revenue and public spending

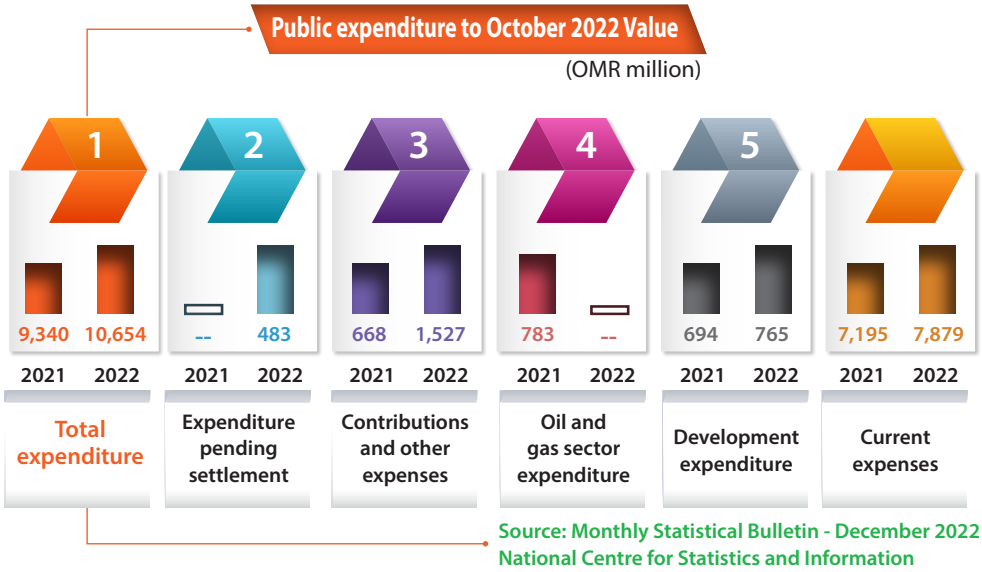
Government revenue for the first ten months of 2022 was steady and rising, reaching a total of OMR11.8 billion as compared with OMR8.3 billion for the same period of 2021, and exceeding the budgeted target of OMR10.6 billion.

Spending was also up in 2022, with the OMR10.6 billion figure to October representing a 14% increase over that of OMR9.3 billion for the same period in 2021. A budget surplus of OMR1.208 billion was recorded at the end of October 2022, marking a positive advance on the OMR1 billion deficit of the same date in 2021.



Source: Financial Performance Bulletin November 2022 - Ministry of Finance

(OMR million)



Source: Monthly Statistical Bulletin - December 2022
National Centre for Statistics and Information

Public debt

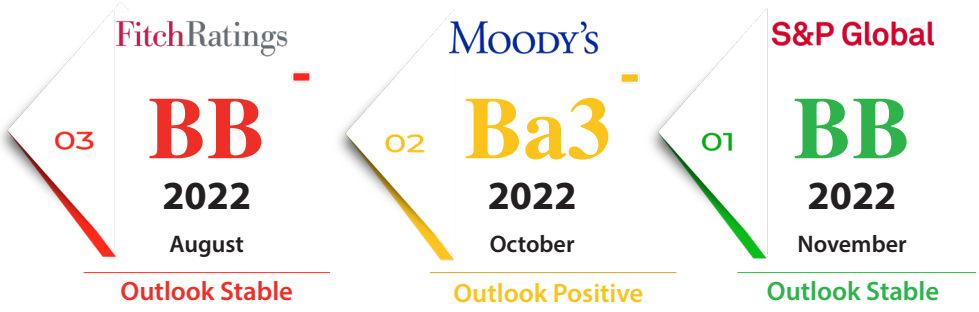
In 2022, the Sultanate concentrated on repaying high-cost loans with a focused view on achieving an early reduction in public debt. This strategy resulted in a decline of debt to OMR18.4 by the end of August 2022, a drop of OMR2.4 billion in eight months.

The same year saw a repurchase of some sovereign bonds at below their issuance value, and the issuance of local instruments for trade on the Muscat Stock Exchange at a relatively low cost. These efforts have combined to reduce public debt, as well as to release repayable interest amounting to OMR127 million from future debt service. Among the significant results of this fiscal rectitude have been enhanced investor confidence in the Omani economy, an upwardly revised credit rating, and an improved overall outlook for the Sultanate.

Credit rating

The major credit rating agencies raised the Sultanate's rating as its debt-reducing initiatives took hold. Accompanying the cost-saving measures designed to control financial performance was a rise in the oil price which, with other efficiencies, led to an overall improvement in financial indicators.

Sultanate of Oman credit rating 2022



Direct foreign investment

The volume of foreign direct investment in the Sultanate had increased by the end of the third quarter of 2022 by a factor of 10.4% to OMR18.14 billion. Meanwhile the Sultanate's global trade exchange was valued at OMR30.4 billion for the year to September 2022, an impressive increase of 46.1% from the corresponding date in 2021.

Direct foreign investment in the manufacturing sector came in at an aggregate total of OMR1.7 billion, as compared with OMR1.5 billion for the same period in 2021.

Oman Vision 2040

Oman Vision 2040 constitutes the national economic and social planning blueprint for the coming decades, describing the strategy outlines of the period from 2021 to 2040. From this vision emerge all of the sectoral policies and five-year development plans. The Vision was prepared with extensive community input and aims to refine both social welfare and broader economic benefits, while transitioning the economy from dependence on oil to one that is more diversified and knowledge-based.

Global indicators targeted in Oman Vision 2040

Global Innovation Index

1	2	3	4
2018	2021	2030	2040
Baseline	Status	Target	Target
69	76	40	20
out of 127 countries	out of 132 countries	Among top countries	Among top countries

Global Competitiveness Index

1	2	3	4
2018	2021	2030	2040
Baseline	Status	Target	Target
47	-	30	20
out of 140 countries	Not assessed	Among top countries	Among top countries

Global Competitiveness Index – Skills Pillar

1 2018	2 2021	3 2030	4 2040
Baseline	Status	Target	Target
36	-	20	10
out of 140 countries	Not assessed	Among top countries	Among top countries

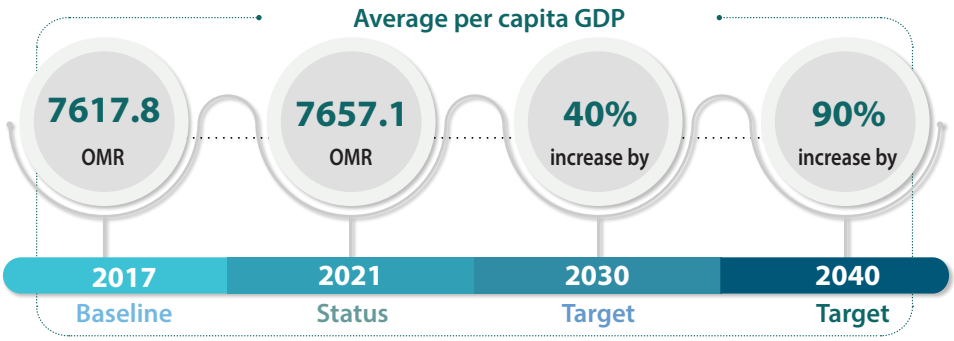
Global Governance Indicators – Government Efficiency

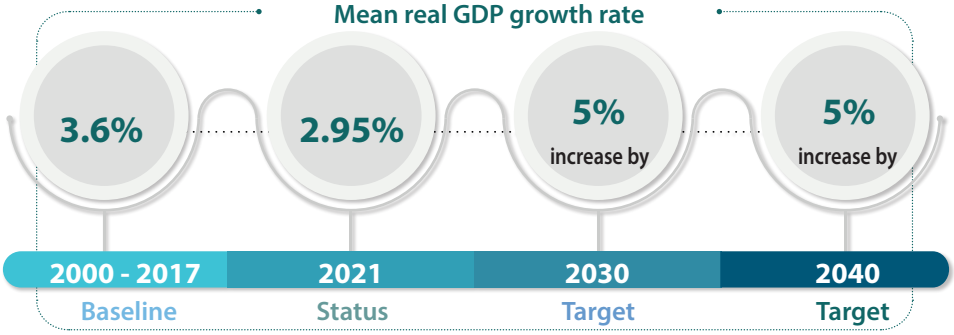
1 2018	2 2021	3 2030	4 2040
Baseline	Status	Target	Target
81	88	30	10
out of 209 countries	out of 214 countries	Among top countries	Among top countries

Environmental Performance Index

1 2018	2 2021	3 2030	4 2040
Baseline	Status	Target	Target
115	110	40	20
out of 127 countries	out of 180 countries	Among top countries	Among top countries

Targeted national indicators in Oman Vision 2040





Contribution of non-oil sectors to GDP

2017	2021	2030	2040
61%	72.8%	83% upwards	90% upwards
Baseline	Status	Target	Target

Foreign investment contribution to GDP

2017	2021	2030	2040
4.12%	4.5%	7% upwards	10% upwards
Baseline	Status	Target	Target

Omanisation rate - total private sector jobs created

2016	2021	2030	2040
11.6%	16.5%	35% upwards	40% upwards
Baseline	Status	Target	Target

