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In The Name of God
The Compassionate, The Merciful

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

(HOLY QUR’AN)
SURAT AL KAHF (XVIII,30)

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID

Introduction

The Sultanate was blessed with another year of even growth and internal stability in 2017, a stability that often stood in sharp contrast to a background of recurring regional tensions. Meanwhile, three years of languishing oil and gas prices have failed to derail the major objectives of the Ninth Five-Year-Plan, thanks to accelerating diversification of the economy and competent management. This is a timely and welcome payoff for the prescience that poured oil revenues at their most abundant into human development and material infrastructure. The citizens of Oman have invested heavily in the half century of development enjoyed by their country and have no wish to see it stall. Every material benefit of the modern Renaissance has ultimately fed into cultural revival and more evolved perspectives of wellbeing.

Since 1970, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has moderated a reconstruction process that has been both staggering in the scale of its ambitions and yet so finely adjusted as to have played out in steady segments without major upheaval. And so, the Sultanate has managed not only to catch up, but to establish an easy familiarity with the developments in science and technology that define our times. Sultan Qaboos never lost sight of the principal objective, which was not to enrich one sector of society at the expense of another, but to deliver the fruits of prosperity to all citizens of the nation on a basis of equal opportunity. This worthy principal continues to be the bedrock of Oman's domestic and foreign policies and it has been fully validated in keeping the path to advancement clear.

Two decades into the 21st century, the Sultanate has regained much of its historically significant status in the world, as a neutral peace-broker ready to play an impartial hand where tensions have become locked into stalemate. It is widely respected for the political altruism that motivates these interventions, at which it has demonstrated a unique expertise. That graciousness that has been responsible for facilitating reconciliations on so many occasions, and among so many disputing parties, is testament to the integrity and peace-loving goals of Oman that override all other concerns.

Our country has seen stellar advances since it was its good fortune to welcome the transformative project outlined by Sultan Qaboos in 1970. This book can do no more than skim the surface of the changes we have seen. His Majesty was blessed with many natural gifts, and we ask God now to bestow on him further abundance, to grant him enduring health and wellbeing and the strength to continue to lead Oman's long journey to greatness.

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"We firmly believe that non-interference in the internal affairs of states, respect for covenants and treaties and a commitment to the principles of international law will lead to a world in which there is greater harmony and concord between the interests of different states. This is something we always call for, and which we believe should be achieved through the propagation of a culture of tolerance and peace, cooperation and mutual understanding between all nations. We also hope that this will lead to the eradication of many of the causes of violence and instability."

Qaboos bin Said

(Council of Oman annual session, 2005)

Qaboos ...
Leadership by Example, the Omani Way

Qaboos: Leadership by Example, the Omani Way

In the lifespan of a nation and people there can emerge a leader whose accomplishments will endure, whose instinctive grasp of events sets them on a course where they become capable of redirecting a nation's future. They tend to have not just a vision of what is possible, but an energy and determination to make it happen. Yet it is the humility to place these energies in the service of a nation's highest interests that makes these gifted leaders exceptional.

At a crucial time in Oman's history, Sultan Qaboos bin Said took on the considerable responsibility of extricating Oman from an extended state of political and economic paralysis and transforming it into a vibrant modern state. The unlikely dream became reality, and in the process, Sultan Qaboos became a leader much loved and admired by the appreciative citizens of Oman, but also a statesman acknowledged far beyond its borders.

In 1970, the immediate aspiration had an inward focus, to nurture a society impoverished by discord and neglect back to health. Only when the tribal and sectarian divisions that had kept the population malnourished and ill-educated were resolved could there be any real hope of advance. Ultimately the idealistic goal of the young Sultan Qaboos was to see his people revisit that golden age of cultural sophistication that was for extended periods of its history Oman's gift to the world.

The modern Renaissance initiated on 23 July 1970 came into being by incremental stages. At the outset, it faced challenging odds, but the obstacles were not of human design. Not only did the citizens of Oman express no resistance to the new direction the country was taking in their own lifetimes, they were quickly awakened to the potential for a very different future for their children.

Sultan Qaboos' vision of progress, to be fully understood in those early days, had to be viewed through a generational lens into a future that would extend well past his own window in history. The first generation would enjoy the fruits of better healthcare, a fuller education, infrastructure to facilitate mobility, all delivered in a climate of hope and renewal.

The second generation would be expected to participate more actively in the development process, to take responsibility for co-creating the Oman they wanted to survive them. Not only did Omanis have an obligation to play a part in manifesting progress, they had an inherent right to do so, as had the nation the right to be able to rely on their contribution.

"We were poor in everything, but we were strong in our originality, our faith, our resolve and our determination to succeed," His Majesty later recalled, "despite all of the difficulties and obstacles we faced." Nor did he fail to acknowledge the public participation he had been so resolved to obtain: "You, the citizens, have played your part in shaping the modern history of Oman over these years, both in its present status and its future potential. You have played your part in laying the foundations of that future to which we all hope and aspire."

The outcome speaks for itself. Achievements monumental in their scale have brought the Sultanate, and the citizens of the Sultanate, to a place that their parents or grandparents could not have anticipated. No aspect of life has been left untouched, no sector of the community left behind. The progress in all areas has been little

One conviction outweighed all others in sustaining the momentum of the modern Omani Renaissance, and that was the conviction that a country's most precious resource was its people and that, given the necessary resources, the Omani citizen could rise to great accomplishments.

short of phenomenal, at material and at human level. Prosperity has established itself in every province, even in those far provinces that just decades ago were inaccessible by road.

As exceptional as the transformation has been, the intelligence and vision that brought it about is no less formidable. There was no guarantee when Sultan Qaboos, as a young sovereign without a contemporary role model to validate his undertaking, took on the task of hauling his country out of the Middle Ages. It took a great deal of courage, and motivation when progress was slow, and determination when roadblocks seemed insurmountable, and genuine love for his people when the early struggle to unite the country seemed almost hopeless. His leadership skills, founded in character and idealism, were honed by the often lonely process of making hard decisions. Sometimes only faith can show the way, accompanied by realistic aspirations.

The openness and clarity of purpose that mark the Sultanate's way of doing business have earned for it and for its pioneering leader a deserved reputation, at home and abroad, for credible dealing.

Today, Oman fits comfortably into the global community of the 21st century and it is easy to forget how far behind it was in 1970, when infant mortality was high and dreams of advancement were low. Today it is a country with a healthcare record that is cited for excellence, a high tech, educated and industrious society proud of its past and optimistic for the future. Forty seven years on, Sultan Qaboos has seen his leadership skills tested at home and abroad and he has met all challenges and circumstances with the same faith and optimism that spurred him almost half a century ago. There are still goals to be achieved, all the more so now that standards have shifted upwards and the potential for ever greater achievements may be seen with less scepticism.

No sovereign leader will survive for long in a democratic society without an intimate knowledge of his country's history. Sultan Qaboos' approach to governance stands out for its constant emphasis on Oman's long and illustrious history. He has encouraged Omanis at every opportunity to immerse themselves in their heritage, to know it in order to know themselves and where they come from, to mine it for connection and grounding in their Omani identity.

In its newfound confidence, the Sultanate of 2017 nevertheless belongs to the wider world beyond its borders, where it sits at the centre of a series of concentric circles of interconnectivity, with the Arab family of states, with the Gulf family of states, with the broader region incorporating fellow Islamic countries, and with the even broader international community of nations.

Good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and cooperation in good faith to achieve common and mutual interests, in accordance with the principles of international law and convention, are the core values of the Sultanate's external interactions. These principles have long roots in Oman, and most particularly they are core principles of Sultan Qaboos' philosophy of human relations. They represent the very antithesis of aggression and they mark out Sultan Qaboos as a leader who values peace above personal victory or conquest.

The openness and clarity of purpose that mark the Sultanate's way of doing business have earned for it and for its pioneering leader a deserved reputation for credible dealing. Even where disagreement exists, Oman can be trusted to give an assessment that has been carefully considered and that is not tainted by vested interest. There may be national self-interest at stake, but it will not be disguised as disinterested wisdom.

For many hundreds of years, Omanis were cited in the literature of history and travel for their hospitality to visiting strangers, for their honesty as traders overseas, for their sanguine character and tolerance of difference. These are the civilised values that His Majesty celebrates in the conduct of the Royal Court and of the Sultanate's formal representatives. They have been used to good effect in situations of tension, where Muscat is perceived as, and is often called on to act as, an honest broker. The Qaboos approach to conflict resolution is mediated dialogue. It eschews the politics of the special agenda and hidden interest. It stands four square against all forms violence, aggression, terrorism and extremism as a solution to anything, irrespective of motive or cause.

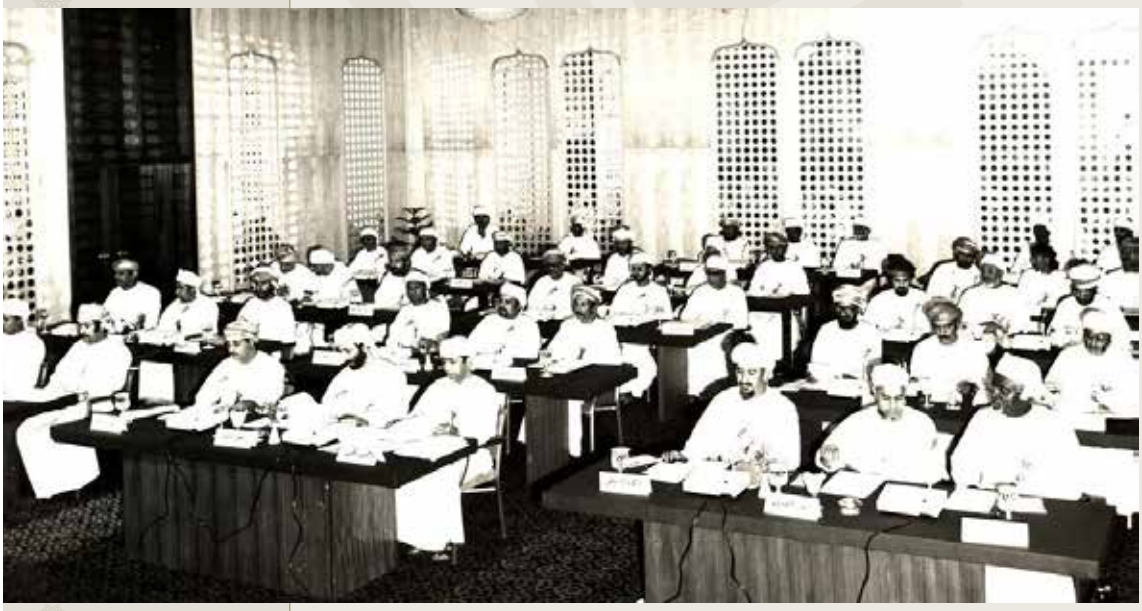
Early steps at home

In drawing up a strategy to bring Oman into the 21st century without resistance and with the resources at his disposal, Sultan Qaboos established that a sequential process of reunification, followed by reconstruction and backed by security, were prerequisite components. Once tribal harmony was achieved, it was clear that the rebuilding of Oman would have to revolve around citizens who first needed and deserved access to the building blocks of physical and mental wellbeing: quality healthcare, education, training. Moreover, these benefits had to be available to all on a basis of equality and law. The plan, in His Majesty's words, was «to rebuild our country and provide each and every one of its citizens with a decent and dignified life. This objective can only be achieved if you will yourselves take on responsibility for executing this task. We will work hard to establish a system of justice and democracy in our country, built from Arab and Omani realities and fully respecting the traditions and customs of our society.» The educational renaissance was launched quickly, given the immediate need for qualified cadres to take on the challenges of development. His Majesty lifted the limitations that had existed on access to education and it became available to all Omanis, irrespective of gender, location or means.

The long negotiations to heal internal divisions and ward off external threats had culminated finally in the victory of the Sultan's armed forces, announced formally on 5 December 1975 and enabling the first Five-Year Development Plan (1980-1976) to commence. It formalised a process that had begun at the outset of the Renaissance in the guise of individual projects and programmes. The fruits of those early endeavours are everywhere evident in the Sultanate today, bearing witness to a bright, revolutionary chapter in Oman's modern history in which human excellence can flourish against even a backdrop of regional tragedy and conflict.

His Majesty's warm personality and close engagement with the welfare of the Omani people have earned him loyalty and trust, both crucial to the success of development goals.

Sultan Qaboos has encouraged Omanis at every opportunity to immerse themselves in their heritage, to know it in order to know themselves and where they come from, to mine it for connection and grounding in their Omani identity.



The Sultanate adopted an incremental approach to democracy, building participation gradually into the Shura process that distinguishes the Sultanate's political system today. Pictured: First Session of the State Consultation Council.

Sultan Qaboos moved swiftly to establish the principle of citizen participation with government and private sector in the formulation of national development policy. The actual process was a layered one, built gradually chapter by chapter, and customised to the traditions and temperament of the Omani people. It declined to model itself on the particular experiences of other countries and it did not attempt to accelerate through vital stages.

In 1981, the State Advisory Council was created, and in 1991 the Consultation Council (Majlis al-Shura) replaced it when the principle of free and direct election of members by the citizen electorate was adopted for the selection of state representatives. This included the right of Omani women to stand for election to the Council and, in this respect, Omani women enjoyed rights ahead of their peers in the GCC states.

In 1996, His Majesty promulgated the Basic Law of the State, the constitutional document which would regulate the work of all State institutions - and the state of institutions was born. The creation of the Council of State under the terms of the Basic Law brought a new level of competence to the broadening leadership of the State. Of the current membership, Omani women make up some 15%.

The Council of Oman is the bicameral parliament that pairs the State and Shura Councils (Majlis al Dawla and Majlis al Shura) when they are summoned to meet jointly by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. The Sultan addresses the Council of Oman annually, initiating the sessions of both the State and Shura Councils. He has been proactive in seeking a high degree of coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman (both houses) both formally and when members of the three Councils are called upon to meet to debate issues of concern to the executive and parliamentary wings of government. By 2011, aware of a need to review some of the working mechanisms

between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman, and bring clarity to the legislative and supervisory powers enjoyed by the latter, His Majesty amended the Basic Law of the State, supplementing the Consultation Council's powers. "From the outset," His Majesty explained, "we wanted Oman to have its own unique experience in the exercise of democracy, in the manner of citizen participation in national decision-making. This experience is being built on the solid foundation of Oman's own reality and the realities of the times we live in." The process has not been without its difficulties, but the importance and value of the Omani experiment are daily confirmed.

With human resources fully mobilised, technology, communications, all material means available for a price, or exchangeable for the rich mineral resources Oman had to offer, were recruited to move the engine of development forward.

"Our goal," said His Majesty, "is to restore the former glory of our country. Our goal is to see Oman regain its civilised ranking among nations. Our projects are rooted in our reality and are in harmony with this civilised objective. We have had to build our project from the ground up, and from our unique perspective. Our ground base is the citizens of Oman and it is as citizens of Oman that we will celebrate our accomplishment."

To achieve national priorities and goals without risking major interruptions of geopolitical origin, His Majesty has returned again and again to the imperative of economic diversification, of building enterprise, encouraging youthful innovation, and these have been the constant themes of successive five-year plans. Today, with tourism in a healthy upward trajectory, and with a thriving SME culture, the Ninth Five-Year Plan 2016-2020 is more focused than ever on the shifting trend away from fossil fuels. Under the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh), His Majesty has declared: "The challenges of the future are many and great. The tools we need to overcome these challenges are enlightened thinking, a culture of information and advanced technical skills."

The Basic Law of the State (specifically its Chapter 3) formally protects the rights and freedoms of all Omanis on a basis of citizenship and equality, equipping them to interact locally, regionally and globally as fully confident citizens of the world, motivated to uphold the stability of their environment. Such competence demands intellectual freedom, and as far back as 2000 and with habitual foresight, His Majesty, noted the ominous emergence of negative trends, declaring: "The suppression of intellect and of meritorious endeavour is the greatest of sins. We will allow no subversion of free thought from any quarter whatsoever … The true faith we espouse was born of reason and intellect. It never at any time sought to suppress free thought. Our religion is tolerant. It is moral. It is open. And the words of the Holy Qur'an press upon us to use our intellect, and to be mindful."

The advent of globalisation, with its multiform influences on society, prompted Sultan Qaboos to see ahead of time "the need to be prepared for the challenges of a global economy by developing national capabilities and competitive strategies. Technology, research and development will be the components that will generate the economic profile we need to embrace,

with the private sector in the driving seat of the process. … Nations are built only by the sustained efforts of their people … The real wealth of any nation is its human resources; only they are capable of advancing the process of development… 'Negative patriotism' will not get us anywhere. A sincere love of country must take the form of the consistent input that is the obligation of every citizen."

There could be no place for selective recruitment in the new climate of 'all shoulders to the wheel.' Women and young people had to all intents and purposes been excluded in the past from all decision-making outside the family. Their potential had not been exploited, and that very potential was itself reduced by lack of opportunity. Since 1970, these two sectors of the population have been the target of unprecedented levels of attention on the part of the system, the one for their sustaining role, and gender balance, as fifty per cent of the population, the other as the human engine that will forge new horizons in the future.

Nor have the disadvantaged been abandoned. A national welfare programme supports families in temporary or prolonged need, and students of ability or ambition from such backgrounds may complete third level education on full or partial scholarships, at home or abroad, as appropriate to their chosen field. In a philosophy of equal citizenship, all members of society are afforded the possibility of altering their circumstances by their own effort, with a helping hand from the State as appropriate. A telling endorsement of His Majesty's conviction that 'none shall be left behind' is the directive he issued that education, health and social development (social security and support) should in no way be deprived by the heavy losses to the State coffers of collapsing oil prices.

The ethical code of a country's national media reflects the values it embraces as a culture, and the Omani media was founded on principles distilled from attributes that embolden the Omani personality - impartiality in an assessment of the facts and balance in their presentation. It is not easy to survive in the competitive field of media without a bias towards sensationalism. Yet the Omani media has trodden the narrow path of objectivity in reporting the domestic narrative in real time, and has been an equally judicious window on the outside world, notwithstanding the regional tensions that frequently raise commentary to a clamour. No polemics, no pitched press wars of the kind that fuel friction and pointless rivalry.

"We appreciate the importance of the media and the role it plays in the lives of nations. We recognise that the media is a mirror that reflects what is happening in a country and equally that this mirror must be unblemished, honest with itself and with others,"His Majesty has explained. … The accuracy of the facts is imperative, the story must be true. It must convey what is happening in our beloved homeland and reflect the genuine deeds and hopes of our people. ... We want to know ourselves and we want the world to know us just as we are. More than anything, we want the citizens of Oman to see reflected back the successes for which they may be proud, given the determination and will with which they accomplished them by collaboration with their government." Since the Omani media had a significant explanatory function in presenting the goals and process of the modern Renaissance to the public, His Majesty warned early against any temptation to "propagandise or

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make promises." Omanis, he said, and the Omani government, had no time for sycophantic applause. «Humility is still our principal attribute.» Notwithstanding these high-minded limitations, the Omani media has succeeded in attracting significant contributions from the private sector to all branches – press, audio, visual and electronic – enabling it to maintain ethical standards without losing audiences or technological edge.

Emerging from its one-time isolation, the Sultanate has been keen to interact with other peoples, to acquaint them with the heritage and long cultural contribution of Oman, and with its moderate interpretation of Islam and absolute repudiation of extremism. This it is accomplishing effectively and by multi-faceted means, by the presence of Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centres in selected world capitals and Sultan Qaboos academic chairs at some of the world›s leading universities; by such initiatives as "Rapprochement and Human Harmony Week" organised annually each February by the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture and Science, and the "Message of Islam from Oman" mobile exhibit, which has visited dozens of cities and capitals around the world.

Meanwhile, the Royal Navy tall ship, the RNOV Shabab Oman II, replacing its predecessor, the RNOV Shabab Oman I, continues to bring a message of friendship and warmth from Oman to ports throughout the world. The Shabab has participated in competitive events also, and brought home the Sail Training International Friendship Trophy, in the Tall ships Regatta in the Baltic Sea in August 2017. These contributions do much to counteract negative imagery and reinforce the truth about the Sultanate as a peace-loving nation inhabited by a warm and cultivated people.

His Majesty inaugurates Media City, introducing the story of Oman to an ever growing audience.

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The wider world

There is no question but the Sultanate occupies an extremely important strategic position on the geopolitical map. Around this oasis of stability swirl conflicts and rivalries of regional and global dimension. It could so easily fall victim to either, but instead has opted to reprise and treasure a role which it has occupied for long periods of its history, that of peace-maker in the Gulf, Arab and wider worlds.

The post-1970 Sultanate expounded a philosophy of foreign relations that was unmistakeably amicable in nature, that eschewed unnecessary conflict and ideological judgment of others. Live and let live was its guiding mantra. There were no hidden agendas, no cross-border territorial ambitions, no desire to interfere and every desire to befriend. International conventions were sought out to embrace and international organisations to join in order to legitimise this approach to exchange with others.

While the Sultanate puts a high price on the principles of good neighbourliness, of respect for sovereignty and of non-interference, it views this approach as a two-way process, and in offering these gifts to others, it countenances no interference in its own affairs. Its policies are not influenced from abroad. Nonetheless, it has developed a reputation as an honest broker with a strong track record in resolving disagreement, and as such it is always ready to intervene when asked, acting impartially as a neutral facilitator and within the parameters of international law.

Sultan Qaboos, as founder and leader of Oman's modern Renaissance, was responsible for defining the root philosophy of the Sultanate's foreign policy, incorporating sentiments which he in turn drew from Oman's dominant cultural heritage. Clarity and candour are paramount. Irrespective of whether or not the Sultanate's position on an issue is supported, its sincerity cannot be disputed.

The Sultanate will never sacrifice genuine engagement for the less committed position of 'negative neutrality.' It does not distance itself from what is happening around it, but always contracts fully and deeply in approaching issues that impinge on peace and stability. What distinguishes the Omani approach to such matters more than any other is its willingness to work below the radar, to eschew limelight in favour of quiet diplomacy. It will never use armed force other than to defend its own territory, or to assist a fellow GCC member in repelling external aggression; such as occurred, for instance, during the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 in exercise of mutual defence agreements. Yet, equally, it will never hesitate to exercise its good offices in attempting to resolve differences, to bring the positions of disputing parties closer, should it be so requested. It has itself no differences with its brothers and it has time and again refused to boycott neighbours and allies in times of internecine strife, preferring to maintain a window of communication that will allow it to build a bridge or help overcome some partisan difference.

The Gulf region is one of immense strategic importance to the world. Its stability, or lack of it, has implications of security, energy, economic and financial dimension. The Sultanate encloses one half of the narrow navigable passage at the Strait of Hormuz within its territorial waters and His Majesty Sultan Qaboos is conscious of Oman's particular

responsibility in this respect, as well as the joint responsibilities of the other Gulf member states in protecting the safe passage of shipping through the Strait.

There is a clear need for cooperation between the eight countries bordering the Gulf in general and the GCC countries in particular, "cooperation and friendship devoid of vested interest," as His Majesty stressed more than 40 years ago. "We have no desire," he added, "to implicate ourselves in the contentions of the superpowers or to serve the interests of others. All we want is for the countries of the region to be left in peace and that we be allowed to play our role in the service of world peace. His Majesty is a profound believer in the value of "equivalent interests" among diverse parties as a means of preserving peace and stability. "Moderation in international relations and in the handling of human affairs is the only true path to credibility. …. Not only is cooperation, each to their ability, the lifeblood of regional advancement, of mutual social, economic and geopolitical security, it is an imperative without which the desired goals that we seek cannot be achieved." The GCC Cooperation Council is more necessary than ever as a geopolitical mechanism of cooperation between its member states, not an aggressive entity at all, rather a stabilising influence of benefit to the region.

The Sultanate has always supported issues of material import to the Arab world, foremost among which is the Palestinian cause, and even as it backs every effort to bring peace to the region, it has striven as much to bring about the resolution of Arab differences and to restore Arab solidarity. As early as 1985, His Majesty summarised a cautionary position that has not changed since: "We have repeatedly warned against Arab differences, of the danger that they pose to the true interests of our nation. We ask our Arab brothers to close ranks and forswear division. Today, we reaffirm that there can be no alternative to this way forward."

The Sultanate supports all fair initiatives directed towards achieving a genuine resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, the latter rights exemplified in their right to self-determination in their own independent state within pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as their capital and a two-state framework.

The Sultanate has always supported issues of material import to the Arab world, foremost among which is the Palestinian cause, and has done much to help resolve Arab differences and restore Arab solidarity.

Under the personal direction of Sultan Qaboos, Oman invested valuable time in the early years of its Renaissance defining and demarcating its land and sea borders with each of its adjacent neighbours. These demarcations were then sealed under international agreements, leaving no opening for the type of misunderstanding that constitutes a prime source of intra-national conflict. The Sultanate went on to transform its borders into bridges of friendship and good relations, so that no party that shares a frontier with Oman need doubt but that the hand that reaches across the border is a hand of goodwill. This more than any other factor is what has sustained the decades of security and tranquillity which the Sultanate has enjoyed since 1970.

