

Sultanate Marks 50th National Day—

Celebrating Renewed Renaissance, Setting Further Milestones

Muscat, Nov 5 (ONA) – On the 18th of November, the Sultanate marks its 50th National Day anniversary. With firm resolve, Omani citizens continue to make more achievements under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, who vowed to upgrade the march of nation building and enhance the pace of progress, striking a high note in Omani people’s enthusiasm for an ambitious renaissance that covers all spheres of life.

Yet, this year’s celebration is impinged by sentiments of sour sorrow for the loss of Father of Omani renaissance, the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Bin Taimour, who sculpted this Arabian edifice from scratch, his vigilant eye not missing a flaw in any side of the monument.

Smooth Transition of Power:

HM Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik Assumes Leadership

Despite the immense calamity that befell Oman, the Arab world and the Islamic nation upon the death of the late Sultan, the 11th of January 2020 was a virtually unforgettable day in the Omani

history. On this day, Omanis depicted a unique national saga of loyalty and devotion when the Sultanate surprised the whole world with a smooth transition of power. In gratitude and tribute to the late Sultan, the Royal Family endorsed, with unwavering certitude, the successor chosen by the late monarch to take the helm, given his proven wisdom and farsightedness.

To answer this wish, the Defence Council opened the letter of the late Sultan who “recommended installing Haitham Bin Tarik as the Sultan of Oman due to (what the late Sultan perceived as) traits that qualify him to shoulder the responsibility.”

Omanis bade farewell to “the dearest and finest of men” (to quote HM Sultan Haitham), pleaded mercy on his soul and recalled his everlasting good deeds and the legacy of nation building that he left behind in 49 years during which Omani citizen were the means and mainstay of development.

Achievements of His Majesty the Sultan:

Within a short span of ten months, His Majesty Sultan Haitham was able to make many achievements. With insight and strong will, he restructured the State’s Administrative Apparatus to keep pace with Oman Vision 2040 whose salient features were drawn out by all segments of society in a manner that responds to His Majesty the Sultan’s aspirations. Under his patronage, the participants determined the future goals and economic, social and cultural approaches for a more verdant phase of development.

Regulating Administrative Action:

Royal Decree No. 75/2020 on the State's Administrative Apparatus constituted a turning point in practicing and regulating administrative action in the Sultanate. Its pursuits will shake up the structure by introducing new mechanisms that contribute to streamlining of procedures, maximizing benefits from services and finalizing them in the shortest possible time in a manner that conforms to Oman Vision 2040.

A strategic approach of Oman Vision 2040 is to accord priority to the development of sustainable governorates and cities by espousing decentralization as a style of governance mentioned in Article (2) of the above-mentioned decree, which states that “the State's Administrative Apparatus consists of central units like ministries and councils and non-central units like authorities and public establishments.”

Royal Decree No. 101/2020 on regulating governorates and municipal affairs will contribute to the establishment of sustainable development, utilization of resources in the most ideal manner, generating benefits from tourism resources and heritage landmarks of every governorate and managing municipal utilities. The Governorates Affairs Council will facilitate coordination among governorates as they practise their respective specialisations and it will follow up the implementation of developmental projects. It will also assess their performance, evaluate their budgets and monitor investment of their resources.

Leader Meets People:

His Majesty Sultan Haitham met a number of tribal chiefs (shaikhs) in Dhofar Governorate in the Wilayat of Salalah last September. An aura of dialogue prevailed in the meeting in a style reminiscent of the late Sultan's meet-the-people tradition. His Majesty Sultan Haitham expressed his keenness to meet citizens, study their needs and listen to their proposals for the development of their respective wilayats and their views on how to enhance the role of government departments and their services within the country's comprehensive development plans.

Apart from the role undertaken by Oman Council, through its bicameral chambers (State Council and Majlis A'Shura), coupled with the role of municipal councils in promoting development, such face-to-face meetings represent a practical application of Omani Shura (consultation) method—which is a value derived from the habits and traditions of Omani society.