Oman Investment Authority

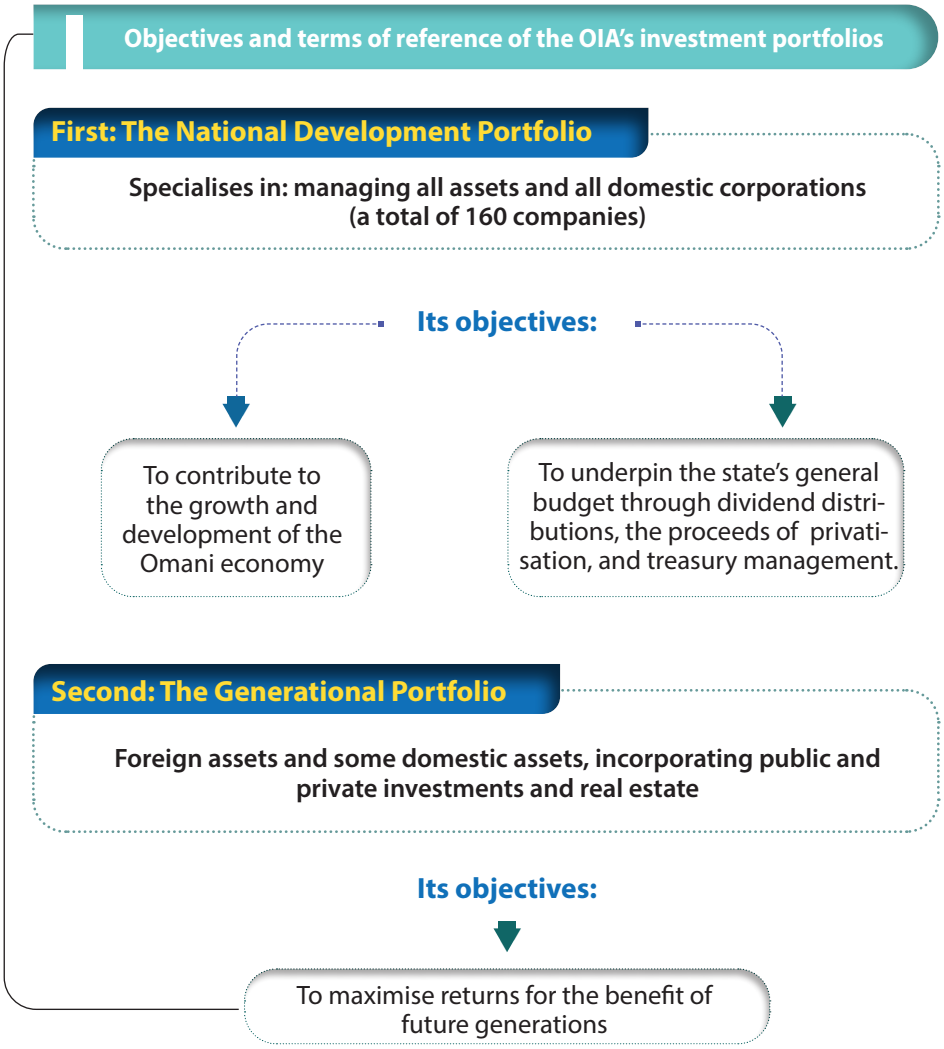
The Oman Investment Authority drafted a 5-year work strategy in 2022 up to 2026. The plan revolves around stimulating performance in the Authority's various subsidiaries, improving productivity, raising the investment level to one more capable of contributing to economic and social development, and increasing the contribution to GDP and to the state's general budget. Since its inception, the Authority's annual return has averaged 10.3%.

The Authority invests in more than 40 countries around the world, acting under the umbrella of two broad strategies. Its public market investment arm seeks out opportunities in global stocks, fixed income bonds and short-term assets, while its private market arm invests in real estate projects, logistics services, the service sector, mining and industrial projects, technology, infrastructure, food and health care.

The Omani Investment Authority is mandated to grow the Sultanate's investments and maximise the country's financial reserves.

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – priorities for 2022-2026:

1. Achieving financial sustainability, enhancing profitability, and raising the contributions of the tourism, agriculture, fisheries and technology sectors
2. Stimulating growth in selected investment sectors
3. Increasing its contribution to GDP
4. Attracting private sector investors through new, productive departures; exiting certain existing investments; and further privatisation
5. Identifying upwards of 20 assets with a view to achieving returns of some OMR2.6 billion
6. Contributing more to local added value
7. Encouraging synergy and integration between companies in more than 100 items with positive impact on supply chain, digitalisation, human resource, and profit aspects
8. Enhancing efficient governance and transparency by issuing a corporate governance charter for companies associated with the Oman Investment Authority



The banking sector

During 2022, the Omani banking sector logged growth in several sectors. At the end of October, deposits were up, to OMR25.6 billion, an increase of more than OMR400 million from end October 2021. Meanwhile, credit allocated rose from OMR27.8 billion to OMR28.9 billion, and several other indicators flagged a positive overall picture for the banking sector.

Banking sector statistics at October 2022

1. OMR1 billion: capitalisation of Central Bank of Oman
2. OMR28.9 billion: total credit disbursed by banking sector
3. OMR24.1 billion: credit disbursed to private sector
4. OMR5.3 billion: financing disbursed by Islamic banks and windows
5. OMR25.6 billion: total bank sector deposits
6. OMR38.5 billion: total assets of conventional commercial banks
7. OMR6.4 billion: total assets of Islamic banks and windows
8. OMR1.6 billion: cash in circulation
9. OMR20 billion: broad money supply (M2)

Tender Board

In 2022, the Tender Board awarded projects valued at OMR505.3 million, double the 2021 value of OMR252.5 million and substantially above that awarded for 2020 (OMR392.2 million).

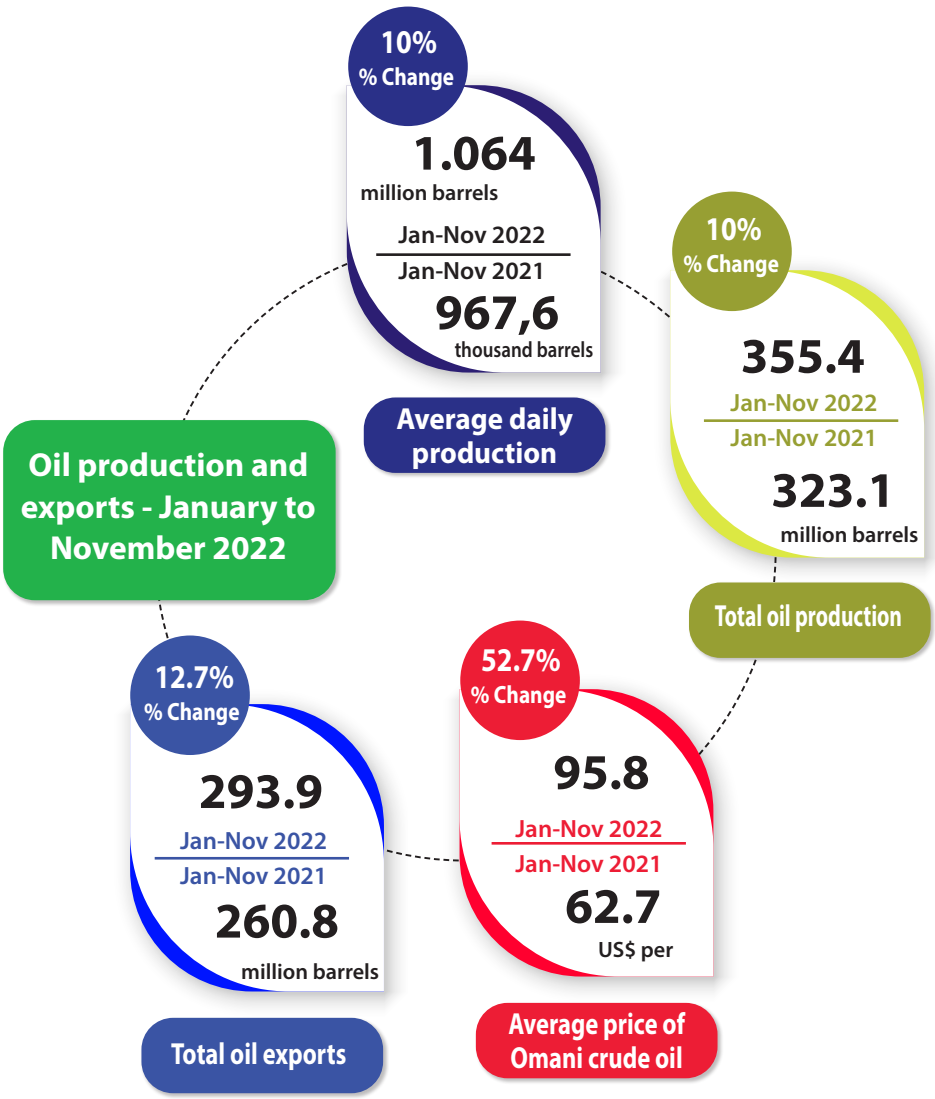
The 10 most significant tenders awarded by the Tender Board in 2022

1. Provision of catering, nutrition, hygiene, laundry and pest control services for hospitals, complexes and medical centres affiliated to the Ministry of Health — **59,980,184**
2. Supply of medicines, vaccines and serums to the Ministry of Health — **52,106,855**
3. Construction of a dam to protect against flood risks in the Wadi Uday mountain gorge in Wilayat al Amerat, Muscat — **38,660,023**
4. Design and construction of 13 schools in various governorates of the Sultanate — **26,780,000**
5. Supply, design and installation of the government financial system for a period of (5 years) on behalf of the Ministry of Finance — **21,345,353**
6. Establishment of the Central Public Health Laboratory — **18,214,697**
7. Project to pave the Harweb-Mateen Road in Dhofar Governorate — **17,398,334**
8. Renewal of the Microsoft agreement for government organisations for a period of 3 years (2021-2024) — **16,546,415**
9. Establishment of Mahout Hospital in Al Wusta Governorate — **13,920,686**
10. Maintenance of asphalt roads in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate over a 5-year period — **13,721,199**

Oil and gas sector

The oil and gas sector is a major supporter of economic and social development in the Sultanate of Oman. The Sultanate has total oil reserves of 4.8 billion barrels and natural gas reserves of 23 trillion cubic feet.