As early as 1976, Sultan Qaboos, noting the ingredients of simmering contention in the regions bordering the East Mediterranean and Indian Ocean and signs of a «new colonisation of Africa and other territories" warned of re-emerging struggles between the world's big powers for control of resources, for which he said the world, and particularly the region, would pay a heavy price. Without agreement on a formula for cooperation among the countries of the region, he could see a future time when war cries falsely disguised as shining ideals of freedom, equality and human rights could be employed to destabilise states and create chaos. Young people would be particularly vulnerable to such propaganda. That was four decades ago, thirty four years before the events of the Arab Spring, and the trail of negative consequences it left in its wake.

Indeed Sultan Qaboos has warned at regular intervals since the 1980s of a rising trend in instability, violence, intolerance, disregard for democracy and for the law, nevertheless insisting that "it is just as certain that this false trend will be defeated."

At the Sixth Summit of the leaders of the GCC in Muscat on 3 November 1985, His Majesty praised the "eagerness of the GCC States to collaborate in protecting the region from the phenomena of violence and terrorism and all acts that threaten its security."

Two weeks later, in his address marking the Sultanate's 15th National Day on 18 November, he returned to the theme, appealing for action to "eliminate terrorism in all its forms, for it poses such great danger to our security and stability. Yet as we confront it, we are just as committed to the serious and urgent work of addressing the causes of tension and conflict by peaceful means." For this to succeed, he added, the role and effectiveness of the United Nations would be paramount.

His Majesty's deep commitment to peace is to the realistic "peace of the strong ... to such just and comprehensive peace as eradicates violence, eliminates the roots of extremism and entrenches tolerance, amicable coexistence and civilised human exchange," and this commitment is what underpins Omani policy.

Again, His Majesty called for a framework to confront growing international crises such as drought and human displacement. In particular, he urged the oil-producing countries to bring stability to global oil markets. "The world is undergoing radical transformation in all fields," he predicted. "The 1990s are seeing the emergence of a new international order.

It is our hope that there will be no future place for conflict or confrontation, but rather for cooperation, understanding and peace."

In 1991, he spoke of the fragile state of the planetary environment and of the collective responsibility borne by humanity to protect it, a responsibility, as he described it, "not limited by the political boundaries of States." Failure to address the seriousness of the issue might cause humanity to experience something barely short of "collective suicide".

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation was established in 1989 and is one of the principal international awards assigned to environmental conservation work. Since 1991, it has been awarded every two years by UNESCO. It goes without saying that the Sultanate has been proactive in the protection of its own environment, within Oman itself, and extending to the Gulf and the region beyond. Indeed, the Paris Climate Accord, signed at the Paris Summit in late 2016 and which emphasised collective responsibility in preserving climate and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, came a full quarter of a century after His Majesty made the comments referred to in the paragraph above.

In the ensuing quarter century, the world has indeed undergone profoundly significant developments - political, economic and social. These developments have, regrettably, included war, confrontation and the appearance of terrorist organisations operating globally. The region has suffered greatly from their criminal acts, and from the violence and extremism that has inserted itself into society and infested the peace-loving religion of Islam. Sadly, given his prescience, His Majesty has seen all of the dangers he warned about come to pass, although his convictions have not changed: "Extremism, by whichever name it uses, fanaticism in whatever form it takes, factionalism, irrespective of its driving force, are poisonous weeds, and they have no place on Omani soil."

He has warned against intransigence which, in the religious understanding "only leads to backwardness among Muslims and the spread of violence and intolerance in their societies.

"It is indeed regrettable that intransigence has weakened the Islamic nation, stagnating intellectual activity, so that we are now facing a form of fundamentalism that is the consequence of illiteracy as regards the facts of Islam.

There will always be those ready to exploit the naiveté of youth to encourage acts of violence, and to promote discord and hatred."

His Majesty sees as a preeminent task of this century the alignment of the forces of good "to fight injustice and tyranny, confront the practitioners of ethnic cleansing and abuse of human dignity, and challenge those who occupy the lands of others and deny their legitimate rights." For it is essential for the good of mankind that we "establish and maintain peace… and this peace can only be sustained if it is based on the solid foundations of justice and cooperation… Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, whatever its objective, is an attack on the peace that humanity seeks to achieve… We have from the outset condemned all resort to terrorism and we have equally called for a full examination of its causes."

This summary distils to its essential points the broad vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and of his

understanding of humankind. The Sultanate continues to be actively involved in efforts to combat terrorism, expressing this involvement in its own unique way, by using every occasion and opportunity to disseminate a culture of tolerance, peace and understanding between nations and peoples.

As he observes the profound changes still taking place across the world, driving the inevitable emergence of a new international order, His Majesty has guided his country through the decades of shift from the bipolar world of the Cold War years, to a unipolar one, where the United States has dominated the global power system since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union. And now once again a shift is afoot, towards a multiplicity of poles.

As the Russian Federation recovers its influence regionally and in the Middle East, new international powers and power blocs are also emerging, most notably China, India, Germany and Japan. The rise of the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) reflects the shifting polarity away from the old colonial power blocs that gave dominance to the West for centuries.

His Majesty has spoken of "human brutality turning on itself," evidenced in "the cruelty practised by one segment of society against another" or in ethnic and sectarian conflict. "How grievous it is," he said in 1993, "that Muslims in some parts of the world are today more exposed than ever to sectarian persecution, to ethnic cleansing and massacre, callously inflicted on men, women and children. There is neither creed nor conscience to this degenerate behaviour." Failure to stem the tide of violence has unleashed escalating costs that now threaten all corners of the world.

Always driven by awareness of collective responsibility and of the consequences of inaction, His Majesty still believes that world leaders may find common understanding and choose peace for mankind above vested interest, accepting the United Nations, empowered by its own charters and conventions, as fair arbiter in seeking this cooperation between States. For "nations are more convinced than ever before that armed conflict is no longer viable, but merely a hindrance to growth and a threat to world peace and security. Logic and human sentiment support this newly emerging realisation."

"Perhaps if we can build confidence between peoples, establish bonds of friendship among nations, work towards common interests, observe international legitimacy, and abide by treaties and laws, all this can lead to a more conscious understanding and to the constructive cooperation that will propel the victory of security and peace, reassurance and prosperity. … Cooperation and the peaceful sharing of beneficial interests among nations are of utmost importance. We must strive for this result with all seriousness, tireless in our endeavour to attain a more prosperous future for mankind. In Oman this is never far from our minds. It is the reason, and the only reason, we participate in regional and global gatherings, for the positive impact we might have in supporting all that is good for humanity."

It has been Oman's exceptional good fortune to have been able to rise from stagnation to become the vibrant modern state that it is today, thanks

to the insight and foresight of a truly exceptional leader, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. As their country accelerates towards goals undreamed of in 1970, Omanis are already enjoying a quality of life that may be the envy of far wealthier countries. They are not unaware of where they have come from, and they are engaged and willing to protect their achievement against external or internal threat. "The positions we defend," in His Majesty's words, "derive from our convictions. They reflect the sincerity of our intentions, the clarity of our vision, and the realism with which we deal with issues as they arise, both at home and abroad." It is a uniquely Omani way – discreet and accommodating, frank, prescient, humble yet resolute, scrupulously fair - and fearless in defence of truth.

"...I should like to look at the map of the world and not find a single country that is not linked to Oman by ties of friendship..."

Qaboos bin Said

(His Majesty's press conference with the Omani media, 1985)

Foreign Affairs
Friendship, Dialogue and Balanced

For almost half a century, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has pursued a foreign policy that values cooperation, trust and credibility above all else, and that practises openness and clarity in all its dealings with others.

Friendship, Dialogue & Balanced Relations

The Sultanate pursues a foreign policy that is neither restless nor aggressive, but rather is the product of a thorough, conscious reading of events, measured against proven facts and ethical constants. It is motivated by a pre-eminent desire for solution rather than display. The constants are those enshrined in the Basic Law of the State and in the conviction of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said that diplomacy, in particular the open diplomacy that Oman has long practised, is the evolved approach to international relations and, in the extreme, to dispute resolution. Its guiding principles are the creation and maintenance of good and equal relations, good-neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and respect for international laws and norms.

The successful history of Omani foreign policy was elevated to new levels by Sultan Qaboos after 1970. Opening up gradually from its earlier isolated, albeit peaceful, position in regional and world affairs, Sultan Qaboos developed a foreign policy based on active cooperation and credibility. He believed that frankness and clarity were the bedrock of trust in dealing with others in all situations and has not wavered from this conviction. It has gained for Oman the status of fair arbiter in its assessment of often contentious issues, as a result of which it has had occasion to contribute positively and regularly to easing tensions regionally and beyond.

Today, thanks to this impartiality but not indifference, the Sultanate enjoys healthy relations with countries around the world of vastly differing perspectives, and nurtures these relations without judgment, to the benefit of the Sultanate and others. Dialogue and negotiation are the tools it engages in approaching issues of difference, and peaceful resolution within the parameters of international law is the overriding goal.

The Sultanate believes, and makes that belief known wherever its foreign policy is exercised, that there is no problem that does not have a solution if interests are reconciled and where will and effort are combined, for all decent people seek peace, understanding and coexistence in a manner that will protect the interests of all under the principle of "do no harm".

With these core principles to guide it, the Sultanate has built up a bank of goodwill internationally, where it is acknowledged for its open approach to difference and willingness to engage with endeavours to resolve geopolitical tensions. This reputation is cemented by its active participation in international institutions of both political and non-political purpose.

From the start of the modern Renaissance, Oman's foreign policy has progressed along a path parallel to its development policy. The two have served and benefited one another, enabling the Sultanate to advance, by the same pairing of wisdom and bold decision-making, towards the achievement of its aspirations for economic prosperity at home and peace at home and abroad.

Healthy relations promote stability

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos keeps lines of communication open and friendly with heads of state and political peers around the world and this policy has served Oman well, as it has served healthy interactions in the larger region. Open exchange is crucial to the maintenance of peace in a part of the world as strategic and potentially volatile as the Middle East, and the stability that is particularly characteristic of Oman is a constant reminder that transparent relations work.

The Sultanate's approach is founded on a deep understanding of its own historical experience and a belief that a country's best investment is an investment in its own internal development. This clarity of purpose is one of the qualities that single out Oman among nations that have only relatively recently emerged from backwardness. The progress it has achieved in less than half a century adds credibility to its endeavours in dealing with other nations.

In the Gulf region, the Sultanate has been an active promoter of the movement towards greater integration among the GCC states. It returns constantly to the theme of regional security, of stability, as the bedrock of progress and the rational means to securing mutual interests and true Gulf citizenship. It acts wherever appropriate to encourage more cooperation between the GCC countries and their non-GCC neighbours, such as the Republic of Yemen and Islamic Republic of Iran, always with the goals of stability and shared prosperity with these countries and their peoples in the place of priority.

Oman's close relations with its sister countries in the GCC are grounded in common history and common political, economic and social objectives. Muscat sees greater interdependence and cooperation as the means to enhancing the welfare of the peoples of the constituent countries. In this context, it has worked to remove obstacles that threaten the stability of the Gulf region and the developments that have been achieved.

The Arab world has had more than its share of upheaval and the Sultanate has often been called on, or volunteered, to bring calm to situations fraught with tension. Its intentions are well respected, given their orientation towards resolution and the highest welfare of the Arab peoples. Its interventions have resulted in many quiet successes where internal misunderstanding or external aggression has stirred conflict. The Sultanate's commitment to peaceful dialogue is strongly backed up by its own record of non-aggression.

Oman›s reconciling instincts are not confined to exchanges with its Gulf and Arab neighbours, but extend to the broader canvas of Africa, Asia, Europe and America, in addition to the many international and regional organisations of which the Sultanate is a member. It is acutely aware that the stability of the region is profoundly affected by decisions made or events taking place in other parts of the world. In its mission to promote a culture of peaceful interaction, the Sultanate has been a committed supporter of the activities of the United Nations and of its many affiliated organisations, including UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation, the International

Oman is an active participant in the activities of various regional and international bodies and organisations, where it supports all endeavours that promote peace, respect for human rights and measures to counter terrorism and piracy.

Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Human Rights Council and others.

The Sultanate also shares the sentiments of other regional and international bodies concerned with peace and human rights, as well as with efforts to contain terrorism and piracy.

The Arab and Gulf regions saw significant political, diplomatic and economic activity during 2017 and the Sultanate was an informed participant in much of this activity.

On 20 February 2017, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos hosted as head of a friendly neighbouring state His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, to discuss matters of mutual concern over an extended 3-day visit.

His Majesty the Sultan receives His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

Later, on 14 May 2017, His Majesty welcomed His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan on a private 2-day visit to the Sultanate.

His Majesty the Sultan welcomes His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan.

His Majesty the Sultan receives His Excellency Dr Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Oman continues to maintain cordial relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iranian President Dr Hassan Rouhani who visited the Sultanate for a day of talks with Sultan Qaboos and senior government officials on 15 February 2017.

Always a keen contributor at Gulf, Arab and international summits, the Sultanate has a long track record of interventions to heal rifts in Arab and international relations.

As Special Representative of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, His Highness Sayyed Asaad bin Tariq Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Relations and International Cooperation, met with His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, on 18 May 2017. President Abbas was on a two-day working visit to the Sultanate.

While these visits reflect the degree of personal and political esteem which His Majesty enjoys among his peers, the Sultanate is also a committed participant in Gulf, Arab and international summits called to address matters of mutual interest or concern, given the value of these occasions in cementing personal bonds between heads of state.

In this context, His Majesty delegated His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs, to attend the meetings of the 37th GCC Summit on his behalf. The Summit took place in Bahrain in December 2016.

On behalf of His Majesty the Sultan, the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs led the Sultanate›s delegation to the meetings of the 37th Gulf Cooperation Council Leaders Summit.

The Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs once again represented His Majesty when he headed up the Sultanate's delegation to the 17th Consultative Summit of the leaders of the GCC member states, and the Arab-American Islamic Summit held in Saudi Arabia in May 2017.

The Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs headed the Sultanate's delegation to the Gulf-American Summit.

His Majesty delegated his Special Representative and Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation to attend the Arab Summit's 28th Ordinary Session held in Amman on 29 March 2017.
In the same month, His Excellency Dr Yahya bin Mahfoud Al-Manthari, Chairman of the Council of State, was delegated by His Majesty to lead the Sultanate's delegation to the Indian Ocean Rim Association's First Leaders' Summit, which convened in Jakarta on 6 March 2017.

The Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan led the Sultanate›s delegation to the 28th Ordinary Arab Summit.

"From ancient times the Omanis have been civilization builders and they have a great historical heritage; through their maritime links they have always been open to other civilizations and have sought to maintain contacts with them for their mutual benefit. As a result they have been able to set an example of rapid development and progress and have kept pace with the changing times by adopting all the new, useful and enlightened ideas, sciences and technologies that are available. At the same time they have remained true to their lofty values and principles, along with the customs and traditions in which they have been raised..."

Qaboos bin Said

(Inauguration of the Council of Oman's 5th Term, 2011)

History and Geography

History and Cultural Continuity

The city of Al-Baleed in the Governorate of Dhofar has roots dating back far into the pre-Islamic era.

At various times in its history, Oman's reputation on the high seas was second to none. It commanded fleets of ocean-going trading ships that explored far distant shores and interacted with the great civilisations of the past - Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Roman and others. The navigational skills of Omani sailors were legendary and brought merchants to the southern shores of Persia and the Orient and westwards across the Arabian Sea to Africa, where they were frequent and welcome visitors to East African ports, from Somalia south to Mozambique.

With the rise of Islam, the fame of Omani sailors breached new boundaries. Fearing only God, they displayed tremendous courage at sea and became persuasive instruments in the early dissemination of the faith, to Iraq, Persia, Sindh and beyond.

Though trade provided the initial spur for their extensive explorations, it was for their contribution to the spread of Islam that Omanis were most proud. They took their new faith into the very interior of Africa from the coastal ports where they exchanged goods. They brought it with them to China and the Asian ports in between. Their calm demeanour, the honesty which characterised their dealings, and their embrace of difference, were the factors that made them such effective missionaries of the new faith. Islam sat well with their temperament and Omanis made contributions to culture and intellectual activity in the early Hijri centuries that were both outstanding and longstanding in their impact.

The Portuguese reached the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf in the 16th century AD and Oman lost control of the Eastern trade routes. Its towns were looted and brutally vandalised. In time the inhabitants succeeded in closing ranks and re-establishing a naval fleet that was capable of evicting the Portuguese from the strongholds they had occupied in the country. There followed a succession of naval campaigns, dispatched to the western Indian Ocean, to the shores of Persia, to the Arabian Gulf and Eastern Africa, until one by one they had completed the destruction of Portuguese strongholds to end their presence in the region.

With the establishment of the Al Busaidi state by its founder, Imam Ahmad bin Said, in 1744 a succession began which continues today in the person of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Oman's fortunes recovered.

Omanis, who earned justified renown as highly capable sailors and navigators, made a key contribution to the Islamic conquest, carrying the faith over land and sea to Iraq, Persia and Sindh.

As its influence returned, it set about building what would become its largest ever fleet, an armada which in 1805 numbered four frigates, four corvettes, two single-sail ships, seven boats with mast and twenty armed commercial vehicles.

The resurrection of Muscat's maritime influence was accompanied by unprecedented commercial and diplomatic activity. The Omani vessel Sultana sailed to New York on 30 April 1804, carrying aboard Ahmed bin al-Nu'man, the first Arab envoy to officially visit America. The governor of Mombasa, then an Omani province, also flew to London in 1842 as ambassador to Queen Victoria. The ship "La Caroline" visited Marseille in 1849.

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.

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. Yalainous was one of the earliest Roman historians to mention Oman, in the first century of the Christian era. A century later, the name recurs in Ptolemy. A. Grohimann in the 1936

An exquisitely illuminated manuscript from the Sultanate's prized collection.

Medieval Arab sources acknowledged Oman as an independent region. Both Al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal referred to it as a spacious land of autonomous inhabited territories.

Encyclopaedia of Islam (Brill, Leiden) was of the view that the Omana described by these two historians was in fact Sohar, the predominant regional economic centre of the Classical Age. Oman has been identified by other names, most extensively 'Magan', by which the Sumerians and Mesopotamians referred to it. The name may contain an allusion to the shipbuilding industry for which Oman was noted. In cuneiform inscriptions a magan was a type of ship's hull, known to the Persians as a mezoon, and deriving from a root (mazan), meaning clouds or abundantly flowing waters. Arab sources referred to Oman as an independent territory. Al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal concurred that Oman was "a sovereign land with a sovereign people."

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

Contribution to the propagation of Islam

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

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

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

Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet, who dispatched Amr Ibn al Aas to Oman's two kings (Jaifer and Abd, sons of Al Julanda ibn al Mustakbir) advising them to embrace Islam. Oman responded positively under the leadership of the sons of Al Julanda and has ever since become a strong fortress of Islam and helped in the religion's propagation in many regions, particularly in east and central Africa.

The Prophet Mohamed (PBOH), in a well-established Hadith, said of the pious inhabitants of Oman: "God's mercy be on the people of Al Ghubaira (the people of Oman)…. "They believed in me although they had not seen me." The Prophet's singular commendation acknowledged the reports that had come to his attention of the genuine and wholesale embrace of Islam by the Omanis, in its purest interpretation. The speech delivered by the Caliph Abu Bakr to the Omani delegation that travelled to Madinah under the leadership of `Abd bin Al Julanda after the death of Prophet Muhammad is an important record that tells of the good character and hospitality of the Omani people and their adherence to Islam. Oman played a leading role in the spread of Islamic civilisation to other parts of the world. Omanis participated

Their early devotion to Islam and pious demeanour made Omanis persuasive missionaries of the da'wah, or call to Islam, in their travels abroad.

in the Arab conquests by land and sea of Iraq, Persia, the Indus valley and other places.

Omanis took Islam to East Africa, China and ports in other parts of Africa and Asia where they engaged in commerce. The Omani people are well known for their adherence to their religion and values. This has created strong bonds between the people, which they are dedicated to preserving.

Rule of the Nabhan

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

The second or Later Nabhan Period, which lasted from 906 to 1034 AH/1500 to 1624 AD, featured a succession of failed imams and was beset by power struggles among the Bani Nabhan themselves, and between the Nabhan and several other tribes in a jostle for power. Yet, the most significant of the events of this period was undoubtedly the occupation by the Portuguese of coastal Oman.

For portions of their rule, the Nabhan were confined in their influence to the interior of the territory, and at their peak they held sway as far as the

Al-Faiqin Castle in Manah was known both as an impregnable fastness and for the strong Islamic influences in its architectural style.

The influence of the Al-Nabhan frequently extended to the coast, but at times was limited to the interior when fractious tribes managed to insert themselves, separating the coastline from the central authority.

coast. At yet other times dissident tribesmen managed to secede from Nabhan control by retiring to the coastal regions.

As to relations between the Nabhan and external powers, Omani sources point to a developing interplay of political and diplomatic connection between Nabhani Oman and the external world, evidenced in exchanges of visits with neighbouring countries, particularly those of the Gulf and East African region, and with a number of Asian kingdoms.

The Ya'rubis and the expulsion of the Portuguese

While the Portuguese were systematically quelling all resistance in the region and extending their control over large stretches of the Omani coast, despite strong resistance, a new energy was being awakened in Oman. In 1624, Nassir bin Murshid emerged as a charismatic leader to become the first Imam of the Ya'rubi State. He was quick to grasp the scale of the task to be accomplished, and the nature of the changes taking place, both in Oman and the region. He became convinced that no confrontation with the Portuguese could be decisive unless undertaken by a disciplined and cohesive national force, which demanded that he take on the formidable task of uniting fractious Omani tribes. In this enterprise he succeeded, consolidating the country under his leadership for the first time in many years, then went on to empower it with a strong naval fleet, which curtailed Portuguese influence and liberated several coastal cities from their grip. The Imam Sultan bin Saif continued the task, until he managed to liberate Muscat in 1650.

The Omanis did not rest, having dispatched the Portuguese from their own coastline, but launched a succession of raids against Portuguese strongholds in the Indian Ocean and East Africa. In the reign of Imam Saif bin Sultan, the foundation stone was laid for the invincible navy that took control of all of the East African coastline, from Mombasa to Kilwa, turning Muscat into the principal entrepot of the Gulf region and one of the principal ports of the Indian Ocean and Arabian Peninsula.

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

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

The fortress of Muttrah stands tall, an eloquent monument to the region's history and memory of the ships that plied the high seas to and from this ancient port.

After a prolonged period of turmoil and under the strong leadership of Imam Ahmed bin Said, who united rival tribes and founded the Al-Busaidi State, the country achieved stability and central government.

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

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

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

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

The Omani people have a deep sense of belonging to their land, and a keen awareness of the need for unity in order to confront any challenges the country may face. This sense of unity has been a consistent feature of the Omani national identity throughout the history of Oman. The Al Busaid family's continuous leadership since the mid-18th century until now has played a significant role in contributing to national unity, especially during the reign of Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1807-1856), and during the current reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the builder of Oman's Modern Renaissance.

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

Geography

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

The Sultanate of Oman occupies a uniquely important location strategically and this fact has been reflected time and again in the choices it has made, along with its policies and style of execution, dictating how it interacts with issues and developments affecting it.
Situated in the extreme south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman extends from latitude 16.40 to 26.20 degrees north and from longitude 51.50 to 59.40 degrees east. Its 3,165 kilometre coastline runs northwards from the Arabian Sea and the entrance to the Indian Ocean in the far south-west to the Sea of Oman and Musandam, where it overlooks the strategic Strait of Hormuz at the entrance to the Gulf.

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

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

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

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

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

Nature and geography, magnificent in their abundance

(Wadi Al-Arbiyeen in Quryat).

Omanis compare the Hajar mountain range to the human spine. They call the district that borders the Oman Sea Al-Batinah (approximately the 'internal abdomen') and that to the west of the highlands Al-Dhahirah ('external/rear').

Soaring Jebel Hatt in the Hajar mountain range captures the grandeur of the Omani landscape, where tourists arrive in increasing numbers to experience pristine nature.

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. They call the area lying on the Sea of Oman the Batinah, or "Stomach", and the area to the west of the mountains the Dhahirah, or "Back". The Batinah - the coastal area formed by the wadis (dried up areas of river bed) that flow down from the mountains – is between 15 and 80 kilometres wide and over 300 kilometres long. The Sultanate's main agricultural area, which boasts farms and orchards irrigated by groundwater, runs northwards from Muscat to the borders of the United Arab Emirates.

Several wadis cut right through the Hajar mountains. The largest – Wadi Samayil – links the city of Muscat on the coast with the wilayats of Izki and Nizwa in the interior. Omanis call the mountains to the west of this wadi al Hajar al Gharbi (the Western Hajar); this region includes the Jabal al Akdhar and the wilayats of Rustaq, 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 wilayats of Sumail and Bidbid. The highest peak in the Hajar range is Jabal Shams in the Dakhilyah Governorate, the summit of which is around 3,000 metres above sea level.