Royal directives to tackle coronavirus pandemic:

His Majesty the Sultan's attention to the people crystalized in the way he tackled coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic since its outbreak in late 2019 in most countries of the world. His Majesty gave orders to form a Supreme Committee to find scopes to deal with the virus: monitor its spread, follow up regional and international efforts to limit its impacts and to

devise solutions in accordance with assessment of general health results.

The Supreme Committee, headed by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior, has been on ongoing session and it has embarked on implementing the Royal directives of His Majesty the Sultan, who presided over one of its meeting last March. In the meeting, His Majesty pledged the government's full support to the Committee. He said that the government "in its mandate to protect the health of citizens and residents, will spare no effort in combating the pandemic and curbing its spread."

- **“Waqf (Endowment) Fund” to support health services and “Anti-Covid-19 Support Fund” to enhance the Ministry’s efforts:**

Meanwhile, an Endowment Fund and an “Anti-Covid-19 Support Fund” were established as prime movers of public support to the Ministry of Health in the battle against coronavirus. His Majesty the Sultan himself donated RO10 million as a personal contribution to the funds. The Royal gesture reaffirms full collaboration between the leader, the government and members of the public, both citizens and residents, to help eliminate the threat of the virus.

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic took many

decisions and espoused precautionary measures to curb the spread of the virus. It imposed partial lockdown in some governorates and total lockdown in other governorates. It also set up Command and Control Points, banned nighttime movement, closed mosques, suspended study in schools and other educational establishments, downsized workforce at public and private workplaces, activated online work, suspended some commercial activities and imposed laws and regulations to ensure abidance by preventive procedures and stem the spread of the virus.

- Special committee formed to tackle economic impacts of Covid-19:

In view of the heavy toll on the global economy from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and its repercussions that reflected in the situation in the Sultanate, His Majesty Sultan Haitham gave orders to form an economic committee, an offshoot of the Supreme Covid-19 Control Committee, to deal with the economic impacts of Covid-19 in the domestic front. Accordingly, a number of decisions were taken and resulted in the Government's offering packages and incentives to private sector establishments and firms. The steps included the establishment of an Emergency Loans Programme which offers assistance to segments of entrepreneurs whose businesses were most severely stricken by the pandemic.

Foreign Policy

As soon as he assumed power, in his first nation address, His Majesty Sultan Haitham reaffirmed the permanent stands of the Sultanate's foreign policy, saying that the Sultanate advocates peaceful co-existence among nations, good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. His Majesty the Sultan also stressed that he would follow the footsteps of the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said bin Taimour.

In his speech, His Majesty the Sultan said, "We shall trace the course of the late Sultan, reaffirming the fundamentals of our country's foreign policy based on peaceful co-existence with nations, good neighborliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, respect for countries' sovereignty and international cooperation in various spheres."

This stance was reaffirmed by the Sultanate's Government last September in a speech delivered by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi before the 75th general assembly of the United Nations. Sayyid Badr said, "His Majesty the Sultan has reaffirmed beyond any doubt that the Sultanate will continue the prudent policy set by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Bin Taimour, Founder of Oman's Modern Renaissance and architect of its foreign policy and its international relations over the past 50 years."

In addition, the principles of Omani foreign policy as established in its blessed renaissance espouse dialogue as a means for solving disputes. They also support values of

tolerance, justice equality and the settlement of conflicts in accordance with the UN charter and rules of the International Law. This enhanced the Sultanate's regional and international status and made it a lighthouse of peace and security.

It is worth noting that Omani foreign policy principles are derived from basics of Oman's centuries-old civilisation and original values of Omani society that indicate a sincere desire to promote humanity and moderation. As a result, the Sultanate is widely accepted as mediator in the international arena.

Economy...Oman Vision 2040:

The much-awaited Oman Economic Vision, scheduled to be implemented upon the start of the 10th Five Year Plan in January 2021, meets with serious challenges, including the slump in international oil prices and the global spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

These challenges prompted the government to undertake stringent measures, including a Medium-Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024) which features many initiatives and programs aimed at establishing solid foundations for financial sustainability, reducing general debt, upgrading the efficiency of government spending, enhancing the State's financial reserves, improving revenues from investment of government (to help the country deal with any challenges) and, thus, setting economic growth upright.