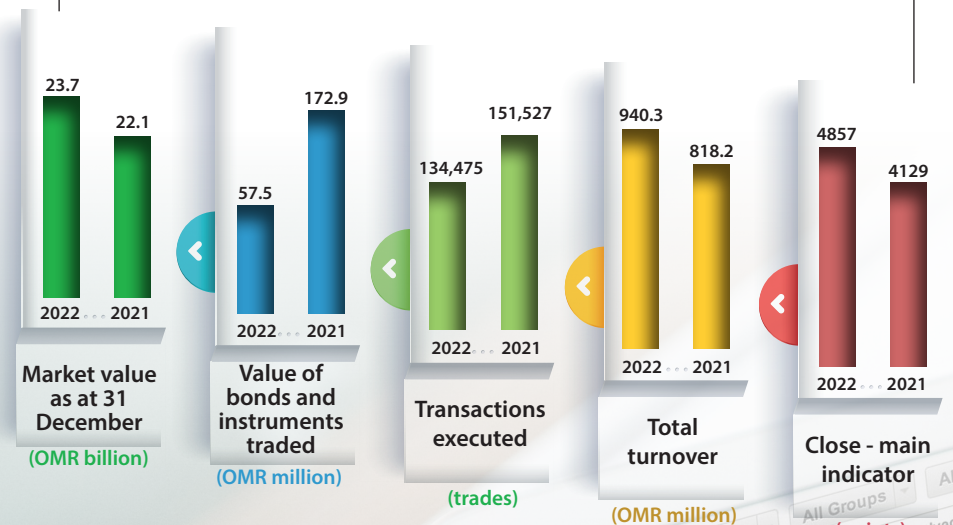
New exploratory surveys were conducted in 2022 with a view to developing the sector by increasing the number of producing wells. Moreover, additional investment was focused on expanding the potential of value added projects.



Muscat Stock Exchange

In 2022, the Muscat Stock Exchange logged its best annual performance in 5 years, bringing the trading value to about OMR 940.3 million, as compared with OMR 818.2 million in 2021, and OMR441 million in 2020. The main stock index rose 17.6% to close at 4857 points, an uptick for the year of 727 points.

The main indicators of the Muscat Stock Exchange by the end of 2022



Principal trade statistics to September 2022

(OMR billion)
12.5
Oil and gas exports
Jan-Sept 2022

(OMR billion)
5.6
Omani non-oil exports
Jan-Sept 2022

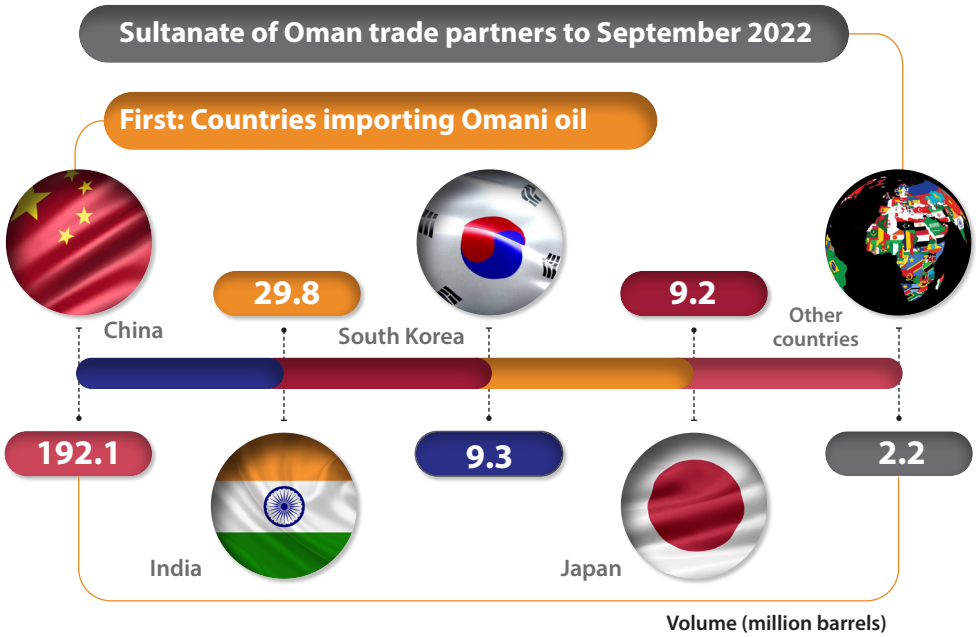
(OMR million)
972.6
Re-exports
Jan-Sept 2022

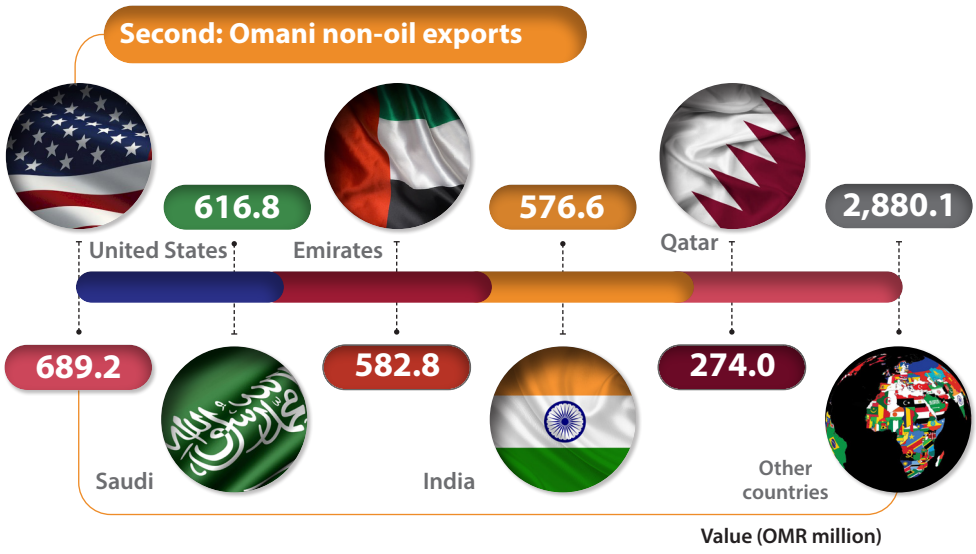
(OMR billion)
19.1
Total merchandise exported
Jan-Sept 2022

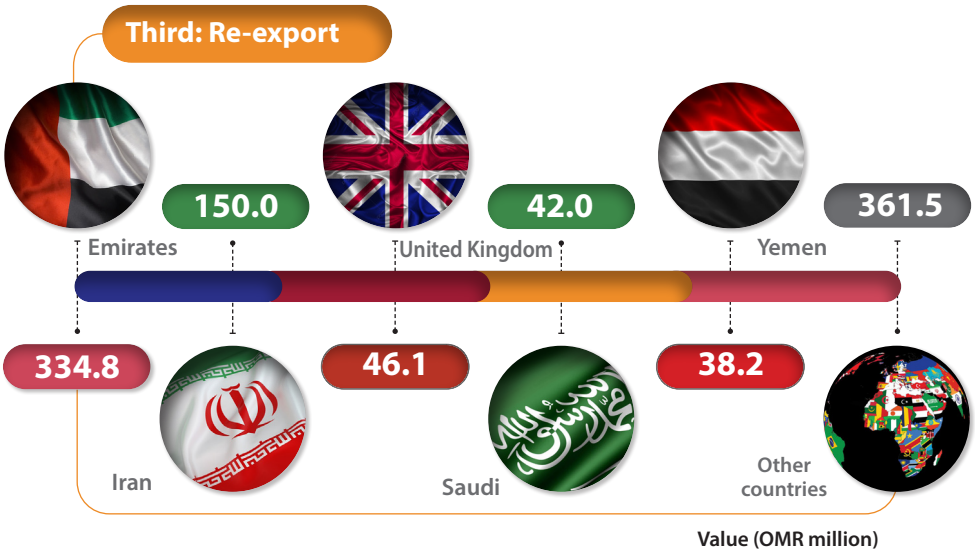
(OMR billion)
11.3
Registered merchandise imports
Jan-Sept 2022