At Qurm Heights in Muscat the Omani coast narrows and becomes rocky with numerous inlets. The shoreline from South Muscat Point to Ras al Hadd is similar. From Ras al Hadd to Filim on Masirah Bay the Sharqiyah Sands extend over a band of terrain some 160 Kilometres long by 8 Kilometres wide. To the south west of Masirah Island lies a vast area of flat, stony ground known as the Jiddat al Harasis. To the west of the Sharqiyah Sands is a stretch of low-lying rocky terrain around 250 kilometres wide crossed by wadis running from north to south; these include Wadi Halfain and Wadi Andam.

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

Due to monsoon winds arriving from the south-west, visitors flock to Dhofar Governorate in the autumn to experience the cooling effect of rainfall and watch its pastures bloom. The region is also famous for its indigenous boswellia trees, for many centuries the source of Oman's lucrative frankincense trade.

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

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

Frankincense trees grow in some areas – a living reminder that the region was once renowned for its trade in this substance – the main source of its wealth in ancient times.
Fresh water springs flow abundantly in Dhofar throughout the year.

Geology

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

Superb rock outcrops in the mountains are a paradise for geologists from around the world. The country's rock record spans to more than one billion years. Next to thick layers of limestones, testifying to tropical conditions in the past, the rock recorded three periods when he country was ice covered, somewhat surprising given its present climate. Dark coloured Sumail ophiolites, a layered mix of volcanics and rocks originating from very deep up to10 km in the earth, were pushed from north to south onto the land over hundreds of kilometers 75 million years ago. These ophiolites locally can be rich in copper and chrome.

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

Population of Muscat Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
1,474,948	775,878

Muscat Governorate has benefited from a series of infrastructural and development upgrades that continue to impact every aspect of contemporary life.

A modern network of busy roads:

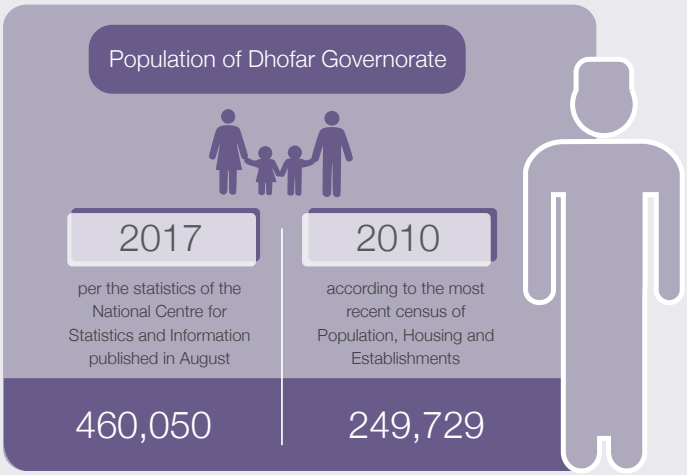
Sultan Qaboos Street speeds traffic through Muscat City.

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

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

Muscat has the highest population density of all the provinces in the Sultanate, with a population of 775,878 residents, according to the most recent (2010) census of Population, Housing and Establishments, that had risen to 1,474,948 per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August 2017. This governorate witnesses active development in all sectors, including the establishment of a modern road network linking Muscat with the other wilayats in the governorate and beyond, landscaping projects, parks, 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 wilayats: Muscat, Mutrah, Amerat, Bausher, Seeb and Quriyat, each of which is administered by a wali appointed by the Governor of Muscat. The Municipal Council of Muscat has 26 members representing the wilayats of the governorate.



The Dhofar Governorate has played an important role in Oman's history, in recent times as well as in the more distant past, and it was from Salalah, in Dhofar, that Oman's contemporary era of development first saw the light of day under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Historically, Dhofar – the Arabian Peninsula's Land of Frankincense – was Oman's great

Dhofar Governorate was the Land of Frankincense in the Arabian Peninsula and a gateway to its progress, development and prosperity under the modern Renaissance.

Recent development projects bring an added dimension to beautiful Dhofar Governorate, which is fast becoming a top tourist destination.

gateway to the Indian Ocean and the crossroads of Southern Arabia's caravan routes, while in recent times it has become the country's gateway to progress and prosperity.

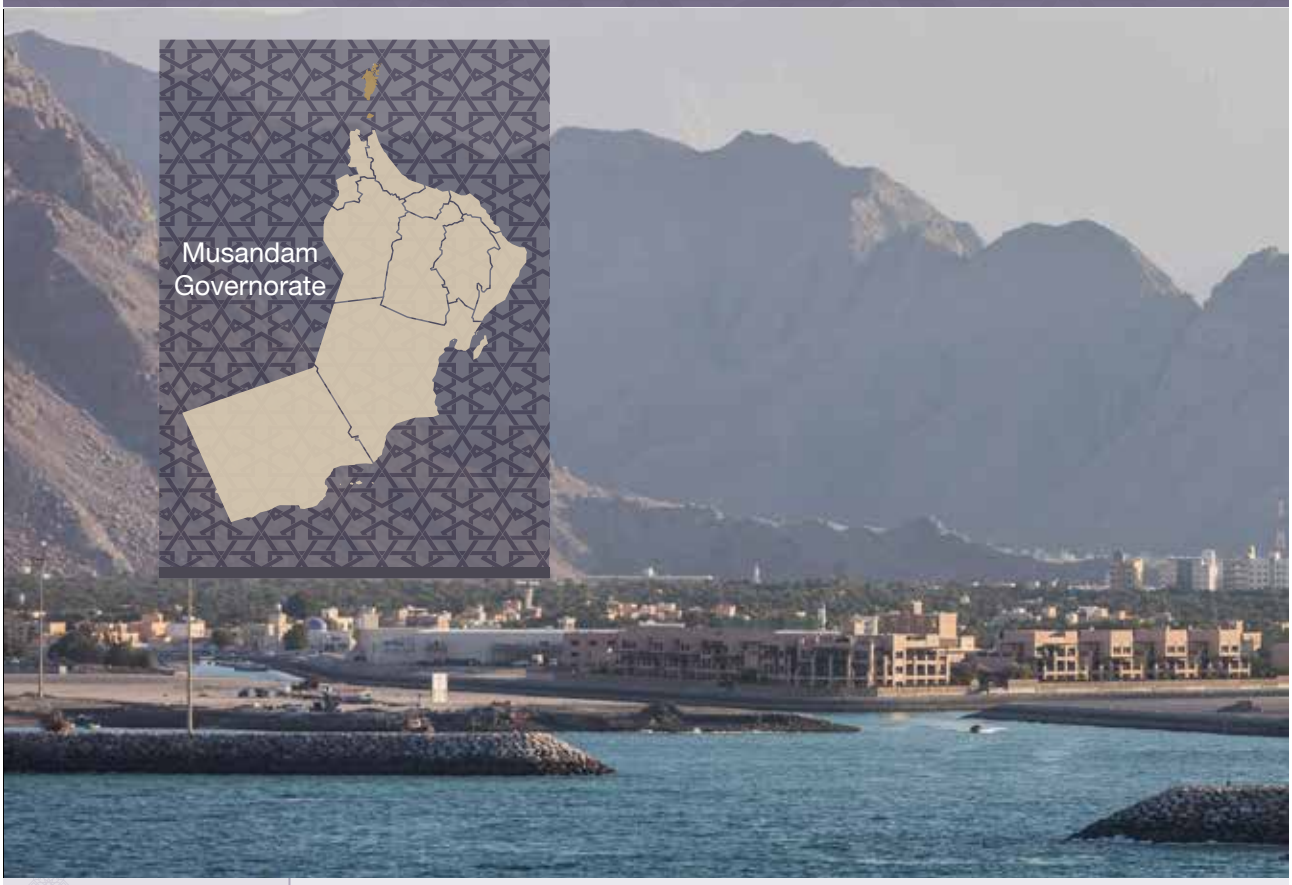
Dhofar Governorate lies at the southern end of Oman, with Salalah some 1,000 kilometres distant from Muscat. It borders the Wusta Governorate to the north-east the Arabian Sea to the south-east and south, the Republic of Yemen to the west and south-west and, to the north and north-west, the Rub' al Khali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

This governorate has ten wilayats – Salalah, the main hub, and Taqah, Mirbat, Rakhyut, Thumrait, Dhalkut, Mazyounah, Muqshin, Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands, and Sadah.

Dhofar Governorate has a population of 249,729, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, or 460,050, in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, as published in August 2017.

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

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



Population of Musandam Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
44,332	31,425

Overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, Musandam has unique strategic significance as a guardian of one of the world's most important waterways, which carries some 10% of the world's oil shipments.

Handsome Fort Khasab, resplendent in its striking natural surroundings.

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 is located in the far north of the Sultanate of Oman and overlooks the Strait of Hormuz and serves as the gateway between the Gulf and the open sea in the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

The Governorate of Musandam has four wilayats – Khasab, the main hub, as well as Daba, Bukha and Madha. The population of the province was 31,425 in the 2010 General Census of Population, Housing and Establishment, and 44,322 in the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information for the month of August 2017. The Municipal Council has 8 members representing the various wiliayat.

Population of Buraymi Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
114,794	72,917

Al-Buraimi Governorate is celebrating the completion of several major development projects, which will bring new life to the governorate and boost its economic and tourism status nationally.

Wilayat Al-Buraimi, provincial capital of its namesake governorate, celebrates the gifts of the modern Renaissance.

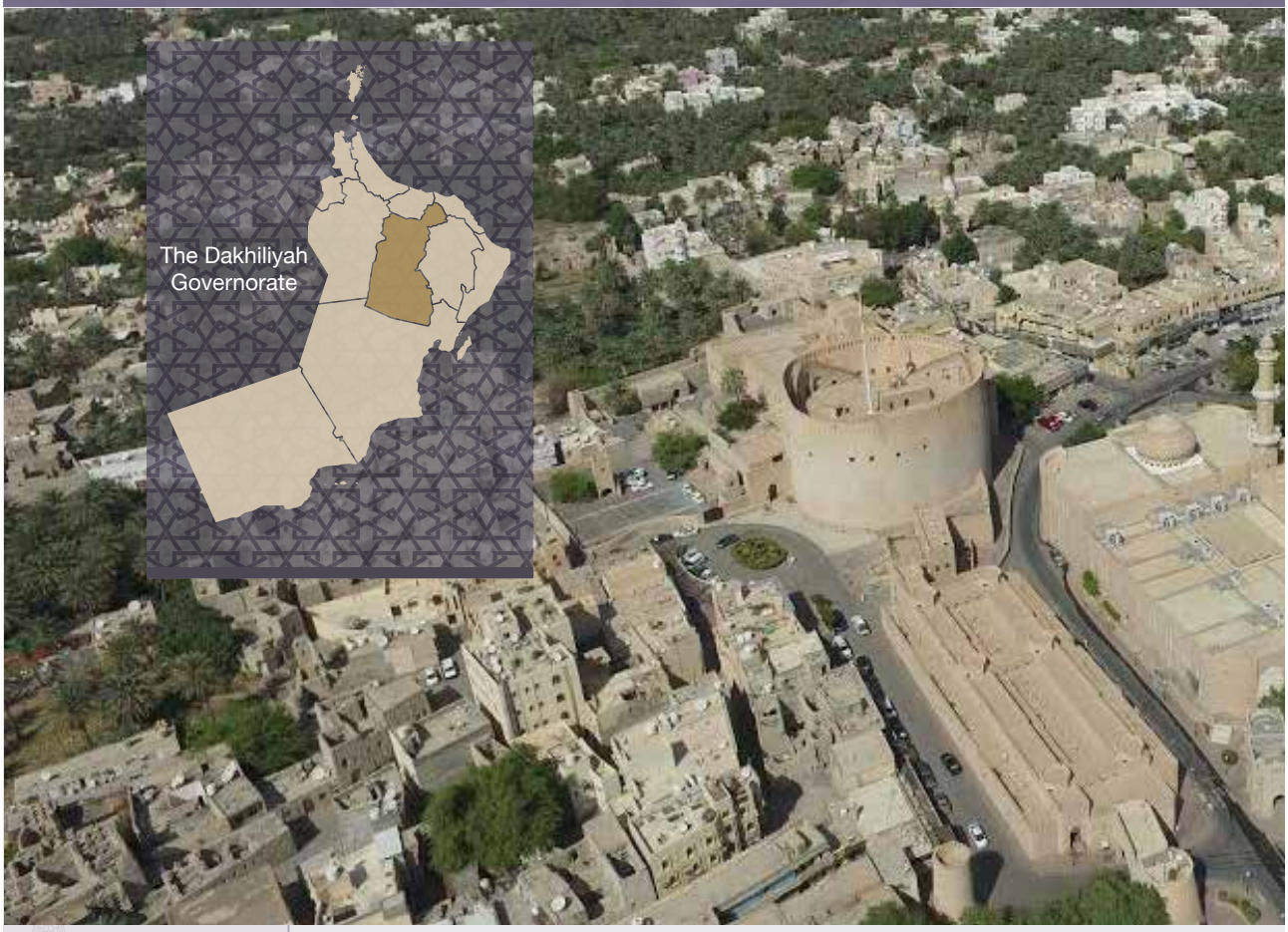
The Buraymi Governorate is renowned for its strategic location in the north-west of the Sultanate. Historically, because of its height above sea level and abundant water supplies from its wadis and aflaaj (irrigation channels), it also became an important trading station on a major trade route and a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

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

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

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

The Governorate has three wilayats – Buraymi (the main one), Mahdha and al Sinainah – and a population of 72,917 according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, or 114,794 in the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has 8 members.



Population of Dakhiliyah Governorate

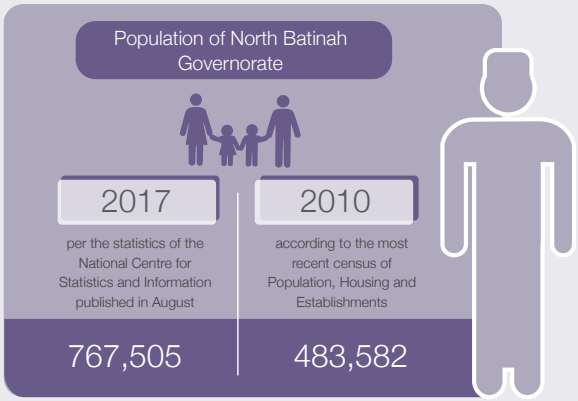
2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
466,969	326,651

Not only is it one of the country's principal agricultural provinces, Al-Dakhliyah Governorate is a province of immense significance in Omani history.

Once a powerful capital of Oman, Nizwa in the interior Governorate of Al-Dakhliyah still inspires awe today, dominated by its restored fort.

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

It has eight wilayats – Nizwa (its main hub), Bahla, Manah, al Hamra, Adam, Izki, Sumail and Bidbid – and, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, it had a population of 326,651, now up to 466,969 per the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has 26 members.



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

The Governorate of Al-Batinah North encompasses one of the Sultanate's largest agricultural plains, Al-Batinah Plain, a mineral-rich region which has supplied the raw materials for several vital industries.

The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Sohar is a modern cultural landmark in an ancient trading port.

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

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

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

The Governorate's population stood at 483,582 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments and at 767,505 in the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. The North Batinah Municipal Council has 28 members.

Population of South Batinah Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
423,574	289,008

Al-Batinah South extends from the Sea of Oman in the east to the foothills of the Western Hajar Mountains in the west, and because of its location, economic potential and population density, it has been a place of influence throughout Oman's history.

The famous 'blue' pools of Al-Khabbah Al-Zarqa in Al-Hawqain in the wilayat of Al-Rustaq is one of South Batinah's prime tourist attractions.

The province of South Batinah consists of six states namely Rustaq, Awabi, Nakhl, Wadi Al-Ma'awel, Barka, Al-Masna'a, and Al-Rustaq Governorate. The population of the governorate (289,008) people according to the general census of population, housing and enterprises for the year 2010, and 423,574 people, according to the statistics of the National Center for Statistics and Information for the month of August 2017.

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 the development of the natural warm water springs of Ain al Kasfah in the wilayat of Rustaq and Ain al Thuwarah in the wilayat of Nakhl.

Population of South Sharqiyah Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
315,537	188,032

Tourism is set to boom in Al-Sharqiyah South Governorate, where multiple new projects are in various stages of development. Meanwhile final details of the scheme to enhance the Saleel Nature Reserve have been approved.

Sur has a long association with the sea, having since ancient times been a port of call and departure for merchant vessels trading with distant markets.

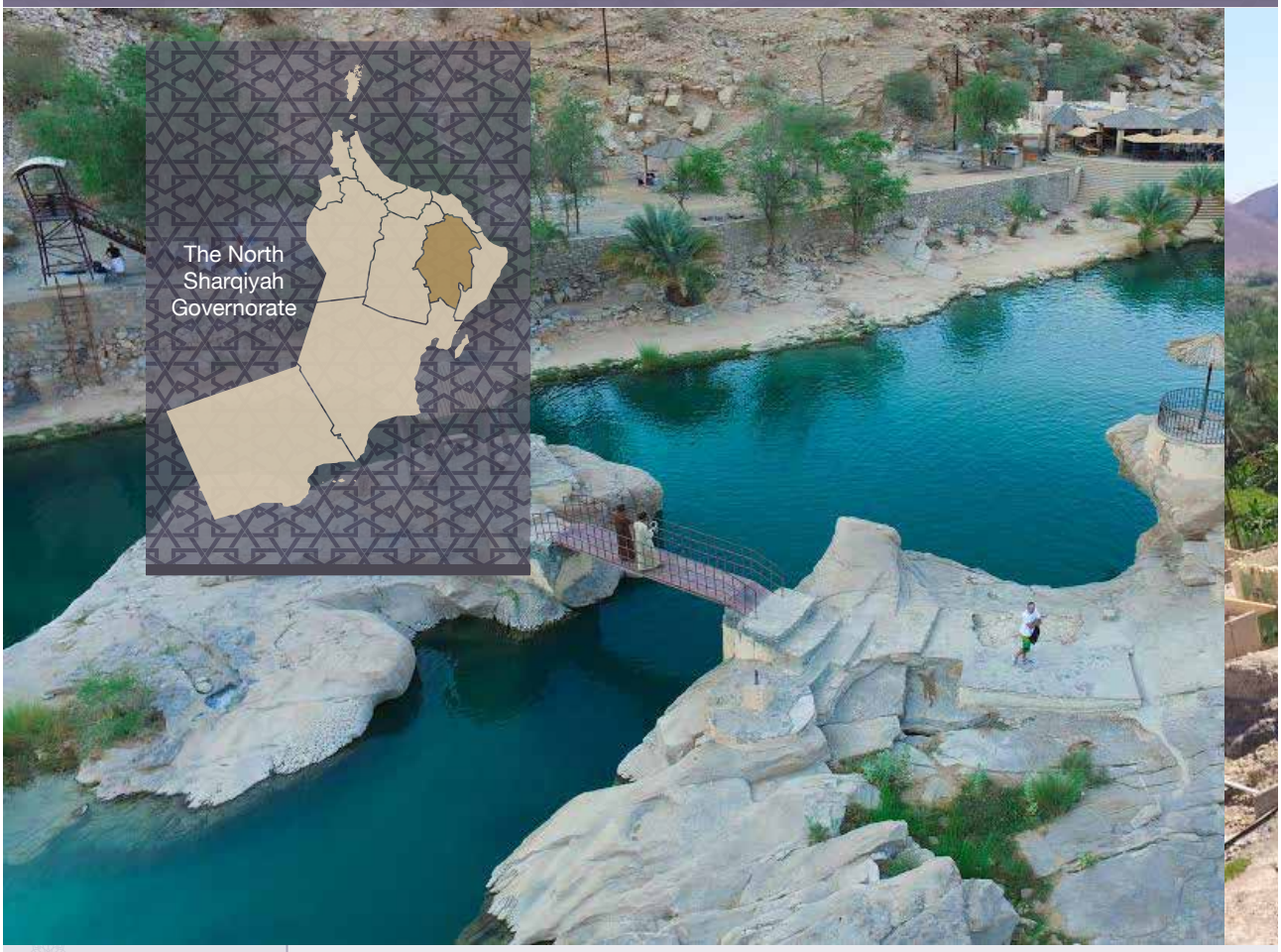
The South Sharqiyah Governorate, which occupies the north-eastern part of the Sultanate of Oman, borders the Arabian Sea to the east, the Sharqiyah Sands to the south and the Dakhiliyah Governorate to the west.

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

South Sharqiyah has seen the implementation of a range of development projects, along with a major extension of the road network and infrastructure specific to tourism.

The Al Saleel Nature Reserve is an important project in eco-diversity, which contributes to maintaining the regional ecological balance and promotes sustainable tourism.

The South Sharqiyah Governorate is home to major economic projects, including LNG plants, a urea-ammonia smelter & the Industrial Estate of Sur, a hub for small & medium industries. With a population of 188,032 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments and 315,537 in the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the governorate's Municipal Council has 16 representative members.



Population of North Sharqiyah Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
283,095	162,482

With simultaneous projects spanning health, education, tourism, roads, electricity, water and other sectors under way, the Governorate of North Sharqiyah is a bustling hive of development activity.

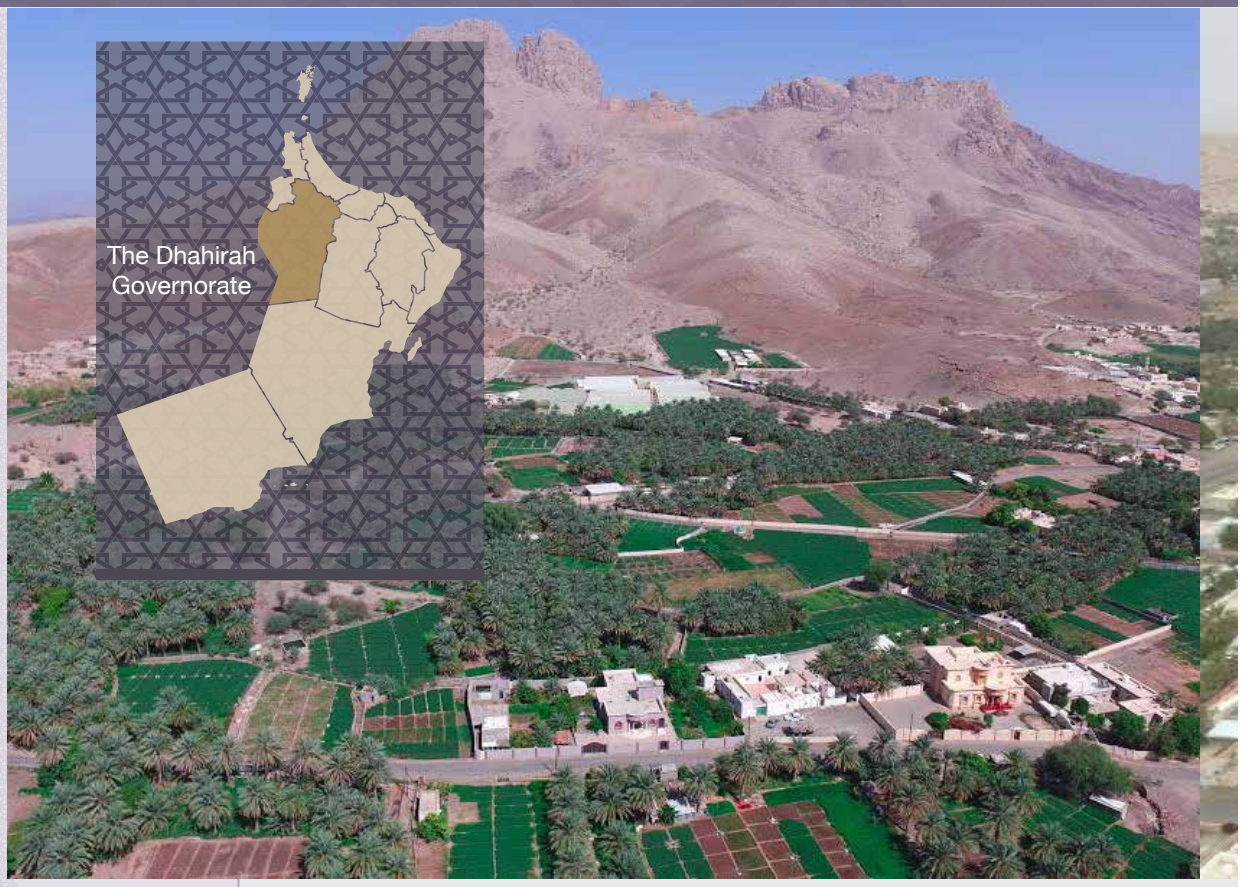
The North Sharqiyah Governorate overlooks the inner flanks of the Eastern Hajar mountain range. It shares borders with the governorate of Muscat to the north, the Dakhiliyah Governorate to the west and the South Sharqiyah Governorate to the east and south.

North Sharqiyah's six wilayats are Ibra, the main centre, Mudhaibi, Bidiyah, Qabil, Wadi Bani Khalid and Dima wa'l Ta'een.

With a population of 162,482 in the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, and 283,095 in the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the Governorate's Municipal Council has 16 representative members.