The government of the Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Finance, also cut down budgets of government units by 5%, downsizing operational budgets and financial plans of government firms by at least 10% and slashing remunerations of boards of public authorities and establishment and affiliate committees by 50% applying a 5% Value Added Tax by next April (2021). All these measures are expected to supply the budget with a sum of RO 400 million.

The aggregate revenues of the 2020 Budget stood at RO 10.7 billion calculated at a rate of \$58 per barrel, while general expenditure was estimated at RO 13.2 billion, which entails estimated deficit of about RO 2.5 billion or 8% of the Gross Domestic Product.

In his speech last February, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik outlined the features of the next stage of development. He pointed out that the tasks of government firms will be fully revised with a view to developing them and augmenting their contribution to the economic system. His Majesty said, “We will study government decision-making with the aim of realizing the supreme national interests of the country. We will accord this aspect our full attention and our support.” Accordingly, Oman Investment Authority restructured the boards of directors of 15 government firms coming under its supervision. Also, ICT sector firms were restructured and a project for the foundation of an all-round agricultural products marketing company was announced. The vegetable and fruit marketing company will report to Oman Food Investment Company.

Due to the vital role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in economic growth, the government of the Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Labour, worked to establish a suitable environment for SMEs. The steps included the exemption of SMEs from Omanisation percentages and the allocation of some professions to expatriate manpower. Also, the portal Invest-Ease has introduced many electronic services to the business community. In this respect, His Majesty the Sultan said, “We understand the significance of the Small and Medium Enterprise Sector and the Entrepreneurship Sector, notably projects based on innovation, artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. Attention will be accorded to training and empowering youth to help them benefit from opportunities offered by these vital sectors so that they could establish the core component of a smart national economy. Our government will follow up the progress made in these domains step by step.”

The schema of laws and incentives related to investment helped furnish an attractive climate for investments from home and abroad. These include the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

The government capitalizes on investment in Omani ports, particularly the Port of Sohar and the Port of Salalah, in addition to special economic zones (like the Special Economic Zone in Duqm and the Port of Duqm). The tourism sector also forms one of the basic pillars of economic diversification. The government has devised clear-cut strategies to maximize benefits from investment in the tourism sector.

Electronic Census:

His Majesty Sultan Haitham attaches great importance to Electronic Census of Population, Residences and Establishments due to be held in December 2020. His Majesty the Sultan urged all to cooperate and interact positively with the census procedures so that it could achieve its desired objectives. The outcome of the e-census will cover all aspects of developmental planning.

Job Security System Law

To provide means of decent living for Omani citizens amid adverse global economic conditions, a Job Security System Law has been promulgated by Royal decree. His Majesty the Sultan donated RO 10 million as a personal contribution towards the foundation of the fund. He also issued directives to speed up the establishment of a comprehensive national Social Security Scheme that provides protection to low-income groups and Social Security Fund beneficiary families against expected impacts of the medium-term Fiscal Balance Plan.

Education and Research Sector:

His Majesty Sultan Haitham accorded top priority to the sector of education. He gave directives to provide a supportive environment that enhances learning, research and innovation. The aim is to enable Omani citizens to contribute to the forthcoming stage of development.

The National Strategy for Research and Development has been modernized to keep pace with Oman Vision 2040, notably the development of a cognitive community that is capable of competing and converting knowledge into economic revenue. The setting up of University of Technology and Applied Sciences last August is testimony to this approach of encouraging research and innovation and benefit from advances of artificial intelligence and the 4th industrial revolution (4IR). For the same purpose the name of Ministry of Higher Education has been changed to Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The Sultanate's modern renaissance is influenced by the memorable quote of the late Sultan who said, "We will educate our sons and daughters even under the shade of a tree" (way back in the 1970s). since then, the march of education has gone a long way and, today, educational establishments are set up on each mountain and plain in Oman.

The recent Royal directives to set up six priority schools in the forthcoming stage to the tune of RO 8.85 million reflect the attention accorded by His Majesty the Sultan to the needs of citizens. It is a gesture that denotes his Royal support to education, being the basic requirement for nation building.