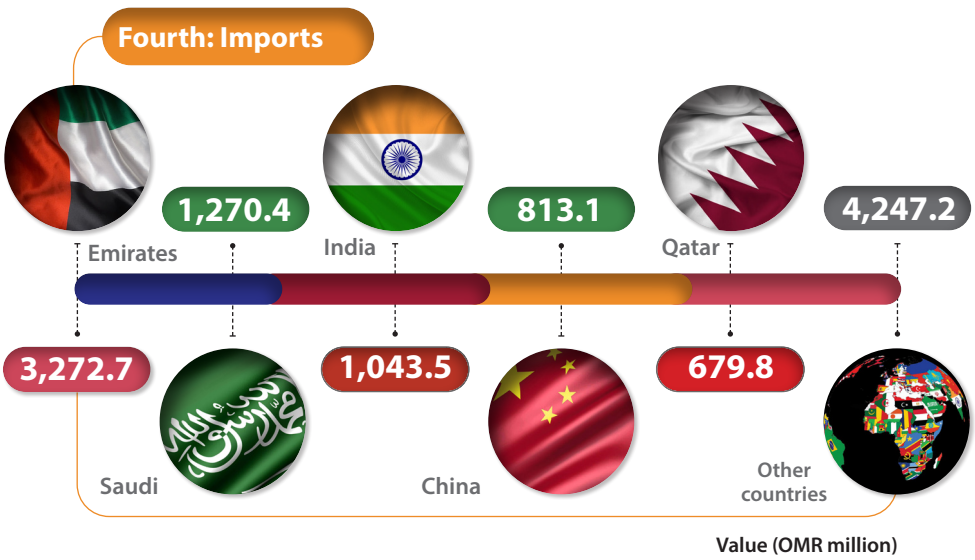
(OMR billion)
13.8
GDP at current prices – service activities
Jan-Sept 2022

(OMR billion)
2.6
Contribution of wholesale and retail trade to GDP
Jan-Sept 2022


Sultanate of Oman trade partners to September 2022
First: Countries importing Omani oil
China
29.8
South Korea
9.2
Other countries
192.1
India
9.3
Japan
2.2
Volume (million barrels)


Second: Omani non-oil exports
United States
616.8
Emirates
576.6
Qatar
2,880.1
689.2
Saudi
582.8
India
274.0
Other countries
Value (OMR million)

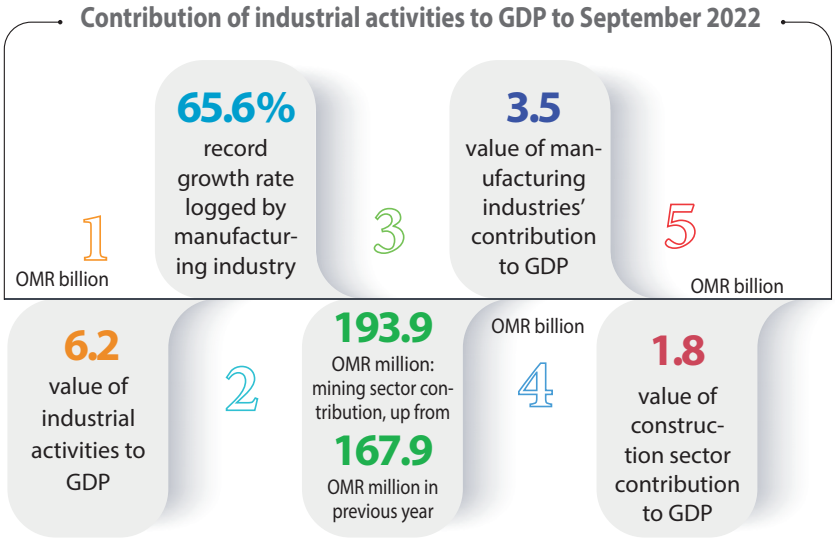

Third: Re-export
150.0
42.0
361.5
Emirates
United Kingdom
Yemen
334.8
46.1
38.2
Iran
Saudi
Other countries
Value (OMR million)

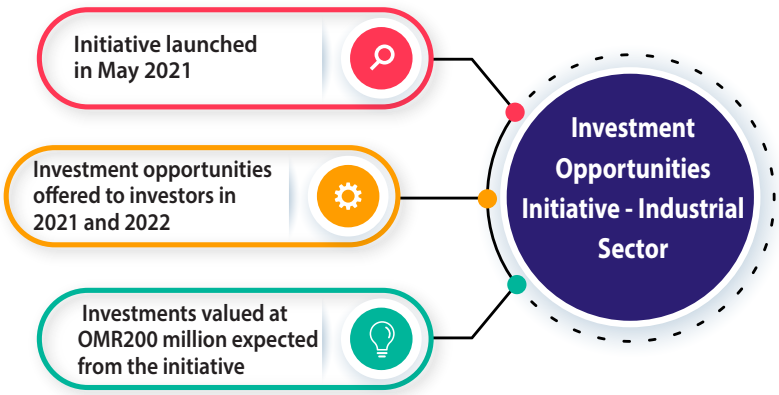

Fourth: Imports
1,270.4
813.1
4,247.2
Emirates
India
Qatar
3,272.7
1,043.5
679.8
Saudi
China
Other countries
Value (OMR million)

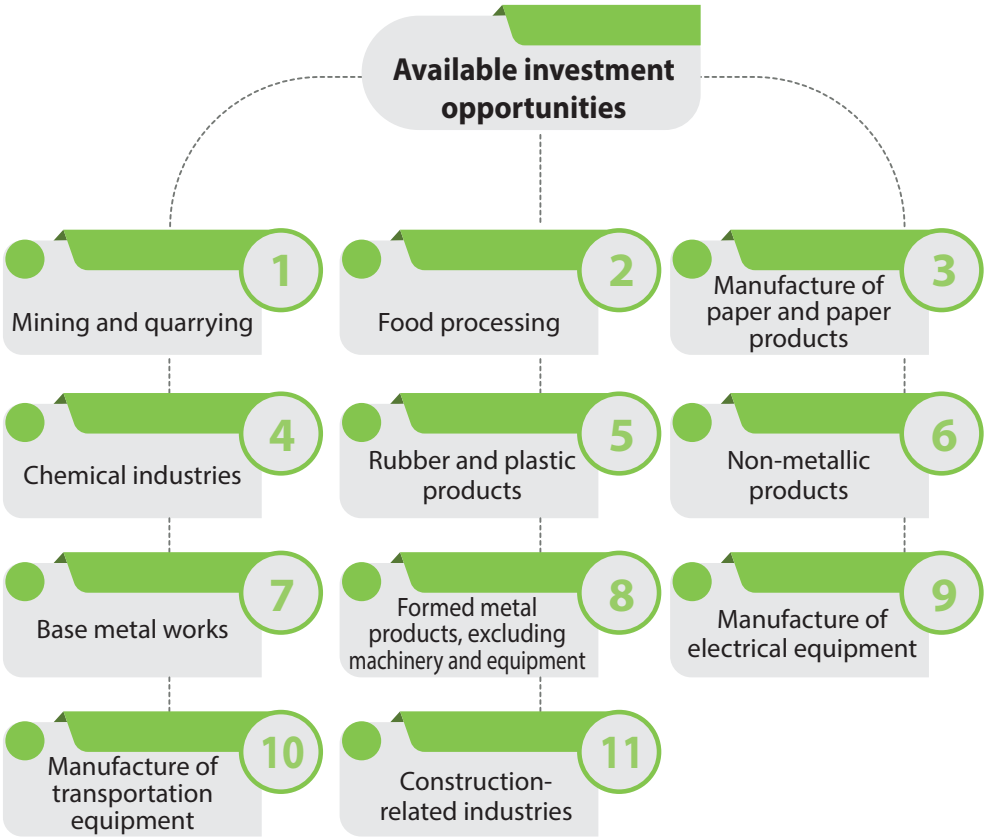
Industrial sector

The Sultanate's overriding economic strategy for the coming decades is to increase the contribution of the industrial sector to GDP and to create job opportunities for citizens. In 2021 and 2022, a number of initiatives were launched to this end.

One such initiative is the national promotional campaign 'Made in the Sultanate of Oman,' organised on a yearly basis as an incentive to the manufacturing sector and local producers. The state sponsors a number of overseas fairs annually with a view to opening new markets for Omani goods, and encouraging more competitive instincts among producers.