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

Two landmark scenes capture some of the diversity of northern Al-Sharqiyah: the historic Al-Khubayb House in Al-Mudhaibi and the lush beauty of Wadi Bani Khalid.



Population of Dhahirah Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
217,153	151,664

Al-Dhahirah Governorate consists of three wilayat: Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank, with Ibri its capital and central hub.The Governorate has an overall population of 151,664.

The Dhahirah Governorate is richly endowed with agricultural resources, history and tourist potential, and during the years of Oman's modern Renaissance it has achieved impressive development in every sphere. It consists of a semi-desert plain which slopes down southwards from the Western Hajar range towards the desert of the Rub' al Khali, or Empty Quarter, which borders its western side. The mountain of Jabal al Kawr marks its eastern boundary with the Dakhiliyah Governorate, while the Wusta Governorate lies to the south.

The Dhahirah Governorate has three wilayats – Ibri (the main wilayat), Yanqul and Dhank – and a 2010 population of 151,664, according to the Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, which had grown to 217,153 in the August 2017 statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

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

Its Municipal Council has 10 members.

Al-Dhahirah Governorate combines the superior benefits of modern development with unspoiled nature.

Population of Wusta Governorate

2017	2010
per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information published in August	according to the most recent census of Population, Housing and Establishments
46,756	42,111

Al Duqm Economic Zone, a multi-purpose international economic interface, is a project of central importance to Al-Wusta Governorate.

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

Al Wusta comprises four wilayats : Haima (the main hub), Mahawt, Duqm and al Jazer – and had a population in 2010 of 42,111, according to the 2010 Census of Population, Housing and Establishments, which had risen to 46,756 by August 2017, per the statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Its Municipal Council has eight members.

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

The dry dock complex in the Duqm Economic Zone, meanwhile, reflects the government's strategy to develop Al Wusta Governorate into becoming a major contributor to the national economy and promoter of the Sultanate's standing internationally. In addition to this complex, many projects of water, electricity, roads, fishing jetties and health and educational services have been introduced.

Thriving Al-Wusta is home to giant projects that capitalise both on its strategic position on international shipping lines and on its natural scenery.

"The government and people are like a single body. If one of its organs fails to perform its duty, the other parts of that body will suffer."

Qaboos bin Said

(His Majesty's accession, 30th July 1970)

Institutions of a Modern State

Building a modern state and grounding it in institutions, systems and laws that respond to the development needs of society and the country was a core principle of the modern Omani Renaissance

Basic Law of the State and its Organisational Structure

The goals of the modern Omani Renaissance were to build a modern state grounded in institutions, systems and laws that would guarantee its survival as a progressive democracy.

The establishment of a modern state and the securing of its sustained existence through a complex overlay of institutions, systems and laws were ground principles of Oman's modern Renaissance. This infrastructure was essential to advance society and support onward development and it was designed with care and purpose by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, who understood both the democratic principles underpinning it and the factors that would adapt the design to the realities of Oman. It was a high-minded ideal and one that has served the Sultanate well in its contemporary journey, enabling it to adopt the science and knowledge of modernity without losing authenticity. Progress and heritage have proved to be strong allies on the path to the twenty first century.

The significance of what has been achieved in terms of the establishment and advancement of a modern State of Institutions was the result of a comprehensive vision, executed through careful planning and leadership. Dedicated to the homeland and its citizens, the direction of governance has been first to establish, and then protect, a concept of citizenship based on full equality between all citizens of the State.

This principle was ultimately enshrined in the Basic Law of the State, issued on 11 June 1996, and its amendments. The Basic Law is a charter that enunciates all fundamental aspects of the modern state, the relations between its institutions and the responsibilities, rights, duties and tasks entrusted to the various organs of the

The Basic Law of the State is the legal framework that underpins and delineates the work of its constituent authorities. At the same time, it provides such protection and guarantees as maximise the freedom, dignity and rights of the individual.

State and its administrative institutions. It ensures the independence of the judiciary in the performance of its role, in order that justice may be served, overseeing its performance and ensuring its proper progress through the operating mechanisms of financial and administrative control of the State as expressed through the work of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, the Public Authority for Consumer Protection, and other regulatory bodies which exercise their roles under the umbrella of this law. The associated obligations serve to secure and guarantee the basic freedoms of citizens, protected by law.

The Basic Law of the State

To advance the progression towards prosperity and stability and greater citizen participation in the development process, Royal Decree No. 96/101 was promulgated on 6 November 1996 instituting the Basic Law of the State. The Basic Law would provide the foundation for a secure future for Oman and enhance its status internationally as it promoted its belief in peace and cooperation between nations and peoples.

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

Governance in the Sultanate is exercised in accordance with Article 9 of the Basic Law of the State, that is «on a basis of justice, consultation and equality». The right of citizens to participate in public affairs is enshrined in this Law.

law to the highest sovereign standards recognised internationally.

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

In confirmation of the participation of all members of society in the march of comprehensive development towards the desired goals of progress, some of the provisions of the Basic Law were amended for the first time under Royal Decree No 2011/99 on 19 October 2011. The new amendments granted legislative and audit powers and prerogatives to the State Council and the Consultation Council (Majlis al Shura) to ensure that both conform to the decisions issued by the Council of Ministers.

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

Firm foundations

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

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

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

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

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

The Basic Law of the State also guarantees the independence of the judiciary and makes interference in legal proceedings or the affairs of justice a crime punishable by law.
All aspects of Oman's political system and the way it operates is defined by the Basic Law of the State in its Articles, which guarantee the rights and freedoms of the country's citizens as well as the functions of the State's authorities and institutions.

The Organisational Structure of the State

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

First - His Majesty the Sultan:

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

Second - the Council of Ministers:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HE Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah
Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs

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

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

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

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

HE Dr Rawiyah bint Saud bin Ahmed al Busaidiyah
Minister of Higher Education

HE Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidy
Minister of Commerce and Industry

HE Sheikh Saif bin Mohammed bin Saif al Shabibi
Minister of Housing

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Abdullah al Bakri
Minister of Manpower

HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Obaid al Saidi
Minister of Health

HE Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibaniyah
Minister of Education

HE Sheikh Al Fahdl bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Harthy
Secretary General of the Council of Ministers

HE Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Shuhi
Minister of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources

HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Salem al Futaisi
Minister of Transport and Communications

HE Sheikh Khalid bin Omar bin Said al Marhoon
Minister of Civil Service

HE Sheikh Saad bin Mohammed bin Said al Mardhouf al Saadi
Minister of Sports Affairs

HE Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidi
Minister of State and Governor of Muscat

HE Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Sa'eedi
Minister of Legal Affairs

HE Dr Fuad bin Jaafar bin Mohammed al Sajwani
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries

HE Mohammed bin Salim bin Said al Toobi
Minister of Environment and Climate Affairs

HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Said bin Saif al Kalbani
Minister of Social Development

HE Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan bin Hamoud al Busaidi
Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar

HE Ahmed bin Nasser bin Hamad al Mahrazi
Minister of Tourism

HE Dr Abdulmunim bin Mansoor bin Said al Hasani
Minister of Information

His Majesty chairs a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 15 October 2017.

The National Security Council is the competent authority in all matters relating to national security. The Council meets under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan as His Majesty deems appropriate.

Three - The Defence Council:

On 28 December 1996, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree No 10596/ structuring the Defence Council under His Majesty's chairmanship and with 8 other people selected as members on grounds of their ranks or positions. The Defence Council meets at the direction of His Majesty the Sultan to discuss issues pertaining to the Sultanate's defence and security.

Four - The National Security Council:

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

Five - The Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council:

This Council undertakes the responsibility of drafting the State's fiscal policy and all matters related to its financial and monetary system. It drafts the annual General State Budget and studies financial allocations for development projects, as well as anything related to domestic and external investment, its funding and other savings-related investment, financial and monetary affairs.
The Council's remit also includes the development of energy resources and their contribution to the national economy, as well as improvements to the ways in which the funds they generate are utilized.

The Council, which convenes under the chairmanship of His Majesty the Sultan or its Deputy Chairman, was restructured under His Majesty's chairmanship by Royal Decree No 602011/, issued on 9 May 2011.
On 13 September 2017, the Council reviewed the State›s financial position report, financial performance indicators, preliminary estimates of the State Budget for the fiscal year 2018 and the basis and assumptions on which the estimates will be prepared. The Council endorsed the recommendations of the study on the national energy strategy and the actions to be taken, including the minimum renewable energy target (10%) to be achieved by 2025.

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

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

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. On 5 September 2017, Royal Decree No. 42/2017 was issued

The Supreme Council of the Judiciary is responsible for drafting the general policy of the judiciary and overseeing its independence and development. Its mission is to entrench the values, ideals and ethics of judicial work and protect the judicial system and it has full powers in the exercise of this mandate.

to reconstitute the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman, under the chairmanship of His Majesty.

Seven - The Supreme Judicial Council:

The Supreme Judicial Council has jurisdiction over the general policy of the judiciary, guarantees its independence and monitors its development. It executes a role in consolidating the values, ideals and ethics of judicial work and the prudent care of its systems. In order to achieve its objectives, the Supreme Judicial Council has jurisdiction over the courts and the Public Prosecution. In addition, it facilitates the litigation process and access to legal proceedings and considering nominations submitted by the competent authorities for appointments.

Promotions in the judiciary, the Administrative Court and the Public Prosecution, in cases where the law stipulates such posts should be filled by Royal Decree, also fall under this Council's remit. As well as proposing draft laws on judicial matters and expressing views on draft laws it also gives its opinion on draft judicial co-operation agreements between the Sultanate and other countries, as well as on any other matter His Majesty sees fit to put before it for review.
The Council was restructured on 29 February 2012 pursuant to Royal Decree No. 9/2012, with His Majesty the Sultan as Chairman.

Eight - The Supreme Council for Planning:

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

On 18 September 2017, the Supreme Council for Planning reviewed the performance report on the Omani economy, including GDP indicators and inflation rates, which remained very low. The Council also reviewed an evaluation of performance for 2016, Year One of the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan 2016-2020 in the context of ongoing changes in global oil markets and expectations for the coming three years of the Plan. At stake is the maintenance and extension of economic and social development, and the Council was briefed on the actual disbursement status of the development components of the Ninth Five-Year Plan 2016-2020. A discussion ensued on new development proposals having priority status for ministries and government units over the course of the remaining years of the Plan.

Nine - Higher Committees, Subsidiary Councils & Public Authorities:

Article No 56 of the Basic Law of the State states that "Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers defined and their members appointed in accordance with Royal Decrees. The State's administrative apparatus comprises a number of Higher Committees, Specialised Subsidiary Councils and Public Authorities, each of which is responsible for managing or overseeing a specific sector with a view to drafting a comprehensive vision for development. In serving the public interest and to guarantee the smooth flow of work in each sector, these bodies coordinate with other relevant departments, including ministries. The members of these Committees, Councils and Authorities include ministers and public figures according to their specialisation.

The State administrative apparatus combines a number of higher committees and affiliated specialist councils and public bodies, each of which undertakes the work or supervision of a specific sector, acting in coordination with other relevant bodies to achieve an integrated overall vision.

The Higher Committee for Conferences:

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

The Supreme Higher Committee for Five-Year Plans:

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

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

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

The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution:

The State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI) was established as a financially and administratively independent body on 22nd November 1999. On 27 February 2011, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos gave orders to amend its name to the State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution, whereupon it became the administrative and financial control apparatus of the State. It reports directly to His Majesty the Sultan.
Crowning the sequential steps in the development of the Audit institution, the Financial and Administrative Audit Law was issued by Royal Decree No. 111/2011, coincidentally with the Law for the Protection of Public Funds and Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest (the "Anti-Corruption Law"), promulgated by means of Royal Decree 112/2011. These two enactments together bring focus to the work of the SFAAI and expand its terms of reference in a manner to sharpen its performance in meeting the broad objectives of national development.

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

The State is determined to fight corruption and promote integrity in all of its functioning sectors and the Institution regularly organises seminars to raise awareness and integrity levels and to keep the public informed on the proper disbursal of public funds. Between 2013 and 2016, it sponsored a total of 154 such seminars.

The Civil Service Council:

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

The function of the Council is to undertake the task of developing civil service systems, and increasing the efficiency of the methods, means and procedures routinely used in

The Sultan Qaboos University Council serves to uphold and enhance standards of university education and to achieve the greatest possible coordination between study areas and graduate numbers and the needs of the national development plan.

the work of the civil service; also to review policies, systems, harmonised pay tables, along with allowances, benefits and bonuses; and to propose amendments to same to the Council of Ministers; finally to adopt systems of administrative control designed to verify the integrity of the application of laws and regulations relating to the civil service.

The Sultan Qaboos University Council:

The Sultan Qaboos University Council works to maintain and advance the standard of university education and to achieve the maximum extent of conformity between the courses offered at Sultan Qaboos University and its graduate output and the requirements of the National Development Plan.
On 12 June 2017, the Council adopted the higher studies schedule at the University with some modifications. Establishment of, respectively, the SQU Centre for Sustainable Energy Research and the Nanoscale Research Centre was also approved.

In the context of SQU's efforts to empower students and enhance and value their academic and extracurricular endeavours, three university award initiatives were adopted: for inter-faculty sports activity; for the best student research project, and for outstanding student group.

The Tender Board:

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.

On 28 March 2017, the Tender Board introduced the Esnad ('support' in Arabic) registration system, an e-tendering portal for the government procurement department that is raising efficiency levels by speeding up the evaluation and assignment processes electronically, all in compliance with the Tender Law and its implementing regulations. Esnad also oversees the processing of related financial transactions electronically. In associated interpretations, the Esnad symbolism embodies many aspects of the cooperative relationship between the transacting parties, as well as the progressive trend towards more sustainable forms of development, a greener economy and greener environment, all dominant ideals in the national image of Oman.

Education Council:

The Education Council (TEC) emerged from a triangular marriage of general State policy, the national development plan and the needs of the labour market. Royal Decree No. 48/2012 established the Council as an extension of the Higher Education Council, itself established in 1998 by virtue of Royal Decree No. 65/1998.

On this basis, and in line with its terms of reference, the Council since its inception has rolled out successive projects all designed with the purpose of developing education in the Sultanate.

In 2017, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said reviewed and endorsed the philosophy of education as espoused by the Sultanate's educational authorities, a philosophy that defines policy for all stages of the educational system and serves as a reference in

building curricula that harmonise with broad national objectives.

In the ongoing endeavour to upgrade technical and vocational training systems and align their programmes with the demand by economic development for skilled and professional cadres, the Education Council approved proposals to amend the existing title of 'vocational training centre' to 'vocational college' and to upgrade the Khaboura Fishermen's Training Institute to a vocational college specialising in marine technology and sciences.

The Council also approved the request of the National Automotive Higher Institute for elevation to college status, enabling it to offer specialist courses and programmes to the automotive sector. Finally, the Council approved the request of the Special Economic Zone Authority for establishment of a college to provide programmes and specialist courses of service to the region's economic activities. The upgrade will incorporate investment from the private sector.

The Oman Medical Specialty Board:

In order to cope with exponential growth in the Sultanate's health services sector since the 1970s and the unprecedented achievements logged as a consequence of intense focus on the provision of superb healthcare for citizens, it became necessary to bring home the process of internationally acknowledged training in general and specialised medicine.

In implementation of the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Omanisation is an ongoing national goal on the path to full self-reliance in the labour market. Royal Decree No. 31/2006 created the Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB), a legal personality with financial and administrative independence. Since its inception, the Board has accumulated a body of expertise in specialist medical education and can today claim position as a leading academic institution in this region of the world.

In addition to its operations inside Oman, the OMSB sponsors overseas training opportunities for doctors in various specialist skills. On 6 February 2017 the Council celebrated the graduation of the eighth batch of Omani doctors completing between four and six academic years of training abroad, a total of 107 successful postgraduates in 17 different medical specialties.

The Research Council:

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

The Council established an open research grants programme and in 2009 initiated the funding of research proposals submitted by researchers in various disciplines. The national strategy is to build competence and capacity and to nurture an environment likely to yield advanced research objectives. The programme receives research proposals, examines their potential and dispenses funding as appropriate in six research sectors: viz. energy

and industry; communications and information systems; the environment and vital resources; education and human resources; culture and social and basic sciences; health and social service).

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

In September 2017, the Council launched the Omani Virtual Science Library, Masader ('sources' in Arabic), which has the purpose of linking the Omani academic community with the best research resources in the world. Masader will also contribute to the promotion of scientific research activities for academics generally, as well as students of higher education institutions and other researchers in various sectors across the Sultanate.

The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority:

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

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

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

The Public Authority for Craft Industries:

The establishment of the Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI) was responsible for a spurt of growth in arts and crafts in Oman and incentivised a perception of opportunity in the sector as a source of income. This development harmonises readily with the national policy of economic diversification and promotion of private sector entrepreneurship and is paying dividends on the original investment in the PACI.

PACI works to advance the capabilities of artisans and adapt the output of the craft industries to contemporary trends. This it does through training and production initiatives that support aspects of the artisan production cycle and thus promote traditional craftsmanship as a viable source of employment income in the modern context.

Over the course of 2017, PACI implemented multiple support schemes for innovators and creative workers, managed through a structured system of practical, skills-based and productivity training programmes. These programmes are made available at purpose-built centres specialising in the task of preserving and transferring skills derived from the Omani heritage to younger generations.

As at July 2017, PACI had 180 artisan establishments on its register and 25 regular marketing outlets, in addition to independent market fair locations and

The Omani Charitable Organisation assists persons in need inside and outside the Sultanate and acts swiftly in cases of disaster or of individual or group accident.

craft group and mobile exhibits at retail and e-marketing portals.

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

Capital Market Authority:

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

New regulations and procedures were adopted by the Authority in 2016, the most prominent of which were those governing the sukuk market. Also adopted were amendments to the executive regulations of the Capital Market Law, which reduced disclosure periods for issuers and tightened control standards to guarantee adequacy in the capital market and secure financing.

The amendments also included a reclassification of markets raising the number of markets in the Muscat Securities Market to six: the regular market, the parallel market, the follow-up market, the third market, the securities and sukuk market and the preferential rights market.

The Oman Charitable Organisation:

The Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) supports various social care and relief causes both inside and outside the Sultanate. The Authority has provided assistance, as an example, to Palestinians in need, as well as providing resources for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and the establishment of a number of educational facilities in the West Bank. It has provided relief in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Pakistan and many other countries, arising from the tragic consequences of conflict, war and climate catastrophe, acting through such established international organisations as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UNHCR or the like.

The OCO also makes contributions in situations of personal or collective disaster resulting from accidents, earthquakes or famine in various parts of the world. It has special units devoted to the care of children and orphans, the disabled, the elderly and other disadvantaged social groups.

Information Technology Authority:

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

The Authority was responsible for creating the National Data Centre, which hosts the IT systems for all government institutions and provides disaster recovery solutions; and for implementing the Oman Government Network, a national telecommunications infrastructure that interconnects government entities. It aims to support and link other e-Government initiatives and ultimately to improve public services across the board.

The ITA was responsible for implementing G-Cloud, the Government Cloud Project designed to provide a common infrastructure, including servers, networks, warehousing and applications to serve the needs of all government agencies from a single platform.

The Authority uses Tam, the Electronic Certification Service provided by the ITA's National Digital Certification Centre (NDCC), allowing citizens and residents to use government e-services and transactions with a high degree of security, authenticity, integrity and confidentiality, thus protecting all e-transactions made by way of ID cards or mobile SIM cards.

The Authority was also responsible for implementing G-Cloud, the Oman Government Cloud Project that provides a common infrastructure, including servers, networks, storage and applications, such as enables the platform to meet the needs of all government agencies comfortably.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority:

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was established on 12 March 2002 under the Telecommunications Regulatory Act, issued by means of Royal Decree Law No. 30/2002 and designed to liberalise and upgrade services in the sector. It was given responsibility in 2012 for reorganising the national postal services sector in line with the Postal Services Executive Regulation Law that stemmed from Royal Decree No. 71/2012 on the development and liberalisation of the postal sector.
The TRA has concentrated its energies on giving users access to quality global communications services at affordable prices. To this end it promotes growth in the number of licensees operating in the market so as to be able to offer greater choice to the consumer.

The Authority has also worked to optimise the regulatory environment so that a product-conscious public may be assured of a world class service by the end of 2018.

To this end it sponsored two specific regulatory tools, the first relating to price (the Interconnected Access and Interconnection Regulation, the Retail Tariffs Regulation and the Accounting Separation Regulation); and the other to quality (the Quality of Service Regulation). These regulations were published in the Official Gazette in early 2016, and are expected to promote and encourage competition in the market and to improve the quality of services provided.

The Public Authority for Electricity and Water:

The Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW) was established under Royal Decree No. 922007/, issued on 9th September 2007, following the privatization of the electricity sector in 2004. The Authority is competent to regulate the electricity and water sector in the Sultanate in accordance with extant law. The PAEW - a legal entity that is financially and administratively independent - has the right to own the funds needed to enable it to achieve its objectives.

The Authority is responsible for executing the master plan for the water sector, as outlined for the period up to 2040. The plan involves a rollout of desalination projects and water transfer and distribution projects, aiming for high levels of coverage and increased reliability of water supply. The Sultanate's current water sector coverage, as per the latest statistics for 2015, is 60% and that figure is planned to rise to 98% by 2040.

Desalination plants are large projects which contribute significantly to enhancing the water security of the Sultanate. Under the 2040 strategy, the plants will become the main source of drinking water, with groundwater

Since its inception, the National Documents and Archives Authority has been collecting documents and archives of relevance to the Sultanate. Today it manages a large and important stock of historic material that documents a portion of the national memory.

retained as strategic storage. The PAEW is collaborating with the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, to expand existing desalination plants and establish new ones in order to meet the growing demand for potable water.

National Records and Archives Authority:

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), established under Royal Decree No 60/2007 issued on 2nd July 2007, as a national project to preserve Oman's history and establish a comprehensive system for managing public records related to government departments subject to the NRAA Law. Providing technical support and follow-up in the management of current and intermediate documents, through interaction with the relevant authorities, is one of the specific and most significant competencies of the Authority. It provides technical support to government units to assist them in preparing systems for the management of their own documents. As of May 2017, it had supported 45 units of the administrative apparatus of the State in this process, operating in compliance with the Records and Archives Law.

The Authority oversees and evaluates storage sites of intermediate documents on behalf of the concerned authorities, conducting regular field visits to these sites to make technical observations.

The NRAA has since its inception pursued its core aim of collecting documents and archives relating to the Sultanate from countries that contributed through their past relations with Oman to constituting the documentary archive. It also collects documents from citizens of the Sultanate. The NRAA has by these methods assembled a large and important store of documents representing a portion of the national memory.

In addition, since 2016, the NRAA has begun assembling into its safekeeping documents returned from units of the administrative apparatus of the State, in compliance with Records and Archives Law.

On 1 May 2017, the Commission conducted a safe disposal of documents to securely destroy paper documents, electronic containers and other storage devices on behalf of government and security agencies, companies, private institutions and individuals.

The Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development:

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

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

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

The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve manages an adequately supplied and high quality strategic reserve of basic foodstuffs on an ongoing basis.

The Public Authority for Social Insurance:

The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) has made significant strides in the drive to achieve social insurance cover for citizens working in the private sector. It was set up for this purpose under Royal Decree No. 72/1992. Its role is vital in protecting this segment of the working community. PASI aims to improve the quality of its services and promote mutual trust and satisfaction between employers and insured employees within the available resources and in line with laws and regulations in force.

The social insurance sector has logged many positive developments since the introduction of social insurance regulations in 1992 for Omanis working in the Sultanate's private sector. Successive amendments to insurance legislation have succeeded in extending the insurance umbrella and bringing in categories not protected by insurance in the early years of the system. There were 217,829 private sector employees insured under the scheme according to statistics available at the end of May 2017.

Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve:

The Public Authority for Stores and Food Reserve was established in 1980 by virtue of Royal Decree No. 62/1980. The Decree defined the basic role and function of the Authority as ensuring the availability of basic foodstuffs on a permanent basis in the quantities and state or readiness that would enable it to intervene rapidly in the event of a national emergency, such as a situation caused by climatic or other unanticipated upheaval.

The Authority's brief was recently expanded by means of Royal Decree No. 3/2017, which re-established its objectives and terms of reference in particular aspects, including implementation of the food security strategy, periodic reporting to the Council of Ministers, development of national policies and legislation related to the Sultanate's food security sectors, and the establishment of an integrated national food security information system by coordination with the concerned authorities.

The Authority signed a raft of new agreements in 2017 bearing on the importation of basic foodstuffs from overseas to cover current and potential future consumer needs. The agreements feed into its existing strategy of securing the available supply and storage of quality basic foodstuffs of strategic importance on a permanent basis.

The Public Authority for Consumer Protection:

On 28 February 2011, Royal Decree No. 26/2011 established the Public Authority for Consumer Protection (PACP). The PACP Regulations followed on 5 April 2011, pursuant to Royal Decree No. 53/2011.