Environment:

Since the outset of its blessed renaissance, the Sultanate has been implementing a policy of environment protection and pollution prevention. This policy comes within the framework of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development, conservation of wildlife and preservation of renewable resources.

The government supported this approach by encouraging environment research, exchanging expertise, gathering information, spreading public awareness and instilling basic values and principles that support the goals of sustainable development.

The Environment Authority undertakes the mission of issuing laws deemed necessary for the protection of natural reserves, marine ecosystems and biological diversity. It also introduces the principle of environmental management as a means of raising the capacity of development projects. This is in addition to environment inspection tasks that seek to monitor the situation, assess any negative impacts to the environment and undertake necessary action.

The Environment Authority also seeks to reaffirm the principle of setting balance between development requirements and maintaining environment safety.

The government takes keen interest in analyzing impacts of projects on the environment. This applies to all sorts of industrial, service and infrastructure projects. Regular programmes for monitoring, detection and inspection have been conducted right after the operation of projects, so that field feedback on the environmental situation around the site could be received and negative impacts addressed immediately.

The Environment Authority executes laws, regulations, decision and national strategy programmes and drafts environment protection plans in keeping with the Sultanate's commitment to international environment agreements within the context of basic goals for sustainable development. National strategies in this field are updated regularly for the management of chemicals and pollutants. The authority issues licenses and environmental clearances. It sets up national networks for the analysis of air quality, among other tasks.

The Environment Authority follows up laws and national plans for the management of coastal areas and control of desertification. It drafts proposals for the establishment of nature reserves, including temporary protected sites and important sites in cooperation with global organisations.

Freedom of expression:

The renewed renaissance led by His Majesty the Sultan accords importance to the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Basic Law of the State's Article (29).

The article provides that the law secures to the individuals of society the freedom of expression either through speaking, writing or other means within the boundaries of the law. This has been reaffirmed by His Majesty the Sultan, who said that the State is founded on grounds of freedom of speech, justice and equality of opportunities where people's dignity, rights and liberties are preserved.

Omani Women:

One of the bright aspects of renewed Omani renaissance under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik is the Royal attention accorded to Omani women. The vital role of women in the nation building march has been highly recognized. His Majesty the Sultan said, "We all have to ensure that women get their full rights guaranteed by law, including their right to work side by side with men across all sectors to serve their country and society."

Last month, His Majesty the Sultan conferred the Order of Royal Commendation on a number of Omani women. The Order

was presented by Honorable Lady, the Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, at a ceremony at Al Baraka Palace on 17 October 2020.

Youth Sector:

His Majesty the Sultan described youth as “the inexhaustible wealth of nations...its hands that build.” He voiced his sincere desire to listen to youth, explore their interests, address their concerns and achieve their aspirations.” The celebration of Omani Youth Day on 26 October came as reaffirmation of the Sultanate government’s commitment towards this segment of society and its determination to provide them with all means that facilitate their march forward as they contribute to their country’s progress.

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al-Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, gave a speech at the event, saying, “Omani youth have shown that they are highly capable of shouldering their national responsibility. This confidence stems from their full awareness about their cause and how to serve by it espousing means of advancement, coupled with clear vision and firm resolve to participate in the rejuvenating renaissance of Oman. They are open to the culture of co-existence, love and peace.”

His Majesty Sultan Haitham pledged, as he leads the promising reign of the renewed renaissance, that he will elevate Oman, in

the coming stage, to the level of aspirations of its people in all spheres. Citizens participation will be the main pillar of national action, he said, asserting his absolute confidence in the abilities of loyal Omani people to cope with the requirements of the age and the next stage of development, with clear vision, extreme wisdom, steadfastness and self-denial.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham said, in a Royal address that:

“Nation building is a public responsibility binding upon all. No one is exempted. All should contribute within their capacities. Oman has been founded and its civilization consolidated with the sacrifices of its people, who relinquished everything dear for the sake of their country’s dignity and supremacy. They exhibited exemplary fidelity in performing their national duties.”

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