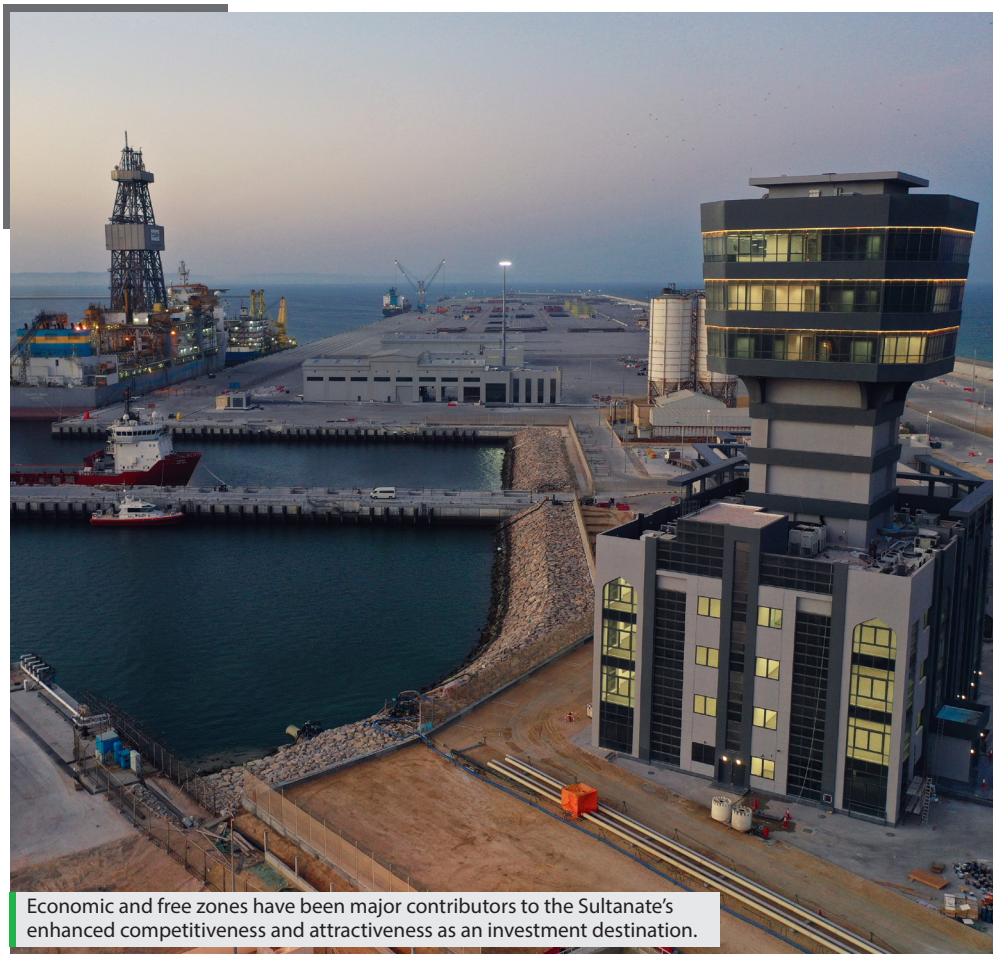
Objectives

1. Incentivising available investment opportunities
2. Attracting quality investment in economic diversification sectors
3. Identifying the most appropriate environment for investment success
4. Enabling the private sector and motivating it to invest in the national economy
5. Promoting in-country value programmes
6. Increasing the domestic market share of Omani products

Economic and free zones

The Sultanate has had impressive success from the establishment of several economic and free zones targeting foreign and domestic investment.

The Duqm Special Economic Zone is the largest of these zones in terms of area, at 2,000 square kilometres in total. It has recently been rehabilitated to attract more diverse investments serving the various economic sectors. Free zones have also been established in Sohar, Salalah and Al Mazunah. During 2022, Royal Decree No 10/2022 created new free zones at Muscat International Airport and Sohar and Salalah regional airports.



Economic and free zones have been major contributors to the Sultanate's enhanced competitiveness and attractiveness as an investment destination.

The most significant free zone activities of 2022

1. His Majesty Sultan Haitham issued Royal Decree No 10/2022 establishing free zones at Muscat International Airport and the airports of Sohar and Salalah.
2. Royal Decree No 53/2022 transferred the affiliation of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' to the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.
3. Duqm Port, now one of the largest ports in the Middle East, was officially opened in 2022.
4. Interim operation of the integrated electricity and water station in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm was initiated.
5. The Specialised Integrated Food Company has set up a US$25 million food processing plant in the Salalah Free Zone.
6. Agreement was signed for construction of an OMR14 million canning facility for tuna, sardines and other marine products in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.
7. Several green hydrogen projects were launched in the economic and free zones.
8. The Karwa Automotive Company celebrated the rollout of the first bus bearing the legend 'Made in the Sultanate of Oman' from its assembly line in 2021. The company is a joint venture between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar.

Establishment of free zones at Muscat International Airport and Sohar and Salalah airports

Economic activities expected to be located in airport free zones:

1. Importation of sundry commodities for storage and marketing
2. Establishment of logistical warehouses for goods re-export
3. Establishment of light industry facilities
4. Transport, banking, insurance and other services pertinent to free zone activity
5. Tourist services, such as hotels, recreational facilities and commercial centres

Incentives and special status privileges afforded airport free zones:

1. 100% foreign ownership possible
2. Exemption from import and export duties
3. No minimum capital requirement
4. Exemption of operating entities and companies from income tax for a period of 15 years, renewable for a further 5 years
5. One-stop shop system for permits, licences, approvals and visas
6. World-class facilities and services, including fully outfitted offices, warehouses and commercial outlets near to the airports

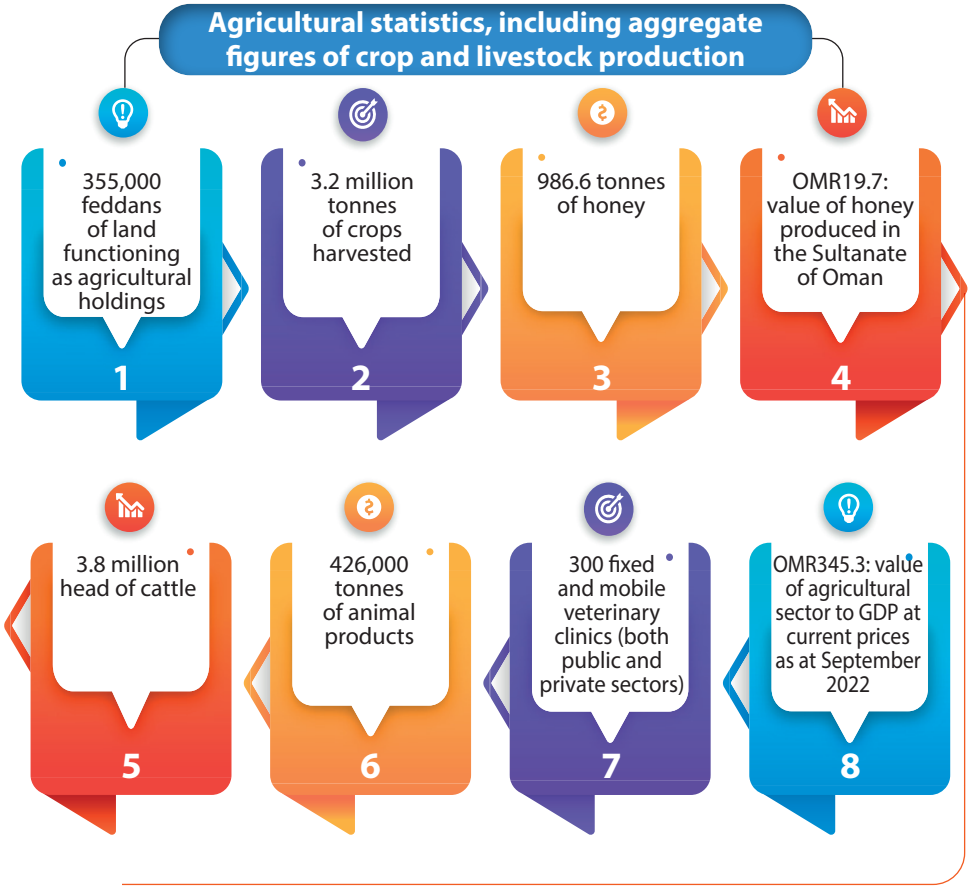
Khazaen Economic City

1. Located in Wilayat Barka in the Governorate of Al Batinah South, Khazaen is the newest integrated economic city to be developed.
2. The new city is targeting light and medium industries, and real estate, logistics and commercial projects.
3. The city hopes to attract significant foreign investment as well as increased domestic input, providing opportunities for small and medium enterprises.
4. Investment contracts are being negotiated with several government agencies and private sector institutions.
5. A 100,000 m2 land port will provide integrated import and export services to investors in the city.
6. An agreement with Salalah Mills Company will establish an integrated food processing complex.
7. An agreement with Al Hilal Industrial Group will establish an industrial project specialising in the production of plastic and fibreglass materials.
8. An agreement with Muscat Municipality will transfer wholesale and coldstore activities from the central vegetable and fruit market to the city of Khazaen.