From the outset the PACP has worked to enact legislation, regulations and guidelines within its terms of reference, bearing on price stability, the mobilisation of consumer awareness in regard to misleading advertising and the processing of relevant complaints from individuals and consumer associations. It examines and tests appropriate solutions to these issues, monitoring all commercial activity on an ongoing basis and observing the movement of goods and services and to ensure their proper distribution. It promotes competition, challenges commercial fraud and works to avert monopoly situations that would be harmful to the national economy. In

The Executive Regulation of the Consumer Protection Law was issued on 9 March 2017 to complete the complex body of legislation drafted to protect the consumer and provide a mechanism for actual application of the terms of the law.

general, it pursues action to protect and strengthen consumer rights in all of their aspects.

The Consumer Protection Law was issued under Royal Decree No. 66/2014 and the Competition Protection and Anti-Monopoly Law under Royal Decree No. 67/2014 to align with the current status of consumer transactions in the Sultanate's domestic and international markets. The Sultanate has been keen to introduce deterrent legislation that defends consumer and supplier rights from fraud. These laws also aim to regulate the relationship between the individual consumer and the business sector supplying goods and services.

The executive regulation of the Consumer Protection Law was issued on 9 March 2017 to complete the complex of legislation governing consumer protection, and gives scope for the actual application of the articles of this law.

The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm:

The Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD), established under Royal Decree No. 119/2011 on 26th October 2011, has been active in its role of managing the Special Economic Zone in Duqm, while overseeing business relations between companies and investors in the SEZAD Zone. It has concentrated on completing the drafting of legislation as necessary to the smooth running of the Economic Zone and to building its capacity in terms of technical, administrative and financial human resources to secure the maximum benefit for this enterprise.

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

On 6 September 2017, implementation of the new SEZAD regulations governing real estate development in the Special Economic Zone commenced. The attractive legislative environment offered by the regulations is expected to enhance SEZAD's efforts to attract local and foreign investment. At stake is the need to encourage the private sector to cooperate in the construction of multi-purpose real estate development projects aimed at the residential, commercial and tourism markets.

The Public Authority for Radio and Television:

The Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART) came into being on 19 October 2010, established by means of Royal Decree No. 108 /2010. It is responsible for the dissemination of its media message through successful audio and visual programming. PART's message promotes high-minded social and cultural values, community engagement and patriotic identification, embodying the state ideology and vision, and aspires to leadership in the field of audio-visual media. Its programming ethos is grounded in the historical authenticity of the Omani identity and the modern

Media content and production quality are subject to constant reassessment in this age of rapid change across the broadcasting field, and the body responsible for keeping pace with developments is the Public Authority for Radio and Television.

Renaissance and it offers a high-quality information product which is rewarded by strong audience confidence.

In its 2017 strategy, PART focused on developing its media content and production quality. It continues to keep abreast of the rapid developments overtaking the technical aspects of radio and television broadcasting with a view to maintaining and improving on its current well-regarded status in a field characterised by energetic and often aggressive competition.

The Public Authority for Manpower Register:

On 19th May 2013, Royal Decree No 32/2013 was issued to amend some of the provisions of the regulations for the Public Authority for Manpower Register. This Decree specifies the powers and prerogatives of the Authority, which is entrusted with the establishment of a comprehensive database of manpower in various departments within the government sector (civil, military and security) and in private sector establishments.

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

In August 2017, the Commission announced the availability of a new mechanism to facilitate job seekers applying for positions online or via SMS, a facility that will also help identify with greater precision the real numbers of long-term unemployed.

The Public Authority for Civil Aviation:

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

The Authority has worked diligently to extend the air transport network linking the Sultanate with the rest of the world. It has broadened the investment field, attracting international airlines into Oman's air space and facilitating the introduction of new national carriers. PACA's dynamic approach, viewing air access in all its forms and with all its attendant services as crucial to further economic development, is fuelling new non-oil sectors of revenue growth in Oman, serving tourism principally, but also business generally, as a self-financing arm of the national logistics system.

Regulatory changes have assisted the process of opening up the skies and PACA completed the drafting of the national civil aviation policy with efficient dispatch. Other achievements include the expansion of civil aviation activity, the easing of restrictions to private sector investment input and the arrival of Oman's first budget airline. Other companies have passed the preliminary general aviation assessment.

The Sultanate now has 92 air transport agreements with overseas countries, of which 31 are open skies agreements, and PACA has endorsed requests by several airlines to establish flight schedules, both domestic and international, into Sohar Airport.

As the Sultanate extends its network of overseas transport connections, the Public Authority for Civil Aviation is ramping up its open-door strategy of greater sector investment, initiating new connections with international airlines and creating opportunities for home-grown air carriers.

The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises:

The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Riyada ('leadership' in Arabic) was established by Royal Decree No. 36/2013 of 30 May 2013 to boost the SME sector and enlarge its contribution to the national economy. Its primary role would be to service the sector by furnishing technical and training programmes and other support services, such as career guidance, various consultation facilities and feasibility studies. The Authority issues the entrepreneur's privilege card to innovators and the self-employed and oversees entrepreneurship awards. It sponsors incubator systems and business centres, manages land usufruct rights and organises internal and external exhibitions and events.

The Authority assists SME entrepreneurs with economic feasibility studies, including the collection and analysis of relevant project information to determine viability. In addition to feasibility studies, the Authority supports entrepreneurs through the entire consultation process (commercial, administrative, marketing, technical), helping them prepare appropriate strategies for their chosen project. At the end of July 2017, 4,702 new SMEs had been registered with the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises, bringing the overall total number of such businesses to 27,923.

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance:

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

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

Omani Authority for Partnership for Development:

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

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

During 2016, the Authority completed the implementation of four projects: the National Capacity Enhancement Programme, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund, the

Oman Marine Biotechnology Centre and the Youth Skills Development Programme. It sponsored 247 courses benefiting 4,572 trainees from 14 military, security and civil agencies.

Public Authority for Mining:

The Public Authority for Mining (PAM) was established by Royal Decree No. 49/2014 issued 21st September 2014 with the founding strategy of conducting a comprehensive geological survey of the Sultanate and then developing the mining sector. The Authority has worked since its inception to refine the overall strategy for the mining sector in the Sultanate, the primary objective of which is to develop it to optimal benefit. Thus it seeks investment in and exploitation of mineral wealth in directions best suited to the objectives of economic diversification.

On 17 July 2017 PAM formally contracted for implementation of the Oman Mining Strategy, which defines the way forward for the mining sector over the coming 10 years. The Strategy constitutes a solid basis for the management and regulation of the sector, determines targets for the contribution of this sector to GDP, with anticipated annual growth levels, and suggests appropriate mechanisms for its development.

Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit:

The Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit (IFSU) was established by Royal Decree No. 50/2016 on 17 October 2016. The Authority is a legal entity with financial and administrative independence. It has the capacity to own, manage and dispose of fixed and movable funds.

The IFSU was established to both underpin and supervise the government›s drive towards economic diversification. It will be the official body responsible for monitoring government projects and initiatives in manufacturing, tourism, logistics, finance and innovative finance, the labour market and employment, fisheries and other of the 19 projects outlined in the Ninth Five-Year Plan to promote economic growth and reduce dependence on oil.

In order to afford the unit greater responsibility and secure its decision-making authority, the Royal Decree specified its direct subordination to the Minister of the Royal Court.

The IFSU will measure the progress of initiatives under the national diversification strategy against accurate performance indicators, coordinating with relevant units and individual entrepreneurs. It will be the first time that such established indicators are used on this scale in the Sultanate.

In its short lifespan, the IFSU has already proven to be an effective instrument in moving initiatives and projects through the implementation process, operating by way of steering committees that link the Unit with related sectors. These committees hold monthly meetings specific to each initiative or project.

The Unit also oversees partnership and business development initiatives that contribute to making the Sultanate an attractive and competitive environment to domestic and international investors.

The Omani National Committee for Education, Culture and Sciences:

The Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences (ONCECS) has as its main function

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Environmental Protection was the first Arab international award in the field of environmental protection. It was established in 1989 at the initiative of His Majesty the Sultan and with the willing approval of UNESCO.

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

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

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

Oman Human Rights Commission:

The Oman Human Rights Commission has endeavoured since it was founded in 2008 to deliver a clear and supportive vision of human rights in the Sultanate. It monitors the status of human rights, fundamental freedoms, responsibilities and duties, compliant with the terms of reference assigned to it under Royal Decree No. 124/2008.

The Commission (formerly known as the Human Rights Commission) is a legal entity with independence in the exercise of its duties. It is based in Muscat and is subordinate to the State Council (Majlis al Dawla).

On 18 April 2016, Royal Decree No. 23/2016 was issued amending the Commission's name to its current title. Royal Decree No. 24/2016 followed, appointing the Commission's 14 members, drawn from various areas of expertise and including among them four Omani women.

On 21 June 2017 Royal Decree No. 26/2017 appointed a Chairperson of the Commission.

National Youth Committee:

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

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

Its functions also include instilling religious values and the values of good citizenship, and promoting attachment to Oman's cultural heritage. It seeks to educate youth on matters of legislation that define their duties towards the State and society and guarantees their personal rights and freedoms as defined in the Basic law of the State. In February 2017, the Committee announced five programmes of action covering the third period (2016 - 2018) of its overall five-year plan (2016-2020). The programme addresses the issues of citizenship and affiliation, the Youth Development Programme, the Youth Participation Programme, the

Inspired by the need to achieve full readiness status in exceptional circumstances impacting public services, lifestyle or health, His Majesty directed the creation of the National Committee for Crisis for this purpose.

Economic Empowerment Programme and youth development generally.

The National Crisis Management Committee:

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

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

"Justice must take its course and must
be our goal as, with God's help and support,
we continue to develop and improve the judicial and
monitoring institutions so that we can satisfy our aspiration
of establishing an institution-based state...Support for the
judiciary and its independence is an obligation to which we
have committed ourselves . It is vital that its decisions
be respected without fear or favour;
everyone is equal
before the Law."

Qaboos bin Said

(Inauguration of the Council of Oman's 5th Term, 2011)

Justice and Equality

The supreme care of the judiciary was a primary consideration in the process of state building. With the modernisation of the justice system came greater respect for the status of the judiciary and superior performance, so that today the judiciary is a proud pillar of the modern State.

Fundamental values enjoyed by citizens and residents

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said is Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, having closely overseen the evolution of the judiciary in the Sultanate over the decades of the modern Renaissance.

Oman has passed many milestones on its journey to the sophisticated state of institutions that prevails today. One of the State's deepest concerns was the imperative to extend judicial oversight and the rule of law; to bring litigating parties closer in a system dedicated to justice and equality. Sultan Qaboos saw these values, and the civilising impact of a fair judicial system, as components of the society he envisioned – a society that was prosperous, safe and harmonious.

The first outstanding landmark in the evolution of the judicial system came with promulgation of the Basic Law of the State in the form of Royal Decree No. 101/1996. Its Chapter Six was dedicated to the judiciary and to modernisation of the judicial system. Royal Decree No. 9/2012 and 10/2012 issued on 29 February 2012 created the Supreme Judicial Council and reorganised the judiciary to conform with the principle of the state of institutions and law which had been progressing through successive

stages. The outcome of this incremental approach to reform was an advanced state of modernisation and development achieved without resistance. It required that the judiciary enjoy full independence, that there be a genuine and complete separation of powers, with each authority acting freely and without external interference or limitation in its functioning.

The Civil Transactions Law issued under Royal Decree No. 29/2013 of 6 May 2013 completed the legislative infrastructure that was the embodiment in appearance and practice of His Majesty's aspiration for justice in Oman.

The inauguration of the Supreme Court on 25 May 2016 was an event of major consequence, as the final institution among the judicial institutions of the Sultanate, and its highest legal authority. His Majesty, as Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, is a strong believer that an effective judiciary functions best in an appropriate environment and he has insisted that all facilities and services be afforded the judiciary, ensuring the smooth exercise of due process for all parties equally.

The development of the national court infrastructure has paralleled in pace and quality the advance of legislation, with court complexes now present in several governorates.

The Muscat Courts Complex was inaugurated in 2015, incorporating the Muscat Court of Appeal and Court of First Instance.

The courts complexes provide an excellent example of the electronic processing that is transforming the administration of society and that is a priority in the Sultanate. A one-stop-shop system is making it easier for the beneficiaries of judicial facilities, whether judges, lawyers or litigants, to access case details and obtain judgments.

The Omani judicial system has been the subject of international scrutiny and positive feedback. It rates highly among indicators that evaluate judicial systems globally. This validation is the fruit of decades of systematic and thoughtful planning, and a direct consequence of allegiance through all circumstances to the rule of law and the state of institutions. Justice delivered and perceived creates reassurance and has enhanced the status of confidence in Oman. A positive spinoff benefit of this perception is the ease with which the Sultanate can now attract capital investment and is becoming an influential and interactive participant in the global economy.

On 30 April 2017, the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs issued a new regulation bearing on judicial inspection. The regulation determined that the Directorate General of Judicial Inspection should be the agency responsible for the inspection process.

The Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs

The Basic Law of the State stipulates that "the rule of law shall be the basis of governance in the State" and, in exercise of this principle, the Sultanate has shown determination in creating an apparatus that guarantees the independence of the judiciary. Royal Decree No. 10/2012 reorganised the administration of justice, removing from the Ministry of Justice powers of court administration and judicial inspection and transferring these to the Administrative Affairs Council established and set out in the Judicial Authority Law. Royal Decree No. 54/2012 established a General Secretariat of the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs and the Council immediately pronounced its independence from the Ministry of Justice and continues to work towards full completion of the Sultanate's intention to install a sophisticated judicial system, progressive in both its infrastructure and its human resources.

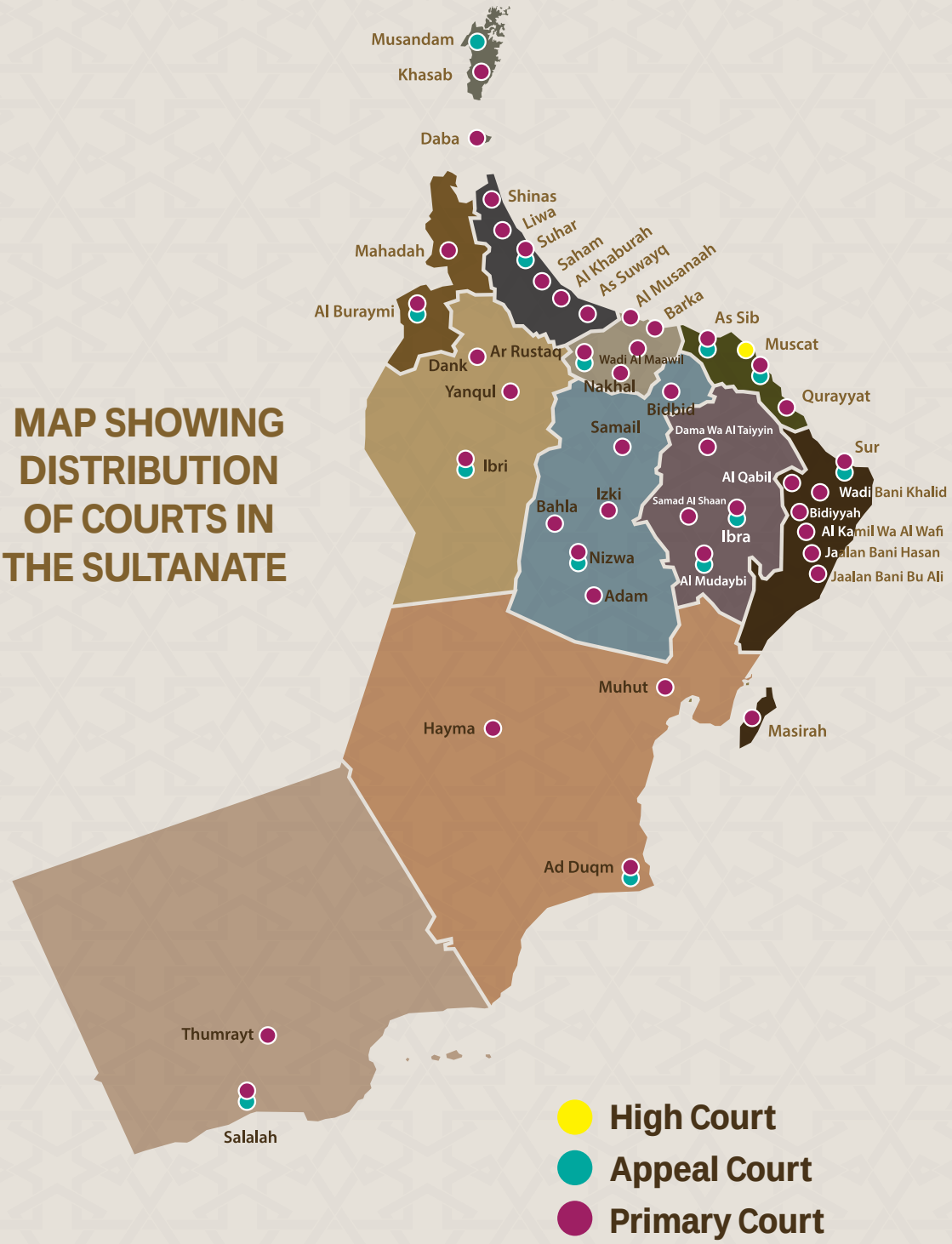
Article 16 of Royal Decree No 90/1999 establishing the Judicial Authority Law states that "The Judiciary shall have an Administrative Affairs Council headed by the Chairman of the Supreme Court; its members shall comprise the three longest-serving deputy chairmen of the Supreme Court, as well as the Attorney General, the longest-serving Court of Appeal chairman and the longest-serving Primary Court chairman." When the post of Chairman of the Council becomes vacant, or in his absence, or in the event of an obstacle precluding his attendance, he is replaced by the longest-serving member. In the absence of a Council member or in the event of an obstacle precluding his attendance, he is replaced by the next member in line, from the area represented by the retiring member.

On 30 April 2017, the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs issued new directives governing the parameters of judicial inspection. The directives determined that the Directorate General of Judicial Inspection would be the administrative body responsible for the inspection process.

Technical inspection evaluates the judicial output of judges and measures performance. It is conducted once in every judicial year. Continuous inspection is inspection of the judicial work of the courts and other aspects of judicial performance in order to assess the organisational efficiency and exercise of due process.

The hosting by the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs of the 7th Conference of Presidents of the Supreme Courts of the Arab States on 25 October 2016 was an example of the Sultanate's ongoing commitment to joint Arab action in the judicial domain. The conference, as with its predecessors, helped cement the bonds linking the Sultanate's Supreme Court with its counterparts in the Arab world. Contemporary systems enable sister countries to familiarise themselves with relevant legislative principles and provisions. The objective of this process is to standardise legal terminology and thereby work towards the goal of unifying judicial systems.

MAP SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF COURTS IN THE SULTANATE



The Supreme Court building is an architectural landmark through which His Majesty the Sultan, Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, wished to announce the prominence which would be afforded the halls of justice under his leadership.

The Supreme Court

The magnificent Supreme Court building stands proudly across from another architectural masterpiece, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.

The Supreme Court is the capstone of the judicial pyramid in the Sultanate. Established by means of the Judicial Authority Law announced as Royal Decree No. 90/1999, its mission is to oversee the proper application of shari'a and other laws and of judicial decrees and procedures, as well as to contribute to the development of national legislation.

It convenes as stipulated in Article 139 of the Code of Civil and Commercial Procedure, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 29/2002, in order to consider appeals brought before it on certain rulings of the courts of appeal. The Supreme Court building and the Supreme Judicial Council building were inaugurated on 25 May 2016. The new building is an imposing structure that successfully combines elements drawn from Oman's architectural heritage, including Islamic embellishments, with powerful contemporary design features.

The building is exceptionally sited in Al-Ghubrah, adjacent to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, where its location and design were calculated to emphasise the favoured positon of the judiciary in the Renaissance era, a symbolism of particular interest to His Majesty. Justice underpins true sovereignty and is a main pillar of the state, and the new Supreme Court building is a monument to the progress that enables the Omani judiciary to exercise their functions today in an environment that surpasses international standards.

The appeal courts hear appeals against verdicts rendered in the courts of first instance. Each appeal chamber consists of three judges. There are appeal courts in each of the Sultanate's governorates.

Courts of Appeal

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

Royal Decree No. 14/2001 initiated the establishment of six appellate courts: in Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Ibri and Ibra. However, with advancing urbanisation and rising population density, the number of appellate courts has now been expanded to 13, so that every governorate has one appellate court and Muscat has two, one at Seeb and one in Muscat itself. In 2016, a combined 27,173 cases were heard by courts of appeal across the Sultanate, of which more than three quarters achieved sentencing completion.

The Criminal Appeals Chambers received the largest number of all appeals heard, at 8,599 for the year. This was followed by civil appeals, at 7,318, commercial, at 4,467, labour 3,003 and misdemeanours 2,026. The Shari'a Court heard 1,760 appeals.

Primary courts

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

The Sultanate's 44 primary courts are to be found throughout the country.
A total of 63,002 cases were heard before the Sultanate's primary courts in 2016, and 48,766 rulings delivered in the various circuits. The largest number of cases was heard in the civil court system, with 15,416 prosecutions, followed by the correctional courts, which prosecuted 17,164 petty criminal cases and achieved 15,064 summary convictions.

The commercial branch handled 13,669 prosecutions, with 9,935 cases reaching conclusion. Meanwhile, in the Shari'a system, 6,164 suits were brought and 4,670 resolved. The labour court heard 4,682 disputes, of which 3,691 were resolved.

Public Funds Court

Oman's court system is progressive and dynamically evolving, flexible in the face of society's changing needs. It observes developments as they arise and adapts quickly, so that litigants may at all times be confident in the judicial system and its ability to obtain justice in all matters of difference or dispute.
As a signatory of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and in application of Royal Decree No. 64/2013, the Council for Judicial Administrative Affairs, in judicial year 2015/2016, established a specialised department of public funds at the Muscat Primary Court. The Public Funds Court has jurisdiction in cases involving bribery, misuse of public funds, wilful neglect and misconduct in public office, as well as all offences bearing on the unlawful handling of public money.

The Public Funds Court challenges financial and administrative corruption in all its forms and promotes the principles of transparency and integrity.

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

Of the 65 cases involving public funds brought before the court in 2016, 18 were held over and six yielded successful criminal prosecutions. Arising from these convictions, some RO13 million in misappropriated public funds was handed over to the State Treasury.

The Administrative Court of Justice, born of Royal Decree No. 91/1999, was the product neither of expedience nor of a replication of judicial ideals pursued in other countries, but rather of extensive preliminary study and deliberation. It was created at the time deemed most appropriate for its absorption into the legal system, a bastion in the modern context of the principle of legality and the supremacy of the rule of law.

Prior to this qualitative shift in the evolution of the Sultanate's judicial system, the Ombudsman's Court had been a linchpin of judicial practice in Oman at various times in its history. The Sultanate had also been served by a local system of ruling on grievances by the administrative headman, who weighed claims made before him and issued decisions. Claims filed by members of the public against administrative bodies of the State were heard by specialised committees, and the Royal Court also sponsored a legal commission to investigate and rule on grievances. Finally, a judge affiliated to the Ministry of Housing issued rulings

A monument to transparent justice, the Administrative Court of Justice upholds public confidence in the legal system by guaranteeing the accountability of public servants and upholding the rights and freedoms of the individual.

in disputes arising from application of the land law.

This historic track culminated in the establishment of the Administrative Court of Justice, the natural outcome of generations of steady, incremental progress. The Court immediately established itself as a pillar of justice and the rule of law. It has a powerful influence on public sentiment, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of individuals by making the administrative authorities of the State fully accountable, as subject to the laws of the land as its least powerful citizens. It is not enough that the law should stipulate such in its various provisions, but rather this state of justice must be upheld by a competent and incorruptible judiciary that monitors without prejudice the conduct of the administrative authorities in the State in its dealings with individuals and community institutions, as well as its commercial, economic and investment activities. The work of the Administrative Court has closely mirrored the progressive advance of Oman's investment-friendly environment, establishing the foundations of legality in accordance with the jurisdiction vested in it by Article 6 of its founding law. It oversees administrative decisions and such contracts as govern transactions conducted between private sector institutions and administrative entities. Particularly applicable in this context are the projects for which government bodies award tenders to local or foreign companies. Also in its jurisdiction is the granting or prevention of permits that organise and facilitate the work of the private sector.

In addition, the Court provides protection to contractors in their relationship with the administrative authorities. There are fundamental differences that distinguish administrative contracts from the type of contract concluded between individuals or between individuals and commercial entities. In an administrative contract, the administrative authority has unusual privileges that are not common in private law. A contractor with an administrative body needs a specialised judicial process to balance these privileges afforded the administrative authority with their statutory contractual rights.

It should be noted that the precedents established by the Court through its rulings, and the principles on which it bases its legal deliberations, have been greatly instrumental in ensuring that administrative bodies function in close accordance with these parameters. Administrative bodies have shown themselves anxious to implement Court directives willingly, fully and with dispatch. Indeed it is common for an administrative authority to respond to litigant claims while a case is still being heard and before an expected ruling that would obligate them to do so is delivered.

The Notarisation Department has an important job to do organising relationships and preserving rights for individual or institutional parties seeking to have social, commercial or financial relationships formally established.

The Notary Public Departments

The work of notaries public in certifying diverse transactions and relationships relieves the courts of a substantial body of work.

The Notary Public Departments play a vital role in regulating relations between parties and sealing their rights in social transactions of many kinds, such as in documenting marriage and divorce arrangements, verifying widowhood, costs and the like; and also commercial relationships, where notaries clarify the exact nature of trade and financial ties for individuals and institutions. Notary departments are independent and are present in all governorates, a total of 61 distributed throughout the Sultanate.

Notaries issued, approved and verified a combined 196,254 documentary items in 2016, both official and unofficial in origin, and including declarations of non-marriage and certificates of divorce and widowhood. Of this total, 141,110, or 72%, constituted official documents and 43,366, or 22%, were endorsements of informal declarations. There were 9,160 certificates of non-marriage (5%) and 1,724 certificates of widowhood (1%). A further 894 informal declarations were endorsed.

The Reconciliation Committees

The Reconciliation Committees embody the inspirational vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and the government has shown itself fully committed to this vision. Taking a broad-horizon approach to mitigating the impact of disputes between litigants, successive governments have pursued policies that afford value to the reconciliation process in society. Oman's long heritage of tolerance has proven success as the basis of a harmonious society. In the Sultanate today, the virtues of reconciliation, counsel and tolerance have been reformulated into legal frameworks that merge these Islamic values with the finer aspects of a modern judicial system.

It is against this background that

Preparing cadres of judicial and legal personnel who are well qualified by established international standards to keep pace with legislative changes and developments is the mission of the Higher Institute of Justice.

the Mediation and Reconciliation Committees were founded, with justice being assessed and served by public figures selected for their competence in the sphere. The Mediation and Reconciliation Law was issued in the form of Royal Decree No. 98/2005, filling a necessary, modernised niche in the mechanism of administering justice.

In its Article 4, the Mediation and Reconciliation Law specified the competence of the Mediation and Reconciliation Committees in adjudicating civil, commercial and personal status disputes.

There are 46 Mediation and Reconciliation Committees distributed across the Sultanate and these committees handled 18,934 applications for reconciliation during 2016. Where the parties were present, a 90 % reconciliation success rate was achieved, and that is a resounding confirmation of the success of the system.

The Higher Institute of Justice

With a reputation for academic excellence, graduates of the Higher Institute of Justice support the national development process and rule of law.

The Higher Institute of Justice is a beacon that lights the path to national development and the rule of law. It has done much to consolidate and expand awareness of the law and how it needs to permeate every aspect of life if society and the individual are to feel secure in their rights. The Institute was established by means of Royal Decree No. 35/2010 of 11 April 2010 and its inauguration the following year was a landmark achievement of the Renaissance.

The mission of the Institute is to prepare and qualify judicial cadres who are fully abreast of ongoing developments in the nation's judicial and legal institutions. Their training is derived from specialist academic curricula and fully compares with international qualification standards. At the end of 2016, the Institute had turned out 159 graduates, including assistant judges, assistant administrative judges and prosecutors. In the same academic year, the Institute was supervising 73 separate training courses, serving an aggregate 1,325 participants.

The Public Prosecution

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

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

The work of the Public Prosecution Department depends on the personnel who head up its investigations and prosecute cases, and its success is in large part a reflection of their capacity. As such, the recruitment and training of this cadre is conducted with extreme selectivity.

Appointments are made from the top tranche of graduates in shari'a and secular law. In the years since its establishment, the Public Prosecution Department has accumulated extensive judicial expertise, giving it a strong record of success in the courts, where it ably exercises its role in the investigation and disposal of even the most complex cases.

There were 154 Department personnel functioning across the country in mid-2017, of whom 28 were women. A further 26 auxiliaries completed training. Overall, 1,071 administrative staff were engaged, of whom 298 were full-time employees.

The Public Prosecution case load declined significantly in 2016, with 37,972 cases prosecuted. This represented a drop of 7.5% over the 2015 figure of 41,072 cases.

Broken down by category, there were 3,482 felonies among the crime figures, and 34,065 misdemeanours. Of these, 5,737 verdicts were appealed. In all, 38,002 accused were listed in 2016 and 21,075 cases, or 56% of the total for the year, filed for hearing. Thirty eight percent, or 14,756 cases, were referred and 1,710 (or 5%) were still under investigation.

Legal Affairs

The Ministry of Legal Affairs plays a vital role in the development of the Omani integrated legal system. The pyramidal system is founded on the Basic Law of the State, promulgated by way of Royal Decree No. 101/96 and on which all Royal decrees and the laws issued subsequently are built.

Royal Decree No. 14/94 defined the powers of the Ministry of Legal Affairs

in developing laws and regulations reflective of the advances witnessed by the contemporary Sultanate. The Ministry coordinates with relevant ministries and government bodies in this respect. It also reviews draft Royal decrees, regulations and proposals submitted for decision on behalf of the various ministries and government units prior to their issuance and publication in the Official Gazette.

The role of the Ministry is not limited to preparing legislation and enactment procedures. It also extends to a review of existing legislation to assess where adjustments may be needed and this it does in coordination with the relevant government bodies. The Ministry also provides legal opinions and issues official approved interpretations of Royal decrees, laws and statutes when circumstances so require.

A consequence of this is the merging of legal precedents and concepts towards a common understanding and application across society.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs exercises its jurisdiction in the rendering of binding legal opinions as requested by State administrative bodies or public institutions, when disagreement has arisen on the interpretation of royal decrees, laws or ministerial regulations or decisions.

In addition to its functions in the areas of legislation and advisory opinion, the Ministry of Legal Affairs reviews contracts involving financial obligations of more than half a million Omani rials before these are signed by any governmental body. It reviews draft international agreements concluded by the Sultanate and applications for accession to existing conventions. International conventions are important legal instruments insofar as their provisions have the force of domestic law after ratification by the Sultanate by Royal Decree, conformant with the provisions of Article 76 of the Basic Law of the State.

The Ministry is also competent to review draft memoranda of understanding concluded by government agencies with other countries.

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

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

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

Laws and regulations guarantee religious and intellectual freedoms for all citizens and residents alike and enshrine freedom of worship and expression, within the limits of the law, as fundamental human rights.

Tolerance .. a well-established feature of Omani society

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque blends Islamic originality and architectural modernity to stunning effect.

Throughout history, Oman has been a centre of cultural communication and coexistence, an ethos fed by its interactions with civilisations across the navigable world. Omani ships explored the oceans extensively, frequenting distant ports, where they brought the flag of peace and friendship. Those early Omani voyagers embodied the true meaning of understanding, tolerance and openness to cultures. Their gift for navigation and trade enabled them to contribute significantly to the spread of Islam, to communicate its message of tolerance and humanitarian values to the populations of coastal East Africa and the shores of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. They brought the pacific values of Ibadhism to Chinese and Asian ports, where Omanis were respected for their sanguine demeanour and ability to accommodate difference in opinion, religion, culture and civilisation with ease.

The tolerance demonstrated by Omanis was no mere historical aberration. It is a deep-rooted facet of the Omani character that is as valid today as ever it was in the past. When the modern Renaissance was conceived, tolerance was built into its founding principles. Addressing the nation on its Second National Day on 18 November 1972, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said referred to the emerging new Oman as “open to the civilisation of this world of which we are an integral part.”

The laws and regulations instituted under the modern Renaissance guarantee religious and intellectual freedoms and ensure that citizens and residents alike are treated equally under the law, since equality is a fundamental human right that cannot be withdrawn. Everyone has the right freely to practice his or her religious rites so long as no others are harmed. Article 28 of the Basic Law of the State states that “the freedom to perform religious rituals in accordance with established customs is guaranteed without prejudice to public order or morals,” while the places of worship of other religions are available to facilitate non-Muslims in freely performing their religious rites. The Omani Personal Status Law guarantees that non-Muslims residing in the Sultanate have

the right to apply their own provisions, subject to non-conflict with Omani tradition, as conforms with Article 282 of the Law.

On 9 October 2016, the Public Prosecution Department issued Judicial Circular No. 22/2016, which declared that "all prosecutors are required to take firm legal action in matters of religious or sectarian strife because of the urgency of the situation, and in implementation of legislators' intention to see such despicable acts criminalised."

In the context, it is no surprise that the International Religious Freedom Report continues to commend the role of the Sultanate and its efforts to consolidate the values of dialogue, tolerance and moderation between religions and cultures, both in Oman and abroad. The Report, which is issued annually by the US Department of State on the status of religious freedoms throughout the world, rates highly the Sultanate's enactment of legislation designed to protect freedom of worship, so long as this does not violate public order or ethics. Discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation or belief is not tolerated in law, nor are assaults on religious values or violations of public order.

The 2016 Report noted the absence of any recorded violations or discrimination on grounds of religious affiliation, belief or practice, and this included the absence of religious detainees or prisoners in the Sultanate. The Report noted also that Oman's Basic Law identified Islam as the national religion and Islamic law as the source of all legislation. Nevertheless discrimination on the basis of religion was proscribed, and individuals were free to practice their religion so long public morality and public order were not disturbed.

Prominent mention was made of the series of exhibitions arranged under the umbrella title of "Message of Islam from Oman" and acknowledging that the exhibitions presented Islam as practised in Oman as a tolerant religion that emphasised the common denominators between the Islamic schools of thought and between Islam and other religions. The original concept of the series grew from a desire to counter the negative stereotypical image of Islam in the West, and to honour tolerance as a feature of great value in human relations.

The exhibition had been seen by more than four and a half million visitors at one hundred locations in 30 countries by mid-2017.

The exhibition's mission is, through acquaintance, to promote understanding and to convey the Sultanate's experience of coexistence and religious tolerance. It approaches the subject from the triple aspects of religious tolerance, understanding of others and peaceful coexistence. Coordinated with the help of a number of organisations, notably UNESCO, it is supported also by religious centres that share the values of moderation and coexistence among peoples, cultures and religions. In addition to the touring exhibit, the Message of Islam from Oman has published inspirational material in card form and promoted its values on social media and websites in multiple languages. The exhibition catchphrase: "Let me do something for tolerance" personalised its purpose of encouraging the spread of a culture of tolerance in human societies, favouring individual, collective and institutional action as a practical expression of this compassionate ethos.

The choice of slogan comes from a belief in the crucial role of tolerance where a gap needs to be bridged in strained relations, where different points of view must be brought closer

The "Message of Islam from Oman" exhibit has been seen by more than four and a half million visitors throughout the world. By mid-2017, the mobile exhibit had visited some 100 stations in 30 cuontries.

in order to find common ground in an atmosphere of peaceful dialogue.

To date, seven inspirational cards have been issued, the first of which bears the message: "We have made you peoples and tribes that you may know (one another)". The second is a self-explanatory: "I love for people what I love for myself». The third, from Hadith No. 18, and fourth continue the theme, with: «Behave well towards others" and: "Be good to your parents." The fifth card encourages loyalty: "To those who have trusted you, return the trust," and the sixth physical moderation with the advice: "You have a duty to your body." The seventh card in the series has a message for the soul: "The best of people are those who benefit others", an exhortation that appeals to the most evolved of human aspirations – cooperation, shared action for the public benefit and a culture of charitable work, voluntarily undertaken.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is responsible for the "Islam in Oman" website, which is presented in eight international languages. In addition, it has produced three documentaries designed to highlight aspects of the Sultanate's experience in the areas of tolerance and coexistence, Islamic art and religious discourse.
Under its policy of highlighting the value of Oman's intellectual contribution and cultural influence generally on Islamic thought, and as an expression of its profound interest in system values that enrich the human experience in an integrated manner, the Ministry publishes a quarterly entitled «Tafahum» (Understanding), which seeks to narrow differences among people of different beliefs and to foster the Islamic call for tolerance.

As at July 2017, 49 issues of Tafahum had been published, along with a book also entitled Tafahum, incorporating a series of historically valuable philosophical and scientific studies in the Arab-Islamic tradition.

Demonstrating its willingness to embrace technology, and with the blessing of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Ministry, on 12 June 2017, launched "Muscat e-Qur'an", establishing a unique precedent in electronic printing. Muscat e-Qur'an is only the second Qur'an to be published in non-print format and the

The "Message of Islam from Oman" travelling exhibit demonstrates the religious tolerance that distinguishes Oman and highlights the common denominators shared by the various Islamic sects and by Islam and other religions.

As only the second Qur'an to be published in non-print format and the first electronically, «Muscat e-Qur'an» is an exceptional achievement. It is reproduced in Naskh script, with all of its complex calligraphic structures intact.

The "Muscat e-Qur'an", sponsored by the Sultanate, is a ground-breaking electronic publishing feat.

first electronically. The searchable text is reproduced in the Naskh script, with all of the complex calligraphic strictures intact, an exceptional feat that ensures the integrity of the Holy Book across computer platforms. The web Qur'an is a valuable resource for all those interested in the Arabic language and the aesthetics of its script. It is destined to become a building block in the teaching of Arabic calligraphy and a means to preserving love for the mother tongue at a time when Arabic faces various challenges in our contemporary world.

The e-Qur'an is the latest product of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs' endeavours to disseminate knowledge of the Book of Allah. In 2006 it published Mushaf Oman, followed in 2008 by Al-Mushaf Al-Omani. Oman has a long tradition of service to the Holy Book, dating to the earliest days of Islam, when it was an enthusiastic adopter of the faith. One aspect of this enthusiasm was expressed in successive reproductions of the Holy Book, most notably by Abdullah bin Bashir al-Sahari in 1157 AH, and later by the scribes Khamis bin Sulaiman al-Harithi in 1186 AH and Mas'ud ibn Khalfan al-Riyami in 1249 AH. This precious legacy bears witness to an aesthetic devotion to the cultural heritage of Islam that has been a preoccupation to Omanis across the centuries.

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

The Ministry sponsors upwards of sixteen thousand mosques under the mosques programme, as well as 350 Koran schools, incorporating some one thousand five hundred teachers. The Ministry has also launched the Qur'an distance learning project, providing access to all-comers online. It maintains a publishing list of religious books and other material of Omani provenance, along with new imprints of the Qur'an

and the electronic Qur'an.
In addition to the Sultan Qaboos academic chairs established at some of the most prestigious American, European, Asian and Australian universities, and which play a vital and useful role in the study of Arab and Islamic civilisation, and in deepening the foundations and reach of dialogue between religions, the Sultanate has either established or supported the setting up of cultural centres and foundations around the world that share the goal of achieving more understanding between peoples and cultures.

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

Motivated by the wishes of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and in exercise of instructions delivered by him, numerous new mosques have been built throughout the Sultanate, helping to alleviate the pressure on existing mosques as the population grows. Other mosques have been restored or rebuilt, and ancillary services added to facilitate the needs of worshippers. The many mosques that bear the name of HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said and which were built at his personal expense, tell another chapter of the story of the modern Renaissance he pioneered and of its deep concern for people. The Renaissance believes in providing the faithful with the means to perform their rites of worship in surroundings of peace, tranquility and safety. It tells a story of Oman's role in and contribution to Islamic civilisation from its earliest days, as evidenced in architectural masterpieces that exude the spirit of Islam. Wonderful mosques, marked by creativity and harmony in their engineering and design, express the deeply felt impact of Islamic culture in the hearts of Muslims, manifested in these religious buildings of surpassing beauty.

The Office of His Eminence, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, plays a leading role in spreading religious awareness based on proper knowledge of the Holy Qur'an and the guiding teachings of the Prophet's Sunnah. The office is the recipient every year of more than one hundred and fifty thousand religious fatwas in all areas of human activity.

The Institute of Sharia Sciences is an academic institution with a mission to gain validation for the noble values of Islam, for tolerance, love and mutual compassion in society. Its ideal world is one in which free cultural exchange is fully accepted and differences celebrated.

Through its academic programmes, the Institute turns out highly qualified experts in shari'a law, Islamic studies and related skills. It uses what means are available at any time, including technology, in the service of its aims, including to promote and implement the distance learning project. This latter project constitutes a particularly efficient use of technology in delivering content to a wide audience. It has availed of an innovative educational service to stimulate a climate of serious academic research.

The distance learning programme enables students comfortable with the e-learning process to pursue their studies from both inside and outside the Sultanate. On offer by the Institute are a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies, jurisprudence and fundamentals, as well as diplomas in the disciplines of Islamic sciences.

There were 1,592 admissions to the fourth year of the programme in 2016/2017, participating from within the Sultanate and from various Arab and Islamic locations overseas.

"...We have been closely following the work of the Council of Oman in both its branches – the Majlis al Shura (Consultation Council) and the Majlis al Dawla (State Council), and we appreciate the efforts it has made during its previous terms. Its contribution has had a tangible impact on the overall development process, leading towards further growth and progress."

Qaboos bin Said

(Inauguration of the Council of Oman's 6th Term, 2015)

The Council of Oman

The Omani Shura process has advanced incrementally over the years to become what it is today: a system of two chambers: the appointed State Council and the elected Consultation (or Shura) Council.

The Shura

A proud witness to the accomplishments of the modern Renaissance is the new Council of Oman building.

A partnership approach founded on heritage and values

The Sultanate's path to shura, as represented today in the Council of Oman, was a journey of many stages, each of which brought incremental changes to the exercise of democracy. The journey began in the second decade of the Renaissance process initiated and guided, from 1970 to the present day, by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. First came the State Advisory Council, established in 1981, followed a decade later, in 1991, by the Consultation Council. The shura process progressed without interruption to arrive at its current format, a system of two legislative chambers: the appointed State Council and the elected Consultation Council. The two chambers share position beneath the broad umbrella of the Council of Oman, though each enjoys a separate legal personality and financial and administrative independence.

Article 9 of the Basic Law defines the universal values and core components of the system of governance in the Sultanate, stipulating that it be based on justice, consultation, equality and the right of citizens to participate in public affairs. Article 59 stipulates as

The Council of Oman consists of the State Council, whose members are appointed by His Majesty for their unique expertise, and the Consultation (Shura) Council, whose members are elected by the voting public.

a fundamental principle the rule of law, and Article 10 lays out the principles that must guide the drafting of policy in the Sultanate. The basis for true shura, or consultation, are best grounded in values derived from the country's heritage and Islamic identity, values that respect history, while taking advantage of modern tools to create a sound administrative system that guarantees justice, peace and equality for all; that ensures respect for public order and concern for the supreme interests of the nation.

Royal Decree No 39/2011 of 12 March 2011 granted legislative and supervisory powers to the Council of Oman that expanded the Council's ability to express the aspirations of citizens and engage them more fully in the decision-making process. This was an important step forward in the democratic practice and it empowered communities and strengthened the consultative phase of policy-making that is a distinctive expression of Oman's historic preference for a shura approach. This was accompanied by several measures which together reinforce the independence of the judiciary and public prosecution.

The State Council plays a vital role in guiding the strategy of comprehensive national development and evolution of Omani society, validating its mandate as an effective legislative and supervisory body.

Council of Oman (Majlis Oman)

The State Council is a vital contributing resource in the Sultanate's comprehensive development aims.

The Council of Oman (Majlis Oman) consists of the State Council (Majlis al-Dawla), whose members are appointed by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos from among citizens of distinction with exceptional levels of expertise, and the Consultation Council (Majlis al-Shura), whose members are publicly elected. The Council of Oman is convened by His Majesty the Sultan to discuss issues of concern raised by him.

Royal Decree No. 99/2011, issued on 19 October 2011 and amending certain provisions of the Basic Law of the State, lays out the principles underpinning performance and constitutes a true interpretation of the intention to extend the powers of the Council of Oman as outlined in Royal Decree No. 39/2011.

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

The mission of the centre is to assist and empower the honourable members of the State and Consultation Councils in the exercise of their legislative and supervisory duties. It also offers refresher and other skills courses as needed to personnel to enable them to upgrade and regularise work procedures. It has already conducted numerous courses and training programmes in various fields for members of the two chambers.

The Council of State and Consultation Council are key building blocks of the State of Institutions, the founding principles of which were elaborated by His Majesty the Sultan.

The State Council

Contributing actively to national policy initiatives

The State Council is central to the process of bringing to fruition major national development goals and the process of advancing Omani society.

Its distinguished members provide crucial expertise in the exercise of its legislative and supervisory functions.

The State Council acts in conjunction with the Consultation Council to form a powerful arm of the state of institutions apparatus conceived into existence by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

In defining the role of the State Council, His Majesty sought to create a strong building block of democracy that could stand over the nation's achievements, validating the principles under which they were accomplished, and under which the process of a heritage and faith-based shura could evolve in a contemporary context.

The Sixth Term of the State Council has 14 women among its membership, representing 17% of the total.

Membership of the State Council

Overseeing the activity of the State Council and its various committees and assisting it in the discharge of its responsibilities is the Office of the State Council.

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

His Majesty, on 7 November 2015, issued Royal Decree No. 47/2015 appointing members of the State Council to its sixth term. The Council consists of 84 members in addition to the Chairman, 61 of whom are new appointees. Twenty three others were retained from the previous session. The new appointees to the Council include 14 women, or 17% of the total membership.

The Basic Law of the State specifies mechanisms for the debate and approval of draft laws by the Council that best serve its mission to further the country's development.

Terms of reference

Article 58 of Royal Decree No. 99/2011 on the Council of Oman defines the powers available to the State Council and necessary for it to achieve its objectives. **These objectives consist of:**

1. approving or amending draft legislation referred to it by the Council of Ministers
2. proposing new legislation
3. discussing and making recommendations affecting development projects and discussing and making recommendations of the annual State Budget as forwarded by the Council of Ministers
4. It also reviews the annual report of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution.

The Basic Law of the State sets out mechanisms for the debate and approval of bills brought before the Council bearing on matters of national and local significance. The Council commissions studies and proposes solutions to issues of development generally and to specific economic and social problems.

The second annual session of the Sixth Term of the State Council (2015-2019) was a particularly busy one, with major proposals and strategies debated and brought to successful conclusion.

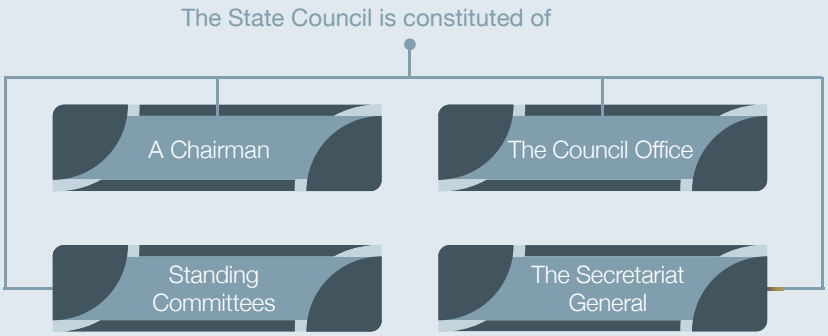
Sessions of the State Council

The State Council is a pillar of the state of institutions and has crucial legislative and oversight functions.

The State Council is appointed for a term of four years, consisting of four annual sessions. The duration of each session is no less than eight months, beginning with the annual inaugural session of the Council of Oman.

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

Structure of the State Council



The Council Chairman

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

The Council Office

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

Standing committees

In its current sixth session, the Council has five standing committees: the Legal Committee, the Economic Committee, the Social Committee, the Education and Research Committee and the Committee on Culture, Information and Tourism.

The Committees are constituted from the Council membership as determined by the Council at the recommendation of the Council Office at the outset of each annual session. Their job is to study draft laws referred to them, in addition to the specific topics within their jurisdiction.

The Secretariat-General

The Secretariat-General is composed of the Secretary-General, appointed by royal decree, supported by a team of assistants and staff from various departments. The Secretariat performs such actions as are necessary to assist the Council and its affiliate bodies in fulfilling their collective mission in accordance with the mandate of the Council Office.
The Secretariat General consists of four assisting Secretariats: the Assistant Secretariat-General for Sessions and Committee Affairs, the Assistant Secretariat-General for Information and Research Affairs and the Assistant Secretariat-General for Administrative and Financial Affairs and the Assistant Secretariat for Media and Public Relations.

Productive sessions & smooth passage of legislation

Periodic joint meetings of the State Council and Shura (Consultation) Council facilitate the smooth integration of their separate roles, all in the public interest.

The second annual session of Council of State's sixth term (2015-2019) has been particularly productive in terms of the tasks seen through to successful completion.

The Council convened in ordinary session on nine occasions between the beginning of the second annual session and up to the end of May 2017, during which it debated a series of bills and proposals passed to it by government, as well as studies commissioned by the Council itself. It approved, following intensive discussions, the draft General State Budget for the fiscal year 2017.

The Council also passed five major pieces of legislation: the Cultural Heritage bill, the Trademarks of the GCC States bill and the Organisation and Protection of Aflaj Sites on the World Heritage List bill, in addition to debating and approving the report of the Joint Committee of the State and Consultation Councils on amendments to the Animal Welfare Law and to the Veterinary Practice Law respectively.