Agriculture and fisheries

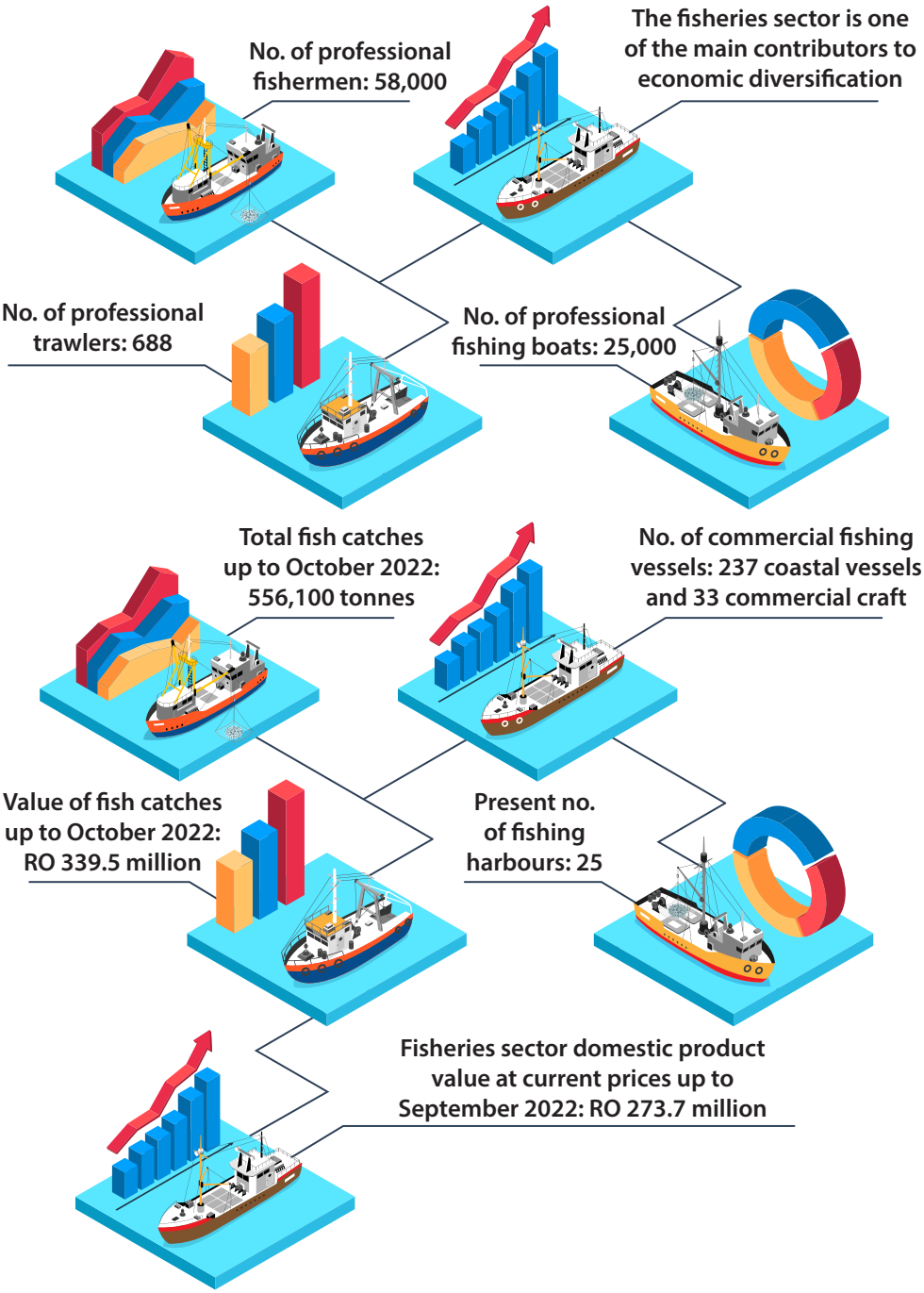
Agriculture, both livestock and crops, and fisheries are mainstays of the national economy and play a major role in achieving and maintaining food security. These sectors also provide many employment opportunities for citizens, in crop planting and harvesting, livestock breeding, artisanal fishing and diverse processing and other activities related to the fisheries sector.

The Sultanate ranked first in the Arab world on the Access to Nutrition Index, and third in the Arab world in the Food Quality and Safety Index of the Arab Food Security Report 2021 issued by the Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development (AOAD).



Principal targets of Oman's food security strategy
1
A focus on basic food commodities
2
Securing an adequate and steady supply of these and other food commodities
3
Developing national policies and legislation of relevance to the food security sector
4
Establishing an integrated national information system around the subject of food security
5
Activating partnerships between the public and private sectors in a manner to enhance food security during periods of emergency or cyclical global supply and demand fluctuations
6
Raising the storage and management efficiencies of basic food stocks

Fishery Statistics



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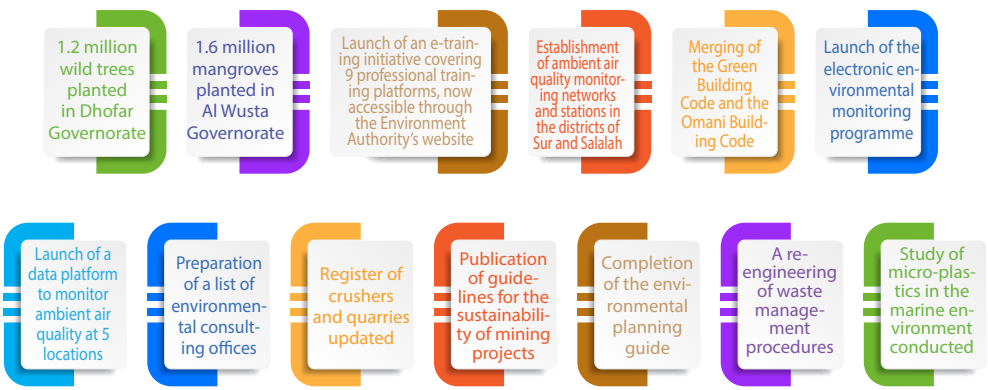
Amenities .. Sustainable development and a closely protected environment

The Sultanate of Oman has been unflagging in its commitment to sustainability as it advanced its economic and social development objectives. External validation for this pioneering path came most recently in the form of lead position in the Gulf region and fourth in the Arab world in the 2022 Sustainable Development Report published by the United Nations. Indeed the Sultanate's high levels of performance have long been recognised internationally, reflecting the country's genuine and deeply embedded culture of sustainability in all fields.

A summary of environmental achievements in 2022



Housing and urban planning

Current perspectives on housing and urban planning are undergoing a transformative directional shift. In visions of the future, placemaking has taken a central role.

The Al Naseem neighbourhood in Wilayat Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate is the first neighbourhood of its kind within the National Residential Neighbourhoods Initiative, which aims to make available alternative housing schemes containing units of varying sizes for citizens eligible for residential plots of land. Under such schemes, priority will be given to residents of the district or of areas close to the project, with a seniority scale applying in the submission of land applications. Applications for residential land will be accepted in the governorates of Muscat and Al Batinah South.

Objectives of the Residential Neighbourhoods Initiative

- To embrace various alternative solutions to housing needs for segments of society as conforms with extant legislation in this regard
- To achieve the urban strategy and goals enshrined in Oman's vision 2040 and which are aimed at creating sustainable cities and villages that meet the valid aspirations of residents
- To encourage stronger engagement by the private sector in building these integrated and sustainable urban communities
- To provide basic services and an innovative model as alternatives within the existing land allocation policy in order to better keep pace with the requirements of society

Real estate activity January-September 2022

Titles issued to citizens of GCC states	Ownership titles issued	Sale contracts traded value	Legal fees – all legal transactions	Real estate traded value
January-September 2021	January-September 2021	January-September 2021	January-September 2021	January-September 2021
594 Titles	188,916 Titles	874 RO. million	67.1 RO. million	1.861 RO. million
628 Titles	175,539 Titles	862 RO. million	46.7 RO. million	1.831 RO. million
January-September 2022	January-September 2022	January-September 2022	January-September 2022	January-September 2022

Road transport

Land transport in all its forms, crucial to the efficient movement of goods and human traffic throughout the country, is a carefully tended strand of the overall transport sector. It constitutes the backbone of the commercial supply mechanism, as well as of tourist mobility. As at December 2021, the Ministry of Transport was overseeing the maintenance of a network of 16,022 kms of paved road, as well as 17,069 kms of dirt road across the Sultanate.

A modern road network eases the path to economic and social progress.

Outstanding developments in land transport in 2021

7 January 2021 — Inauguration of section of the Adam-Haima-Thumrait dual carriageway project

10 January 2021 — Finalisation of the main framework of the Logistics Efficiency National Indicators Initiative (Tamayuz)

14 January 2021 — Official opening of the Yanqul internal dual carriageway

20 January 2021 — Opening of the 20 km Suwaiq-Al Hawqain road

Assignment of damage repair works to the Al Batinah Highway in the wake of tropical storm Shaheen — **20 October 2021**

Second package of repair works assigned for roads in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah damaged by tropical storm Shaheen — **25 October 2021**

- **4 December 2021** — Mowasalat's smart transportation system launched
- **7 December 2021** — Works assigned for construction of the Halban Rest House on the Al Batinah Expressway
- **8 December 2021** — Official opening of the Empty Quarter (Rub' al Khali) Highway, which connects the Sultanate of Oman with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- **21 December 2021** — Works awarded for construction of the Liwa Rest House and Saham Rest House on the Al Batinah Expressway
- **30 December 2021** — Works awarded for construction of Al Suwaiq Rest House on the Al Batinah Expressway

Road projects in planning or under construction in Muscat Governorate (2022-2023)