Also completed and tabled were six studies: an examination of mechanisms to advance the role of women's associations, a study on the realities of tourism in the Sultanate, a study on development challenges facing the private sector and labour market, a status review of higher education nationally, an exploration

As part of their cooperative mandate, the State and Consultative Councils holds periodic joint meetings to exchange views on matters that further closer coordination between the two legislative chambers.

of ways to develop the capital market and banking sector, and finally an investigation into health promotion practices.

The second session heard presentations from four distinguished guests invited to report on developments in their areas of expertise. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries addressed the chamber on the Ministry's food security strategy. Also hosted were officials from the National Centre for Statistics and Information and from the Omani Authority for Partnership for Development (OAPFD), present to outline the progress of their activities and forward plans.

At its nine second session meetings up to the end of May 2017, the Council also exchanged views with representatives of its own Standing Committees and other agencies on reports affecting draft legislation or upcoming policy decisions.

The State and Consultation Councils, while fulfilling separate missions, enjoy a healthy collaboration in deciding matters of national or public importance. On occasion, joint sessions of the two chambers are convened, and these sessions are marked by open and strenuous, but not contentious, debate on matters of public interest.

Council Standing Committees and affiliated working groups met 64 times during the same period, sometimes hosting experts in the fields relevant to their respective mandates.

Council members and representative groupings engage in regular dialogue with peer bodies abroad, exchanging visits and communicating in a spirit of parliamentary cooperation.

In this spirit also, the State Council is represented at several regional and global parliamentary forums. The Sultanate is a committed member of all such associations, and this was reflected in State Council member, Musallam bin Ali al Maashani, being elected Vice-President of the Arab Parliament at the procedural session convened by the parliament in December 2016 at its Cairo headquarters. His Vice-Presidential mandate extends to conclusion of the first session of the parliament's second legislative term.

Meanwhile State Council member and a former Secretary General of the Consultation Council, Abdul Qader bin Salem Al-Zahab, was distinguished with the Arab Parliamentary Excellence Award for his service as Secretary General of the Parliament. The ceremony took place on the sidelines of the 24th Arab Parliamentary Union Conference in Rabat, Morocco in March 2017.

Dr. Raya Bint Salem Al-Mantheriya, Member of the State Council, was elected to the Executive Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union›s Young Parliamentarians Forum at its 136th session, held in the Republic of Bangladesh in April 2017.

These honours underscore the extent to which the shura experience in the Sultanate has achieved a level of authenticity that qualifies it to take its place among leading parliamentary experiences worldwide.

A model of democratic practice and transparency

The Shura Council is subject to constant streamlining of its legislative and supervisory powers, building its leverage in the exercise of its parliamentary duties.

Royal Decree No. 94/91 established the Consultation Council (Majlis al-Shura) on 12 November 1991, as the modern Renaissance entered its third decade. It was a fitting expression of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's mission "to lay the foundation for the emergence of a genuine shura democracy, rooted in the country's heritage and the values of the Islamic faith; one that empowers the legacy of proud history using the tools of the modern world."

The Consultation Council has a separate legal personality and enjoys financial and administrative independence. It is based in the Governorate of Muscat. The Council has entered a new phase of national work, assisted by the legislative powers that were added to the functions and competencies of the Council of Oman by Royal Decree 99/2011. This Decree enhanced the work of parliament by raising standards of democratic performance and transparency, factors which determine the success of forward strategies and the drive to expand citizen participation in the decision-making process.

With authority to hold to account all officers of government responsible for the administration of public affairs, members of the Council may question any minister, as appropriate, on matters relating to legal violations or an exceeding of powers. The outcome of such discussion may then be referred to His Majesty the Sultan. Public service administrators are also obligated to brief the Consultation Council annually on the progress of projects being handled by their respective ministries and the Council may invite them to provide more detail on matters within their jurisdiction for debate by the chamber. Meanwhile, the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution routinely provides a copy of its annual report to the State and Consultation Councils

The Consultation Council is operating from a new platform of national action under the legislative powers that were added to the functions and powers of the Council of Oman by Royal Decree No. 99/2011.

respectively. The Consultation Council also reviews all legislative bills, development plans and draft economic and social agreements that the government is planning to issue, conclude or sign up to, so that its perspective may be added before submission to the Council of Ministers. The Consultation Council is empowered to propose legislation and other recommendations to government and to participate in the drafting of the five-year development plan. The Council Chairman is de facto a member of the Supreme Committee for the Five-Year Development Plan, which defines the broad parameters of the plan and monitors its implementation. The Council debates elements of the plan, as it does the state budget, in the presence of the relevant minister, who will be called on to respond to queries from the chamber prior to issuance of the royal decree that will give each the green light to proceed.

The Council takes the same approach to proposals referred to it by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos or by the Council of Ministers. The Council returns the proposals, accompanied by recommendations and suggestions from the chamber, to the party from which they were received. The Chairman also submits an annual report to His Majesty the Sultan on the results of the Council's work over the session.

From its inception, the Consultation Council, driven by lofty aspiration, has exercised its legislative and oversight roles to the full extent of its powers. It has endeavoured to strengthen the relationship between the Council and the general public, and its success in this sphere is clearly reflected in the significant successes already achieved across the national territory in its 2015-2019 term.

Sessions of the Consultation Council

The term of the Consultation Council is four years, beginning from the official announcement of election results and extending to 30 September of the fourth year of the Council›s term.

Structure of the Consultation Council

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

The Health Committee is one of the Shura Council's most active committees.

The Council Chairman

The Chairman oversees the activities of the Majlis, manages its sittings, represents it in its dealings with other bodies and speaks on its behalf. He has the right to summon extraordinary sessions as necessary. He and his two deputies are elected at an extraordinary session summoned by His Majesty in accordance with Article 58 of the Basic Law of the State.

The Council Office

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

The Consultation Council held a total of 18 weekly meetings up to the beginning of June 2017, to conduct regular business and address matters referred from various government agencies. The chamber debated 107 parliamentary questions and reviewed 34 requests for briefings and 22 petitions. It also reviewed responses returned by cabinet ministers to queries referred to them from the chamber.

Standing Committees

At its inaugural meeting of the first annual session of the eighth term, the Consultation Council approved the formation of the principal Council committees: the Legislative and Legal Committee, the Economic and Finance Committee, the Health and Environment Committee, the Education and Scientific Research Committee, the Social Services and Development Committee, the Youth and Human Resources Committee, the Food and Water Security Committee and the Information and Culture Committee.

The Standing Committees hold meetings and host gatherings and workshops at which they address matters of interest to the community on the basis of studies commissioned by them and the findings and recommendations thereof. The combined outcome of this expertise and debate brings value to government and private sector projects, always with the overall aim of resolving challenges sustainably.

The Secretariat General

The Secretariat General consists of the Secretary-General, who is appointed by Royal Decree, and a number of employees and specialists. The Secretariat-General assists the Consultation Council and its affiliate bodies in carrying out their tasks and facilitates all that relates to organisational and administrative procedures of relevance. The Secretariat-General plays a vital role in the success of the Council's functions. The Council debated the draft organisational structure and internal regulations with a view to upgrading the performance of the Council.

During the second annual session of its Eighth Term the Council hosted several senior ministers for an elaboration their respective policy objectives. Pictured: The Minister of Higher Education addresses the Shura Council.

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

Session two of the eighth Council term (2016-2017) was a busy one on all fronts, involving routine business, new proposals, participations and parliamentary visits. Twenty regular legislative and oversight sessions were held.

Legislative sessions are called to debate proposed legislation, or existing legislation requiring amendment, brought before the chamber either by government or by members of the Council itself. The agenda of these regular Council sessions includes the examination of international agreements between the Sultanate and other countries, referred for various reasons by government, or of study reports by standing committees and their

During the second session of its Eighth Term, the Consultation Council engaged in multiple actions, programmes, participations and parliamentary exchanges, the most important of its activities being the successful completion of 20 ordinary legislative and supervisory sessions.

working groups. They also sign off on ministerial responses to questions posed in the chamber. There are frequent reviews of procedural matters, on the procedural tools available to members in tabling parliamentary questions, requests for briefings or for debate, petitions and the like, assessed with a view to streamlining Council business in the public interest and in the interest of smoother interactions with government.

The oversight sessions include attendance by ministers summoned by the chamber to elaborate on specific ministerial policies. The attending minister is closely questioned from the floor on policy details of concern to constituents; or offered suggestions that could improve performance in the design or delivery of services to the public by government agencies.

The Minister of Higher Education, Dr Rawiyah Al-Busaidiyah, attended a second session Council hearing covering several matters stemming from the work of the Ministry during the past year. The Minister outlined for members the broad strategies guiding higher education policy in the Sultanate and the sector's current five-year plan. She then answered questions from members relating to the Colleges of Applied Sciences, to State and private third level education and to the status of student housing at the higher education institutions overseen by the Ministry.

In the context of a debate on government performance, the Council invited the Minister of Manpower, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Abdullah Al Bakri, to address the chamber, where he delivered a statement outlining the four main motivations driving ministerial policy. Of primary concern is the mobility of manpower in the private sector (2010-2016) and its impact on employment uptake in the national labour force. The electronic job selection process is proving to be a strong asset in this respect and a convenience to job seekers. The expatriate labour force has specific needs, which need to be monitored, as does the status and progress of institutions that impact the constantly shifting trends and challenges of the employment sector.

The Ministry's second principle concern is that of welfare in the workplace, in terms of existing inspection systems and, overall, of labour legislation which may require updating. Its third preoccupation is technical education and vocational training, including the contribution being made in this area by private training institutions. Finally, the Minister outlined the advances his department had made in implementing electronic connectivity in the transition to e-government.

A third Council session hosted the Minister of Sports Affairs, Sheikh Saad bin Mohammed bin Said al Mardhouf al Sȧadi, who delivered his Ministry's progress statement to the chamber. At the core of ministerial policy-making is the Oman Sports Strategy, geared towards manifesting its vision of a 'sports society'. Central to this strategy is a campaign to promote health and fitness broadly throughout society, both for its evident benefits and as a platform for encouraging higher achievements by national sports teams and individuals. Sport has both a direct and indirect role in generating dynamism across all aspects of community development. The Minister also summarised the more important products of sports legislation as it stands currently, along with matters relevant to the various sports associations, the status of sporting facilities for the disabled, and youth programmes at sporting clubs, and this was followed by debate in the chamber.

At its 15th and 16th sittings, the Council questioned Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Dr. Fuad Bin Jaafar Al Sajwani, who delivered a seven-point statement outlining the performance of the agricultural and fisheries sectors. Speaking of fisheries, the Minister noted that aquaculture would represent a major trend into the future. He addressed infrastructural issues - port and fish processing facilities, and fishing and landing sites, by governorate and wilaya. He noted the Ministry's preference for greater partnership with the private sector, and reviewed the status of fish marketing both inside and outside the Sultanate, and of current controls to prevent overfishing and depletion of stock. The Council also hosted Minister of Housing, Sheikh Saif al Shabibi,

whose 5-point statement to the chamber focused on strategy as it pertains to the commissioning and preparation of land for diverse use and its distribution to beneficiaries; and on the provision of housing loans and assistance to the general public and the construction of social housing for target groups.

The Consultation Council participated in periodic meetings and conference gatherings of interest to the parliaments and legislative councils of the Gulf and Arab regions, as well as further afield. At these gatherings, Council representatives exchanged views with their peers on their respective legislative and oversight mandates and how these impacted and were affected by international developments. Representatives of the Omani Consultation Council were active in Arab and international parliamentary groupings. The Council is a member of more than twenty parliamentary friendship groups around the world.

"While the media is playing an increasingly important role in the lives of societies and peoples today, it is also essential to take steps to improve the Omani media so that it can carry out its mission of developing our people's potential and giving them a greater awareness of the pivotal part they have to play in building their nation, and also in helping to reinforce ties of friendship and cooperation with the global family..."

Qaboos bin Said

(20th National Day, 1990)

The Omani Media

The ethical standards that shaped and defined the media in Oman are inherited from the same values that inform its foreign policy: truth, balance and clarity in the presentation and analysis of events. Sensationalism has no place in reporting, nor has bias. As a result, journalism, which has often had its reputation tarnished in recent times by both, has retained the respect of the public.

The ethos of fair reporting was established in the early days of the modern Renaissance. The fourth estate takes its mission seriously, and is comfortable with its task of reflecting back the most evolved expressions of citizenship. The press and audio-visual media have played an educative role in promoting individual responsibility, social and national identity and a desire to participate in the development process. In its finest moments, the media can elevate the culture of a society. In Oman, it served as both educator and narrator as the Renaissance unfolded, explaining the process to a public unaccustomed to being so thoroughly informed. Today it can be said to have done its job well, as the country can claim to have weathered seismic events regionally and globally without ever losing its course.

The Omani media approach to the reporting of foreign affairs respects the Sultanate's foreign policy principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of others, peaceful coexistence, good neighbourliness, fair exchange, respect for national sovereignty and the promotion of justice in international forums. These principles were laid down by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said as early as 1970 to be the constant basis of all of Oman's interactions, and they have earned it respect in many circumstances and many parts of the world.

His Majesty has acknowledged the support of the media for the Renaissance project, particularly in its fledgling phase. He has described the media as "the mirror that reflects what is happening in the country", and the Omani media as "sincere, honest with itself and with others."

"At home and abroad, it is necessary to disseminate truth, to have honest reporting, to communicate a fair image of what is happening in our beloved Oman, the important advances made and the great aspirations of our people. This is what we want broadcast into homes, without sensation or embellishment. We want to know ourselves and for the world to know us just as we are. It is very important for us that the citizens of Oman in particular should be cognisant of the triumphs that they have achieved, by their resolution and will and by their cooperation with the government project. The Omani media is, first and foremost, a dynamic medium of communication that is supported by the very successes it observes clearly in its own dear homeland."

Under the mandate entrusted to it by Royal Decree No 35/2009, the Ministry of Information was made responsible for establishing and overseeing the Sultanate's media network. A policy of close oversight and training has raised the bar of media performance, so that all branches of the Omani media have reached a level of sophistication capable of articulating the story of the Sultanate, as well as of world events, to convincing effect, both at home and abroad.

Royal Decree No 45/2015, announced

The ethical standards that shape and define the media in the Sultanate stem from the same values that inform its foreign policy and include non-interference in the internal affairs of others and peaceful coexistence.

on 2 November 2015, approved the organisational structure of the Ministry of Information in the context of developing media trends. Certain competencies assigned to the Ministry under Royal Decree No 35/2009 were activated, and the Directorate General of Digital Media was established in acknowledgement of the growth of digital media and its importance to the future objectives of the Ministry.

The Directorate General came into being in 2016 and began the foundation work of building an administrative structure, recruiting qualified personnel and drawing up editorial policies for the various media portals through which the Directorate will operate. Principal among these are the Ministry's website in Arabic and English and the Ministry's pages on social network sites.

In 2017 the Ministry undertook an overhaul of its website, upgrading it to a multi-lingual information portal that will adequately reflect the stellar achievements of the Sultanate in the time of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. The first phase, launched in the fourth quarter of the current year, sees it accessible in three languages: Arabic, English and French. Phase three, to be completed in 2018, will add three further languages.

Work on the visual and digital content of the Ministry's social networking outlets continues, and they already have established a substantial following.

The establishment of the Omani Centre for Community Media, an affiliate of the Directorate General of Digital Media, is an important component in the transition to a successful communications policy. Its mission is to deliver accurate information, and to foster constructive relationships between institutions and users through the agency of social networking and digital platforms.

The Centre monitors and analyses content across digital networks and inputs the metadata gathered into scientific research and methodology and diverse statistical reports. The results ultimately find their way to the relevant authorities of State which can benefit from them in aspects of their work or development of performance.

The Omani media has a mandate to communicate to the public an honest portrayal of the national development process as it rolls out.

In setting out to highlight the name of the Sultanate abroad and to validate the national development effort at home; to communicate with other nations; to shine a beacon on Oman's cultural contributions to civilisation; and to explain the progress of cultural, educational, environmental and health policies since the Renaissance founded by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Ministry of Information participates regularly in the most important of the international book fairs in the Arab world and further afield. These forums constitute a valuable opportunity to introduce the Sultanate as a safe, developed and attractive country, home to a hospitable and educated population.

The Ministry of Information also collaborates with several government agencies in organising the Muscat International Book Fair, a major event held annually and attended by thousands of publishing houses from both inside and outside the Sultanate.

Abroad, Vilnius hosted the "Essence of Oman" touring media promotion up to 28 February 2017. The event, prepared by the Ministry of Information, was facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and several private and government agencies in the Lithuanian capital.

"Essence of Oman" is a stylish multimedia event that presents aspects of the Sultanate's heritage and history, as well as the epic story of the modern Renaissance conceived and led by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, with some of its landmark achievements. A photographic exhibition presents selected highlights of the Sultanate's many striking landscapes, heritage sites and tourist attractions, along with scenes from Omani life, past and present.

Other "Essence of Oman" attractions took the form of documentary films about the Sultanate, exhibits of Omani books and traditional crafts, a fashion corner and a booth dedicated to Omani frankincense, with information about its many benefits.

The Ministry also participated in the Beijing International Book Fair, which ran from 23-28 August 2017, becoming the first government institution in the Sultanate to

Abroad, Vilnius, hosted the "Essence of Oman"

participate in this important cultural event. The Ministry's pavilion afforded an important opportunity to showcase Oman's impressive cultural heritage and current status as a thoroughly modern nation.

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

The Ministry leaves no medium unexplored for its potential to deliver a positive message about Oman to as broad an audience as possible. To this end, it engages all media of communication - press, news agencies, radio and television, digital publishing, embassies and media outlets, books, seminars, conferences, exhibitions, events and festivals.

It continues to manage a policy of inviting journalists and media professionals to Oman to acquaint them with the sophisticated reality of the Sultanate, its culture and economic prowess and its stabilising role amid the often tense geopolitics of the region.

The Beijing International Book Fair

The Oman News Agency (ONA) covers current affairs of political, economic and development interest, as well as all other events that may impact the Sultanate in one form or another.

Oman News Agency

One of the Omani News Agency's editorial offices. ONA is the Sultanate's official State news agency.

The Oman News Agency, established by Royal Decree No. 39/86 on 29 May 1986, is the official news agency of the government of Oman. A decade later, Royal Decree No. 43/97 founded the Oman Establishment for Press, News, Publication and Advertising (OEPNPA), which would henceforth incorporate the Oman News Agency. Finally, in 2006, Royal Decree No. 75/2006 transferred the Oman News Agency to the umbrella of the Ministry of Information with effect from 16 July 2006. Today the Oman News Agency falls directly under the Minister of Information and has a director general and editor to oversee its work and the implementation of its goals and functions.

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

The agency offers coverage of events in the Sultanate and is made available to member institutions, while providing background and information material to reporters and media outlets based in the Sultanate. The agency also archives data and images relating to the most important events of the day

Operating in a highly competitive field, ONA is constantly seeking new ways to develop its news products and expand distribution within the Sultanate and abroad.

and all events covered by ONA, and facilitates access to this material for Arab and overseas journalists and media channels seeking to cover events taking place in the Sultanate.

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

In October 2016, the Omani News Agency published Naqash al-Dhao (approximately 'Pattern of Light'), a collection of interviews and reports extracted from the Agency archive, on the theme of the cultural movement in the Sultanate.

The Agency overhauled its website, rearranging the news into categories and adding images. The English language homepage was also updated to reflect the changes in the Arabic version of the site.

The sports news section came on stream in 2016. The first weekly sports bulletin was published, covering local, Arab and international sports news, with accompanying features on local and overseas events.

ONA is constantly looking to develop new news products and to expand its local and overseas distribution. The service provides subscribers with instant reports and timely analysis on the most important political, economic, sporting and recreational news. ONA had 116,289 subscribers in 2016 and dispatched 12,860 news items. There were 1,796 additional beneficiaries of the service by way of direct contact.

The Omani press is designed to respond to rapid developments in media and communications at international level and to report clearly on matters that reflect the interests and aspirations of the Omani public.

Oman 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.

The press in Oman is wholly owned by the private sector, with the exception of the Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising. The work of the Sultanate's press organisations is regulated, as are the procedures for publishing a newspaper, establishing a publishing house, printing press or advertising company, by means of the Press and Publications Law, which was amended by Royal Decree No 87/2004. Newspapers, magazines and media establishments should be owned by Omani nationals.

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

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

Oman Establishment for Press, Publication & Advertising

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

This exceptional performance by the OEPPA has been rewarded by higher readership figures across its list of publications, including daily newspapers, monthly and quarterly magazines, despite strong competition from other print publications and, increasingly, electronic and satellite media and 24/7 radio broadcasts. "Nizwa" magazine, the quarterly issued by OEPPA, held its leadership position in the pantheon of Arab cultural publications, with overseas distribution accounting for 88% of all sales. It continues to print and distribute its free supplement on Omani culture with every edition of the magazine.

The Public Authority for Radio and Television (PART) has responsibility for media development in terms of content and delivery, which to be effective must keep up with the rapid pace of progress in society.

Independent Broadcasting with An Affirmative Vocation

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

The Authority has responsibility for media development in terms of content and delivery, which to be effective must keep up with the rapid pace of progress in society.

The process is often a balancing act that cannot be allowed to forget the broader mission of supporting social values that rise above negativity to encourage a spirit of individual responsibility and community participation. The media in Oman has been used with powerful effect to validate productivity and a work ethic, to celebrate distinction and excellence, and that includes the many achievements of Oman, of Omani institutions and Omani citizens at home and abroad.

Technically, the field is in a state of accelerated change, and the Authority is constantly reviewing the technological aspects of radio and television broadcasting and associated fields to keep abreast of that change. In the fiercely competitive scramble for radio and television audiences, there is no place for a medium that has fallen behind technologically. Equally important are the professionals who deliver the media message, and they are given every facility in terms of training and equipment to do an effective job.

In 2015 and 2016, the Sultanate's audio and visual media underwent a major overhaul, which culminated in the launching of PART's new identity and a revamped image for television channels and radio. The digital studios were commissioned and the News Centre inaugurated.

Production standards in home-grown programming are very high, and embrace the latest available technologies.

Following a major overhaul of the Sultanate's home-grown audio and visual media, PART unveiled its rebranded identity, alongside new digital studios and a state-of-the-art News Centre.

The Public Authority for Radio & Television oversees developments in radio and television broadcasting & related technical fields.

The overhaul brought quality upgrades to both audio and visual media. Production and transmission processes were facilitated by the new technology, and this had a positive impact on the delivery of content, benefiting programming across the field.

Public Radio articulates its public service mission with a programming schedule that revolves around issues of broad and pressing interest to Oman's various age and special interest groups.

The Audio Sector

The audio sector describes the field served by the various radio stations operating in Oman. As an area of broadcasting activity, it has specific audiences with unique interests and the audio sector formats programming to the service of these needs. It derives content from newsworthy issues or entertainment preferences in all areas, and tailors delivery format accordingly. Radio has a very special influence in reaching certain listener groups.

Radio programmes have an immediacy that facilitates direct and indirect communication with the public. It makes the connection easy, by way of dial-up windows, via phone or SMS, or via social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Five radio channels broadcast out of the Sultanate, Public Radio, Youth Radio, Holy Qur'an Radio, English Radio and Classical Music Radio, each targeting a readymade audience.

Public Radio articulates its public service mission with a programming schedule revolving 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 horizon of national development.

Innovation and eclectic sourcing contribute to a broad spectrum of public radio programmes with appeal across all Omani age groups and interests.

Youth Radio targets young audiences by addressing their age-specific interests and concerns.

The 24-hour public radio schedule mixes longstanding favourites with more experimental programming for newer audiences.

Youth Radio, as its name implies, has a typically younger format, given its somewhat difficult task of targeting a listenership more acquainted with visual and social media. Its content is also cultural, economic, artistic and sports-oriented, and addresses segments of Oman's youth-heavy population. Again, interaction with the listenership is a goal, and this is a field where easy familiarity with digital media is an advantage. Youth Radio has solid audiences for all segments of its 24-hour transmissions.

Holy Qur'an Radio broadcasts to a huge audience, offering a mix of live and recorded programmes around the theme of the Holy Qur'an and its interpretation. It regularly hosts interviews and panel discussions on religious and social issues.

Holy Qur'an Radio broadcasts to a huge audience, offering a mix of live and recorded programmes around the theme of the Holy Qur'an and its interpretation. It regularly hosts interviews and panel discussions on religious and social issues. Its round-the-clock transmissions include Qur'an recitations featuring celebrated reciters from across the Islamic world.

Holy Qur'an Radio broadcasts around the clock, offering selected religious programmes and Qur'anic recitations.

English Radio communicates with an Omani audience, as well as non-Arabic speaking communities resident or visiting the Sultanate, with a schedule tailored to their particular interests. It also broadcasts around the clock.

Classical Music Radio broadcasts 19 hours a day, from 6.00 am to 1.00 am, and serves as a platform for presentation of the works of the world's great classical music geniuses. All musical presentations are preceded and followed by a brief explanatory narrative in Arabic and English.