Project	Main components	Date of Initiation	Date of Completion
Elevated dual carriageway	- Dualisation of the road from the Muaskar Al Murtafa Roundabout to the Armed Forces Hospital Roundabout, and on to the Sultan Qaboos University Intersection - Streamlining of the connection between Al Mawaleh Intersection and Muscat Expressway across the Armed Forces Hospital Roundabout - Dualisation of Sultan Qaboos University Road between the University Intersection and the Sultan Qaboos Integrated Centre for Cancer Treatment and Research Intersection	Ongoing	Ongoing for 18 months
Dualisation of University Road	- Bi-directional double lanes, with parallel side passages for pedestrians in both directions - Extension of road from the Sixth Al Khoudh Roundabout to the Traffic Lights Intersection opposite Gate 2 of Sultan Qaboos University - Installation of side barriers along the road and construction of multiple rainwater drainage channels away from the project	Ongoing	Last quarter 2023
Widening of Al Mouj and 18 November Roads	- Widening of both roads to bi-directional triple lanes - Replacement of Al Mouj, Al Bahja and Al Ishraq Roundabouts in North Al Hail to high-capacity four-way intersections with traffic lights installed - Paving of service roads for existing commercial buildings in the area	Projected for first quarter 2023	18 months from initiation date

Project	Main components	Date of Initiation	Date of Completion
Expansion of Mosque Roundabout in the Mawaleh South area	- Transformation of the existing roundabout into a traffic-lighted intersection - Addition of new traffic lanes in all directions from the intersection - Installation of a network of surface water drainage channels, crossings and protective infrastructure	Projected last quarter 2022	One year from initiation date
Dualisation of Al Ansab-Al Jifnain carriageway	- Improvement of traffic flow through creation of bi-directional triple lanes - Conversion of existing roundabouts into bridges and tunnels - Installation of required protections and surface water drainage channels and systems	First quarter 2023	36 months from initiation date
Dualisation of Halban Road (Phase One)	- Construction of a 1,040 metre dualised section extending from the Muscat Expressway Intersection - Construction of a high-capacity traffic lighted intersection at the access point to Al Mabela 8th - Construction of 25 box culverts across the valley, along with side channels for rainwater drainage	2023	-
Dualisation of the Al Joud Road in Al Amerat (Preliminary Package)	- Addition of a new access point to the Al Joud Road to reduce congestion at the current access point - Construction of a 630 metre dualised section of the Road - Addition of 1,010 metre acceleration and deceleration lanes to the existing dual carriageway (Al Amerat Road)	2023	Nine months from initiation date

Shipping

Maritime transport is undergoing rapid expansion, occupying an increasingly important role in the growth of commercial and industrial activity across the economy. The year 2021 saw the accession of the Sultanate to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006) and the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments (BWM Convention) of 2004.

The Sultanate of Oman has several major seaports that service various general and specific economic sectors. Most notable of these are Sultan Qaboos Port, Sohar Port, Salalah Port and Duqm Port. In addition many lesser seaports actively serve the commercial and fishing sectors.

Commodity imports through sea ports

Item	January-July 2021	January-July 2022
Value of imports (million RO)	4,203	6,076
Volume of imports (thousand tonnes)	17,181	21,885

In-port operational statistics 2020 and 2021

Item	2020	2021
(shipped tonnes)		
Movement of general cargo and liquid and bulk materials	70,922,472	77,102,292
Container throughput (TEUs)	5,144,273	5,228,973
Vessel traffic (VTS)	9275	9391

Air transport

The Sultanate's airports reawakened to growing traffic in 2022, as global aviation recovered from the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Between January and August 2022, some 6.1 million passengers transited the Sultanate's airports, compared with 2.4 million passengers over the same period in 2021, representing a 154% increase.

Oman has four airports: Muscat International Airport in Muscat Governorate, Salalah Airport in Dhofar, Sohar Airport in Al Batinah North, and Duqm Airport in Al Wusta.

Airport traffic January to August 2022

Item	Muscat Airport	Salalah Airport	Sohar Airport	Duqm Airport
Total flights	41,594	5,931	652	440
International flights	36,072	2,467	526	-
Domestic flights	5,522	3,464	126	440
Total passengers	5,201,989	783,648	61,876	42,564
On international flights	4,539,148	278,083	50,370	-
On domestic flights	662,841	505,565	11,506	42,564

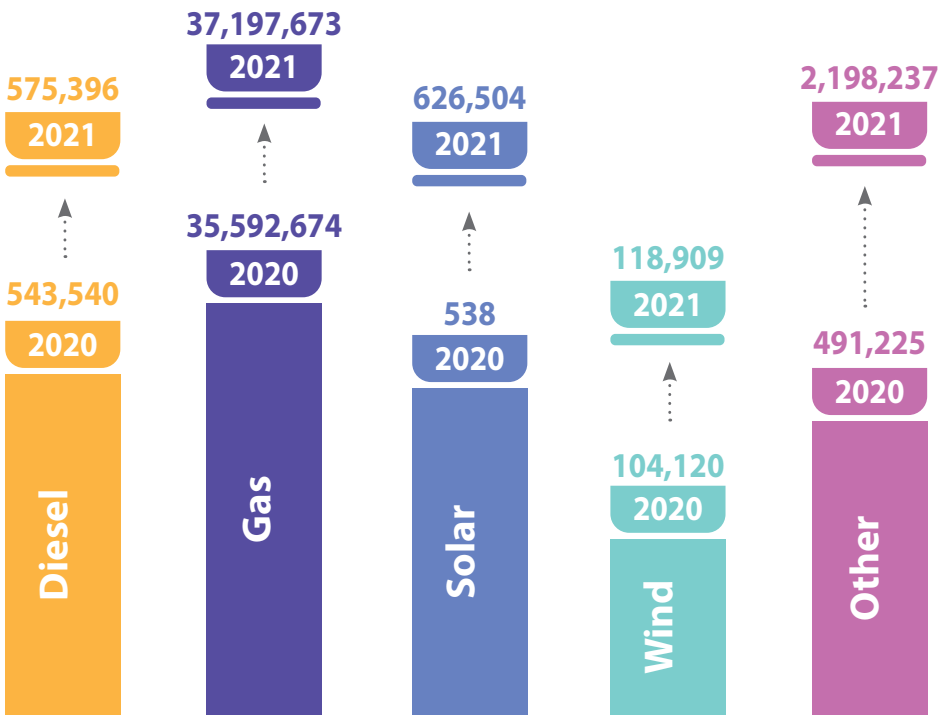
Electricity and renewable energy sector

Total electrical power production in 2021 averaged 42.2 terawatts per hour, with net production of 40.7 terawatts per hour, an increase of 11% over the output for 2020. Net electrical power generated from natural gas was 37.2 terawatts per hour, representing 91% of the total electricity generation source.

Net production of electric power using solar sources increased significantly as a result of the operation of the new solar power station (Shams Al Zahira) in July 2021. Net electricity generated from this station in 2021 was some 626,000 megawatts per hour, as compared with 538 megawatts per hour in 2020.

Electricity production from wind energy grew 14% in 2021, from 104,000 MWh to about 119,000 MWh.

Net electrical power production from various sources (MWh)



Water Resources

Water resources, since they affect every aspect of life, are one of a nation's most vital resources, and are the subject of focused attention in Oman. The Sultanate's annual renewable water resource volume is estimated at some 1.3 billion cubic metres.

Intensive planning in recent years has resulted in a master plan for the management and development of water resources and for confronting the consequences of a water deficit. The plan has involved the enactment of legislation, the construction of dams, and implementation of programmes to evaluate and monitor water resources. A growing arm of the national water strategy seeks to derive benefit from other available alternatives, such as from the desalination of seawater, the treatment of wastewater, artificial cloud seeding, dissemination of modern irrigation techniques, and the reduced cultivation of plants that require large volumes of water.

Dams are central to the infrastructure needed to conserve large volumes of water for recharging the water table or for supplying remote villages with their water needs. Existing dams have more than proven their usefulness in reducing the quantities of water that formerly drained into the sea. In doing so, they have greatly mitigated the onset of water deficits, while providing protection to the infrastructure from recurrent flood risks.

Major dam projects completed in 2021 and 2022

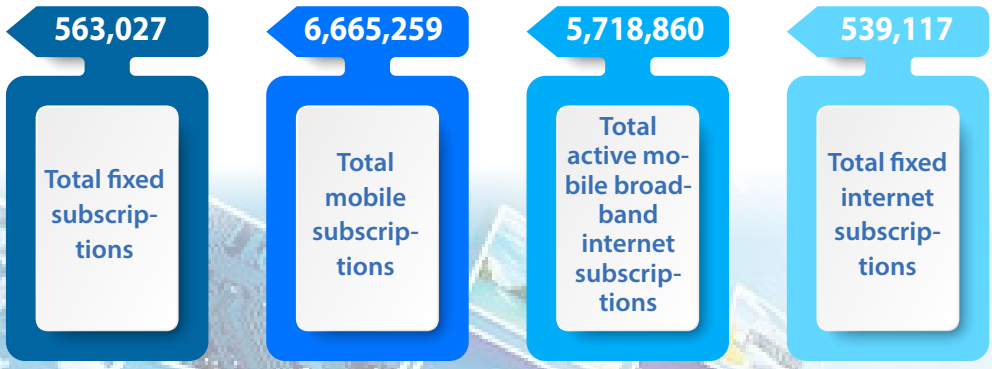
Objectives	Capacity	Cost	Dam
To provide protection from flood waters and improve groundwater levels	11.4 million m^3	RO45.6 million	Al Jafnain Dam in Wilayat Seeb in Muscat Governorate
To intercept and store floodwaters flowing into the Al Amerat Plain so as to protect the residential communities and facilities below, as well as to replenish groundwater	15.7 million m^3	RO34.6 million	Al Jufaina Dam in Wilayat Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate
To provide protection from flood risk for Salalah Port and Free Zone, and to improve regional groundwater levels	83.3 million m^3	RO23.9 million	Adonib Dam in Wilayat Salalah in Dhofar Governorate
To provide protection for Salalah Port and Free Zone from floodwaters and to replenish groundwater	16.13 million m^3	RO22.9	Anaar Dam and lateral protection of Salalah Port
To improve the regional water reserve and help restore the water table in order to replenish wells and aflaj waters	926,000 m^3	RO4.1 million	Al Qafifah Dam in Wilayat Ibra in North Sharqiyah Governorate
To improve the regional water reserve and help restore the water table in order to replenish wells and aflaj	702,000 m^3	RO3.1 million	Warid Dam in Wilayat Ibra in North Sharqiyah Governorate
To feed the aquifer, increase available water in wells and aflaj beneath the two dams, develop water resources and improve the overall water situation in the region	415,000 m^3	RO2.1 million	Sudairyn Dam in Wilayat Yanqul and Sorour Dam in Wilayat Dhanq in Al Dhahirah Governorate

Communication and information technology

The National Programme for the Digital Economy was formally launched in 2021. Its stated purpose is to harmonise strategies and policies associated with the communications and information technology sector, to achieve digital governance, to strengthen the growth of the digital society and facilitate the business environment in achieving further advancement and success.

The Government Digital Transformation Programme is one of the most ambitious programmes currently being rolled out in the Sultanate of Oman. It constitutes the infrastructure of the transition to a knowledge-based economy. It facilitates access to Oman's digital society through development of the Sultanate's national strategy for e-government and to the broad range of digital services, which include such areas as capacity-building of human resources, rehabilitation of infrastructure, implementation of the e-government project, the building of trust, and delineation of the necessary frameworks and legislation to regulate the rollout.

Telecom sector statistics to September 2022



Anticipated results of the digital transformation programme:

- Provision of a central government platform for complaints and suggestions
- Accuracy in data, greatly benefiting planning, decision-making and forecasting
- Creation of a technical infrastructure, with integration and interconnection between institutions
- A central screen to monitor the performance of services and revenues
- A reduction in the environmental impact caused by overcrowding and the demand for service deliveries
- Smart services giving rise to an outstanding experience
- A harmonised national portal for electronic services
- A central communication and services centre
- Attainment of safety, transparency and overall satisfaction for the beneficiaries of government services.
- Provision of a platform for measuring individual, institutional and financial performance
- Attainment of common core digital solutions
- Simplified and proactive government procedures
- Facilitation of local and foreign investments and enhancement of the work environment

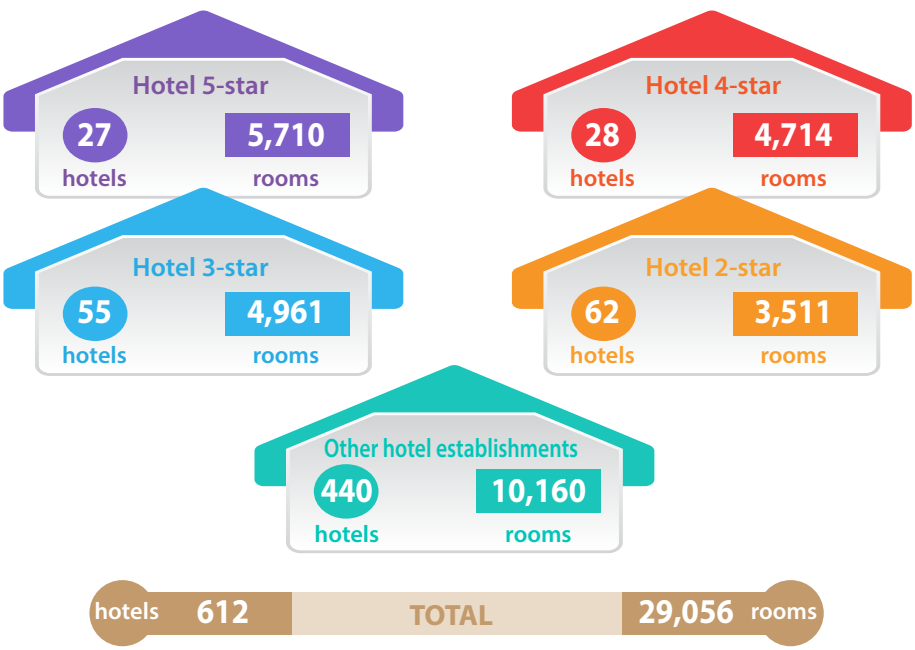
Tourism

The rich and colourful history and culture of the Sultanate is matched only by its abundant and unspoiled natural resources, making it a magnet for the discerning tourist. In the recent past, there has been a concerted effort to promote domestic tourism and attract international tourism. In 2022, land usufruct agreements were signed for the construction of tourism projects as part of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's strategy to attract private investment. On offer is a tourism investment package valued at RO3 billion and aligned with the vision of Oman 2040. Projects anticipated for completion under the usufruct agreements include hotels, rest houses and tourist camps covering the full price category range from budget to luxury.

The Sultanate currently has more than 600 hotel establishments nationwide, having a combined capacity of 29,000 rooms.

The hotel sector performed well in 2021, with guest occupancy in 3-5 star establishments rising to 1.219 million for the year, as compared with 851,000 in 2020. Revenues increased from RO85.3 million to RO101.6 million and overall occupancy stood at 38.3%, as compared with 26.5% in 2020.

Total hotel establishments at end 2021



3-5 star hotel performance (January-September 2022)

January-September 2021

35%	60	849,660
Occupancy rate (%)	Revenus (RO million)	Total occupants

January-September 2022

42.7%	120.1	1,118,340
Occupancy rate (%)	Revenues (RO million)	Total occupants

First: Some Social Indicators

Item	Unit	2020	2021
1- Social Indicators			
- Total Population	No.(000)	4,481	4,527
Omani	No.(000)	2,736	2,804
Expatriate	No.(000)	1,745	1,723
- Crude Birth Rate	per 1000 Population (Omani)	28.2	27.3
- Crude Death Rate	per 1000 Population (Omani)	3.2	3.6
- Infant Mortality Rate	per 1000 Population (Omani)	7.6	8.1
- Under 5 Mortality Rate	per 1000 Population (Omani)	9.3	10.1
- Total Fertility Rate	live births per women 15-49 years (Omani)	3.5	3.4
- Life Expectancy at Birth (Omani)	Year	76.0	74.1
Males	Year	73.9	72.2
Females	Year	78.6	76.5
Total Workers	**No.**	**2,164,000**	**2,158,619**
Omani	No.	752,724	773,786
Expatriate	No.	1,411,276	1,384,833
Government Sector	**No.**	**393,184**	**392,872**
Omani	No.	349,272	351,231
Expatriate	No.	43,912	41,641
Privet Sector	**No.**	**1,468,057**	**1,482,180**
Omani	No.	352,735	374,606
Expatriate	No.	1,115,322	1,107,574
Family Sector (Expatriate)	No.	252,042	235,618

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information – figures at December 2022

Second: Some Economic Indicators

Item	Unit	2020	2021
2 - Economic Indicators			
- Gross Domestic Product at Current Prices	Mn. R.O.	29,187.2	33,909.8
- Gross National Income (GNI)	Mn. R.O.	27,175.5	31,605.7
- GNI per Capita	R.O.	6,064.6	7,053.3
Total Revnues	Mn. R.O.	8,503.2	11,194.8
Total Expenditure	Mn. R.O.	12,925.7	12,417.9
- Oil & Gas Revenue as a % of Total Government Revenue	%	68.2	73.6
- Average Daily Production of Oil	(000) BBL.	951	971
- Total Merchandise Exports	Mn. R.O.	12,874.4	17,145.2
- Total Recorded Merchandise Imports	Mn. R.O.	11,103.3	12,050.0
- Tourism share in GDP	%	2.6	2.4
3 - Infrastructure Indicators			
- Hospitals52	No.	83	88
- Hospital Beds296	No.	6,966	7,096
- Health Centers (With Beds) - (Governments)	No.	54	52
- Health Centers (Without Beds) - (Governments)	No.	136	139
- Extended Health Centers	No.	304	296
- Schools	No.	1,893	2,133
- Students	No.	826,165	898,073
- Teachers	No.	68,486	72,845
- Classes	No.	31,581	35,639
- Asphalted Roads	Km	40,374	40,445
- Fixed Telephone Lines	No.	594,550	572,166
- Mobil Phone Postpaide	No.	1,020,355	1,316,252
- Prepaid mobile	No.	5.256,180	4,799,285
Total Fixed Internet Subscribes	No.	510,991	526,557

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information – figures at December 2022

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