Interaction and dialogue between Omanis and Oman's non-Arab communities are goals of the Sultanate's English-language radio.

The Visual Sector

The visual broadcasting sector is a powerful medium for interpreting the Sultanate's journey to development by way of sophisticated and honest programming.

The visual sector consists of the three channels of the national broadcaster, Oman TV: the General Channel, the Sports Channel and the Cultural Channel. The national broadcaster is responsible for all television programming and broadcasting of live and recorded events. It also recruits and manages the technical and other professional cadres who produce, present and deliver the schedule.

The three main channels divide their programming schedules into segments that target specific viewing audiences, always maintaining the delicate balance between entertainment and education.

The sports channel was the Sultanate's first specialised channel to broadcast around the clock. It relays local, regional and international sporting events and analyses performance via talk shows, panel discussions and other high-audience programmes.

There is a heavy focus on celebration of the positive in Omani society, past and present, with the same positivity projected into the future. The wealth of material provided by the Sultanate's rich heritage and the successes of the Renaissance constitutes a sound basis for promoting the values of citizenship, moderation, tolerance and dialogue.

Diversity and inclusiveness are two noticeable features of the programming package offered by Sultanate of Oman TV through its various channels, and this integrative approach has impacted positively on viewer satisfaction, cementing the social impact of television. **Oman TV**, through its three channels, covers news, culture, sports, development, youth, children, entertainment and miscellaneous other areas of interest. These programmes are produced and delivered by teams of young Omani professionals highly qualified in the technicalities of formatting and presenting material to sophisticated viewing audiences. This goes a long way towards achieving one of the principal aims of the national broadcaster, which is to narrow the gap between presenter and viewer.

Public Channel programmes address issues of social and humanitarian concern as well as reporting daily events.

The other main operating tool of this approach is content, and Oman TV does this through its programming, ensuring that its coverage of events in the Sultanate is broad, relevant and immediate. In this context, it offers regular and timely coverage of news, government announcements and community activities. Its entertainment schedule includes age-appropriate children's programmes, nature features from around Oman, documentaries and drama serials and films of Omani, Gulf, Arab and international origin.

The Sports Channel was the Sultanate's first specialised channel to broadcast around the clock. It covers local, regional and international sporting events, which it intersperses with features of interest to both enthusiasts and spectators, including celebrations

A regular working day at the Sports Channel.

of sporting achievements by Omanis past and present. One of the successes of the Sports Channel has been to encourage greater participation in sports nationally, and this has not only had positive health benefits within the broad community, but spurred Omani sporting champions to greater levels of achievement. With every passing year, Omanis are logging new records in regional and international competition. The channel hosts talk shows and panel discussions that analyse performance in popular sports events involving Omani participants or international stars and these engage particularly large audiences, as do sports events for which the channel provides high quality coverage nationwide.

Oman's musical, historical and cultural heritage have a wealth of material to keep the Oman Cultural Channel busy.

The Sports Channel's coverage of local sports activity is extensive and popular with viewers. This broadcasting segment has a public service aspect, in that it encourages participation at community level and establishes a healthy, competitive but non-contentious, dialogue in the analysis of these events.

On 1 January 2016, the Oman Cultural Channel began a 24-hour broadcasting schedule. The source of the channel's content is the Sultanate's rich archive of cultural, scientific, artistic and musical material, and it creates programmes that celebrate this heritage. Oman has a strong literary tradition and has many scientific and technical innovations to its credit. Meanwhile, the Omani identity is strongly bound up in the combination of geography and circumstance that were the foundation of its very long and successful history. The Cultural Channel in its programming has demonstrated a particular interest in the powerful historical events that impacted this unique history and culture, and that left its imprint on the Arab and larger worlds.

It has translated this interest into a schedule prepared and presented by an elite team of professionals from the human resource bank of PART, supplemented by talent from the domestic cultural scene. It covers all the major cultural events in the Sultanate and maintains an archive of spinoff features.

The News Sector

The Public Authority for Radio and Television holds a special position in the audio-visual sector as the principal overseer of local radio and television activities, both official and private. It is the official broadcasting resource for Royal decrees, news of official government interactions with overseas representatives, as well as of urgent statements by government agencies on matters of public concern.

PART reports developments in government-related projects and services coming on stream. It covers activities organised by government agencies or initiated by civil society organisations. It provides timely news of regional and international developments of political, social and economic significance, accompanied by impartial analysis and commentary. The Authority also oversees Oman Direct, which delivers live daily coverage from local conferences, seminars and festivals, as well as workshops taking place in conjunction with large events, such as the Muscat International Book Fair. It highlights in particular activities taking place throughout the governorates and provides updates on ongoing projects of national relevance.

In 2016, the news sector added five newsfeeds, to be televised at 10.00 am, 1.00 pm, 4.00 pm, 9.00 pm and 12 midnight.

The News Sector covers activities organised by government agencies or initiated by civil society organisation

Private sector and radio and television broadcasting

The developed state of the Omani media is an accurate mirror of the developed state of Omani society. 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:
- Radio Hella in Arabic and Radio Hi FM in English, both of which are owned by the Media Entertainment Network.

- Radio Al Wusool in Arabic - which is owned by Sabco Media.

- Radio Merge FM in English, also owned by Sabco.

- Radio Muscat, owned by Muttrah Information Services, is a public service broadcaster covering all provinces of the Sultanate on FM frequency band.

These services have brought choice to radio offerings across the Sultanate. In addition, retransmission permits were granted to certain international radio corporations, such as the BBC and Radio Monte Carlo.

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

The 2004 Private Institutions Radio and Television Law enabled private institutions to own and manage radio and television channels in Oman. The principal beneficiaries of this broadening of scope are the Sultanate's listeners and viewers.

Majan T.V Channel

مجان الفضائية

A private sector stake in the ownership and management of the Sultanate's audio-visual media was always an objective of national media policy.

"...We strongly believe that the armed forces have an important role to play in both peace and war... Consequently, we provide our valiant forces with all possible care and support to ensure that they are constantly at a high standard of combat proficiency and capable of acting as the Nation's protective shield...as the defender of its land and everything it holds dear, while also playing their part in its development and prosperity..."

Qaboos bin Said

(7th National Day, 1977)

Security and Peace

Oman is recognised as one of the safest countries in the world, having been ranked fourth globally for security in a World Economic Forum report in April 2017.

An Oasis of Security

Ever since the dawn of its modern Renaissance on 23rd July 1970, the Sultanate of Oman has done all in its power to ensure that development reaches every region and sector, and this has been reflected in its achievements on the ground.

The people of Oman have played a pivotal role at every stage of their country's development, and this includes establishing the security it needs in order to protect what it has achieved. Consequently, the Sultanate has remained an oasis of peace and stability in this vital region, despite the challenges that surround it from every side.

Oman is recognized as one of the safest countries in the world, having been ranked fourth globally for security in a World Economic Forum report in April 2017 and scoring a zero rating in the Global Terrorism Index – the lowest possible score for terrorist threats.

This happy situation is also reflected in a number of other indicators confirming the Sultanate's high level of social security, low crime rates, minimal threat from terrorism, tolerant attitudes and other factors that help contribute to a sound economy and attractive investment climate. Against this background, the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Royal Oman Police have a vital part to play in protecting the nation and its territory and ensuring that its citizens continue to enjoy peace and security.

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) are given the highest priority by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, their Supreme Commander. Equipped with advanced modern weaponry and trained in hi-tech defensive and offensive combat in a wide variety of different environmental and climatic conditions, they are constantly at the highest state of readiness. Their leaders obtain advanced scientific and technical qualifications from the Sultanate's numerous institutes and military academies, while their personnel and their families are provided with a full range of health, educational, social and other welfare services.

To mark the Sultanate's 46th National Day, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, presided over the military parade at the Sultan's Special Force's Sumud Camp parade ground on 18th November 2016. The event was a stirring demonstration of loyalty to His Majesty the Sultan and reflected a firm commitment to uphold the country's honour, dignity, sovereignty and independence, in fulfilment of the armed forces' oath of allegiance to God, the Nation and the Sultan.

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) represent at once a crowning achievement and also a bulwark of Oman's modern Renaissance. They are trained to the highest performance levels and in a constant state of readiness, armed with a full range of advanced weaponry systems.

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF)

The Sultan's Armed Forces constitute a supportive pillar of the new Oman, protecting the homeland and its achievements.

Protecting the achievements of the modern Renaissance

The Sultan›s Armed Forces (SAF) represent at once a crowning achievement and also a bulwark of Oman's modern Renaissance. They are constantly being upgraded, so as to maintain the level of readiness seen as crucial by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The main focus of the SAF's plans for upgrading its main wings – the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) – is on training its personnel to the highest performance standards. The goal is to produce modern armed forces with a full range of joint weapons systems whose members are able to handle the latest military technology proficiently in every field.

The Sultanate's military strategy favours a fully integrated system in which combat units are streamlined for more efficient deployment, and new elite special-purpose units are created and professionally trained.

The Sultanate aims to ensure that its armed forces enjoy all the material and moral capabilities they require in order to carry out their sacred national duty, including advanced weaponry and equipment such as tanks, armoured personnel carriers, missile and artillery systems, armoured vehicles, fighter aircraft and transport helicopters. They have also been provided with a naval fleet that includes landing craft, corvettes and advanced speedboats, in recognition of their critical function. The armed forces' support wings are regularly upgraded, while their personnel are maintained at peak performance by regular training in weaponry and the arts of defence, as well as in the most sophisticated technical equipment available to them, which they handle with confidence and professional ease.

Its arsenal is reviewed and restocked, keeping pace with weapons industry advances, and is adapted to the operational requirements of the fully integrated system favoured by Oman's military strategy.

The Royal Army of Oman

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) is a reliable and disciplined strike force.

After many years of upgrading and modernisation over the course of the Renaissance, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) has become a strong military force, a source of pride for Oman. Its brigades, infantry formations, and manoeuvre and support wings have been supplied with high-tech weaponry. In the meantime, special training programmes are being conducted to enhance the combat capability of military personnel and introduce them to the latest systems applicable in war.

Army units and formations are constantly monitored for combat fitness, and are at all times ready, equipped and able to meet their national obligations. Their equipment includes armoured personnel carriers, modern artillery and air defence systems, armoured vehicles, signals systems and transport vehicles. All RAO units and formations have their own specialised maintenance workshops, resulting in a highly integrated, high performance force, well trained in the methods of modern warfare, disciplined and tested, with efficient operational, administrative and technical systems in place; armed with the technical firepower and skilled manpower needed to meet all eventualities. The firqat forces have also undergone significant improvements in their organisation, training, installations, service facilities and telecommunications systems.

Its arsenal is constantly reviewed and restocked as the weapons industry advances towards new frontiers in defence, and upgrades are selected and adapted to the operational requirements of the fully integrated system favoured by Oman's military strategy. Combat units are streamlined for more efficient deployment, and new elite special-purpose units created and professionally trained.

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is a modern air force equipped with advanced aircraft and highly trained and highly disciplined personnel. It is maintained in a constant state of readiness.

The Royal Air Force of Oman

In addition to its highly trained personnel, the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is a modern air force equipped with advanced fighters, helicopters, logistical transport aircraft, and air defence systems, including radars, anti-aircraft batteries, training aircraft and warfare simulation programmes.

RAFO has concluded several forward-looking agreements geared towards meeting challenges down the road, as well as at raising current technical capability. It operates air bases fitted with state-of-the-art systems capable of functioning in all circumstances and conditions.

In a reflection of the importance His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said - the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces - attaches to enhancing and reinforcing the country's defence capabilities and protecting the gains of the Blessed Renaissance, the Sultanate took delivery of its first batch of Typhoon fighter and Hawk training aircraft on 15th May 2017. They are the first of a larger consignment of these aircraft which the Sultanate has contracted to purchase in view of their advanced systems and weaponry, which enable them to operate in a wide range of different situations and conditions.

State of the art training and weaponry make Oman's Royal Air Force a force to be reckoned with.

The RNO fleet boasts a range of sophisticated equipment and weapons, in addition to gunboats and fast missile vessels, including backup, training, cargo and hydrographical survey vessels.

The Royal Navy of Oman

The Royal Navy of Oman (RN0) has roles in defending the country's strategic, economic and security interests.

Due to Oman's strategic location and the fact that the Sultanate supervises one of the most important waterways in the world – the Strait of Hormuz – the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has been playing a critical role in safeguarding the country's strategic security and economic interests through the RNO's permanent presence in Oman's territorial waters. The RNO fleet boasts a range of sophisticated equipment and weapons, in addition to gunboats and fast missile vessels, including backup, training, cargo and hydrographical survey vessels. The flotilla lends support to the division's patrol boats in their mission of securing Oman's coastline and territorial and economic waters or monitoring the safe passage of ships and oil tankers through the strategic Strait of Hormuz, besides providing security for sea transport of SAF units along the Omani coast.

On 8th February 2016 the RNO ceremoniously welcomed the Khasab to its fleet as the latest vessel of the Ufuq project. Then on 10th September 2016 it received delivery of the Nasir as the latest addition to the Bahr Uman project. With their modern equipment, these ships are able to operate for long periods under widely varying conditions and take part in joint operations with coastal patrols, as well as in relief and search and rescue operations. Their presence will reinforce Oman's presence on the high seas, help safeguard Omani sovereignty and ensure the safety of shipping in the Sultanate's territorial waters.

Like the other wings of the Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), which is an important component of the Sultanate's modern military system, has been accorded priority status by His Majesty the Sultan, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO)

Like the other wings of the Armed Forces, the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), which is an important component of the Sultanate's modern military system, has been accorded priority status by His Majesty the Sultan, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The RGO enjoys a high level of combat proficiency and capability and has a full range of infantry and support units with advanced systems and equipment, as well as educational, technical and administrative units. It attaches special significance to training programmes, which are designed to keep personnel up to speed with handling the advanced equipment with which the RGO has been supplied.

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

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 national and military occasions including graduation and passing out ceremonies.

The Royal Guard of Oman is a significant and effective weapon in the military system of Oman today.

The Command and Staff College supplies the SAF, the RGO and other security services with officers trained in leadership skills. As well as servicing domestic needs, its reputation for excellence draws officer trainees from overseas.

Training

Academic programmes of both organisational and practical focus are provided by the Military Technical College.

Numerous facilities for the training and education of officers and men have been set up on site at units and bases and branches of the military. All military service categories are covered - scientific, technical and technological.

The National Defence College – the highest academic strategic institution – trains young nationals in strategy and strategic planning at the national, regional and international levels. Fields covered include security, defence and strategic decision-making, as well as the development of military skills in general. On 20th July 2016 the College celebrated the graduation of its third batch of students. The event was attended by senior officers from the SAF, RGO, Royal Oman Police (ROP), Royal Court Affairs and other military and security services. Senior officials from various ministries and civil authorities were also present.

The Command and Staff College supplies the SAF, RGO and other security services with officers trained in leadership skills. In a reflection of the Sultanate's good relations with states around the world, and its reputation for educational excellence,

The SAF also provides opportunities for its personnel to complete their higher education in relevant military, administrative and technical disciplines, either within the Sultanate or at universities and colleges abroad.

the College also operates courses for officer trainees from other Arab and friendly countries.

The Military Technical College runs theoretical and practical academic training programmes tailored to meet all the SAF's technical and engineering needs. They include courses on aviation, marine, mechanical, electrical, structural and electronic engineering, in addition to telecommunications. The College also runs specialist hi-tech military courses, as well as courses in refrigeration and air-conditioning, precision instruments, medical equipment and other technical subjects.

The SAF also provides opportunities for its personnel to complete their higher education in relevant military, administrative and technical disciplines, either within the Sultanate or at universities and colleges abroad.

Under the constant theme of raising combat efficiency through continual training and field testing of army units, the SAF and the RGO take part in regular land, sea and air exercises at various levels. The "Muharib al Jabal" joint exercise was carried out in 2017, and the security and armed services carried out the "Al 'Ubur" joint naval training exercise and the annual "Search and Rescue" joint exercise in conjunction with the navies of various Arab and friendly countries.

This operation was designed to enhance the Sultanate's operational and security capability at sea, while providing practical training in modern security operations and exchanging expertise with other naval forces. The SAF also carried out a range of other land, sea and air exercises, during which they proved their high standard of proficiency and combat capability.

In response to His Majesty the Sultan's instructions on providing job opportunities for Omani youth, the Ministry of Defence, SAF and RGO attach particular importance to recruitment and employment and this is reflected in the large numbers of young Omanis who sign up to serve in their ranks. The regular intake of officers and men who join their training courses includes significant numbers of secondary school, university and higher education graduates.

Social, Medical & Engineering Services

The SAF's medical services have access to cutting edge equipment, ensuring the best treatment services a healthcare system has to offer.

The Social Services division at SAF Staff HQ provides social welfare for officers and men of the SAF and their families in the form of housing loans and supervised building works, as well as other services including arrangements for Umrah pilgrimages and visits to veterans at Eid and on official occasions. It also organises visits to the sick and injured and the families of deceased ex-servicemen.

The Sultanate is a permanent member of the Arab Federation of War Veterans' and Victims' Associations, in which it is represented by Military Social Services.

The SAF Medical Services offers medical services to members of the armed forces and their families and – in addition to contributing to the development of the country's health sector – SAF Medical Services also provide medical care and support for evacuation operations, as well as for general emergency cases through their Flying Doctor service.

The SAF Medical Services School supplies the SAF with qualified

The SAF Medical Services division offers medical services to members of the armed forces and their families, as well as providing backup for the country's health sector and medical support in evacuation and other emergency operations.

medical and technical personnel. New state-of-the-art departments and facilities have been added at the Armed Forces Hospital at al Khoudh. Armed forces personnel and their families are not only provided with medical care within the Sultanate; they are also sent abroad for treatment if necessary. In such cases medical committees are set up to assess the medical needs of those requiring such treatment.

The Defence Ministry's Engineering Services division plays a vital role in providing technical and engineering backup during military exercises. It also provides essential services such as water, electricity supply and infrastructure utilities at military camps and other installations, and it is constantly increasing the output capacity of power supply stations at military sites. And in addition to planning and supervising building construction projects and carrying out general maintenance work, it also designs and builds roads within the camps - as well as in some of the Sultanate's regions as part of the Defence Ministry's contribution to the country's development.

Among the functions of the Ministry of Defence's engineering services are the provision of essential services such as road construction and water delivery.

Sumail's light weapons ammunition factory is the most modern vital project of its kind in the region. It was set up by the Sultanate's military and security pension funds as a closed joint stock company.

The Defence Ministry's Pension Fund

Many investment projects are carried out directly by the resources of the Ministry of Defence to fund its Retirement Fund.

The Defence Ministry's Pension Fund invests its assets for the benefit of veterans and the families of its deceased Omani personnel. It also provides funding for the pensions and end-of-service benefits of the Ministry's Omani employees.

Its investment projects include the "Nizwa Grand Mall" military commercial complex and the Anantara Tourist Resort in the niyabat of al Jabal al Akhdhar.

The light weapons ammunition factory in the wilayat of Sumail - the most modern vital project of its kind in the region – was set up by the Sultanate's military and security pension funds as a closed joint stock company. Equipped with the latest technology, it manufactures light ammunition to the highest international standards in order to meet the needs of the Sultan's Armed Forces and security services.

The Ministry of Defence received the first consignment of the factory's output on 16th May 2017.

The Institute of Survey Sciences and Map Production confers national diplomas in surveying and mapping on military and civilian personnel qualified in the field. It also offers specialist courses in these subjects.

The National Survey Authority

The National Survey Authority (NSA) is the central body for the production of military and civilian maps. It also carries out aerial photography operations in every part of the Sultanate, sets the criteria for topographical surveys, maintains the National Geographical Archive, and supplies aerial charts and geographical data. It has an extensive range of modern printing and programming equipment for the production of maps, charts and photographs, as well as ultra-high precision satellite survey systems and standard and analytical graphic drawing facilities. The NSA maintains survey networks and provides geographical support and training in mapping and production.

The Institute of Survey Sciences and Map Production confers national diplomas in surveying and mapping to military and civilian personnel qualified in those fields. It also holds specialist courses in the subjects.

The National Survey Authority helps maintain the national archive of geographical materials, as well as producing military and civilian maps.

In a historic victory, the SAF military team won the 2nd Military World Cup, which was hosted by the Sultanate from 15 to 28 January 2017.

Regional and International events

A historic victory for Omani football, as the national military team are crowned champions in the 2nd Military World Cup.

The Sultan's Armed Forces attach great importance to sports as a means of ensuring their personnel maintain a high level of physical fitness and combat capability. Their sports facilities are constantly being upgraded and their teams perform with distinction at Arab and international sporting events and competitions and at local and national military events.

In a historic victory, their military team won the 2nd Military World Cup, which was hosted by the Sultanate from 15th to 28th January 2017.

The SAF and the RGO also attach great importance to culture and have established central libraries stocked with books on a wide range of subjects. There are also libraries and recreation clubs at the armed forces units, formations and bases.

The mosques at Muaskar al Murtafa'ah and other military camps play an important role in promoting moral values and providing religious education for the men of the armed forces.

The Shabab Oman visits ports in the Arab region and beyond, fostering friendly interaction with the peoples of the world and introducing them to the civilisation and culture of Oman and its people.

The Shabab Oman II

The Shabab Oman II came into being after His Majesty the Sultan – the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces - issued instructions that the RNV Shabab Oman should be replaced by another sailing vessel to continue with its mission of building bridges of friendship between the Sultanate and other countries around the globe.

With its crew of young Omanis, the Shabab Oman visited the ports of Arab and friendly countries to develop cultural contacts with the peoples of the world and introduce them to Oman and its people. It won a number of prestigious awards, including the International Friendship Trophy, which raised its global profile and become inseparably associated with it. It also won the Friendship Trophy for the Historical Seas Regatta in Greece, the International Friendship Trophy for the Tall Ships Race in the United Kingdom (for the seventh time) and the International Friendship Trophy for the North Sea Regatta in the Netherlands. No other sailing ship has ever won three International Friendship Trophies in a single year.

On 30th April 2017 the Shabab Oman II left on its third international voyage – "Shiraa' al Sadaqah wa'l Salam" ("Sail of Friendship and Peace") - to take part in various European regattas. Over the course of its six-month voyage it is continuing to carry out its mission of promoting friendship and brotherhood.

Shabab Oman II continues its dialogue with young people everywhere as it travels around the world, introducing aspects of Oman's civilisation and people.

With its human and material resources dedicated exclusively to maintaining security and stability, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) takes great pride in the progress and development it has achieved.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP)

Several newly opened police facilities serve to reinforce the security and service benefits provided by the Royal Oman Police.

An inspiring success story

With its human and material resources dedicated exclusively to maintaining security and stability, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) takes great pride in the progress and development it has achieved in this regard.

Thanks to sound strategic planning, the ROP has made huge advances over recent years in building up a modern police force capable of responding to the modern world's changing security demands. Consequently, it has proved itself able to combat crime in all its forms and protect the community from any threats it might pose.

Between 2014 and the end of April 2017 the ROP opened several new police stations and area headquarters in the Sultanate's regions, as well as new service and Special Task Force premises. These include headquarters buildings in Rustaq and Nizwa, and police stations in al Mudhaibi, Adam, Salalah, Bahla, Saham, al Suwaiq, Nakhl, al Qabil, al Watteyah and the port of Mina Sohar. Twelve police services premises - equipped with state-of-the-art telecommunications and computer facilities - were opened in various

Several new support facilities, including police stations, area headquarters and service and Special Task Force premises are playing their part in strengthening the Sultanate's security and service systems.

parts of the country as part of a plan to provide one-stop stations enabling applicants to complete their traffic, passport, residence and civil status procedures with the minimum of inconvenience.

Other new projects inaugurated over the same period include the Special Task Force HQ in Seeb and Special Task Force units in Sohar, Liwa, Ibra, Quriyat, Ibri, Salalah, al Kamil wa'l Wafi, Nizwa, Mahdhah, Rustaq and al Suwaiq. The HQ is of particular importance because its security remit covers every area of the Sultanate. The Force's main functions include operating patrols in the regions in order to ensure a 24-hour police presence, guarding vital installations, providing security at events organised by government bodies and departments, protecting diplomatic missions, hotels and non-government establishments, and extending assistance to citizens and residents in need.

The Special Task Force HQ is equipped with the most up-to-date facilities and its highly trained personnel are capable of handling any situation.

The Coast Guard have been furnished with fully equipped speedboats to boost their efficiency in monitoring the long Omani coastline, preventing smuggling and infiltration and responding rapidly to SOS calls.

Specialised Police Units

A priority function of the Coast Guard Police is confronting and defeating smuggling and infiltration in Oman's territorial waters, and securing its long coastline.

The ROP has set up a number of directorates-general and specialist police units to keep abreast of economic, social and demographic growth in the Sultanate. These include the Police Coastguard division, which prevents smuggling and illegal immigration in Oman's territorial waters.

The Coast Guard have been supplied with fully equipped speedboats to boost their efficiency in monitoring the long Omani coast and preventing smuggling, as well as responding rapidly to SOS calls from fishermen stranded at sea.

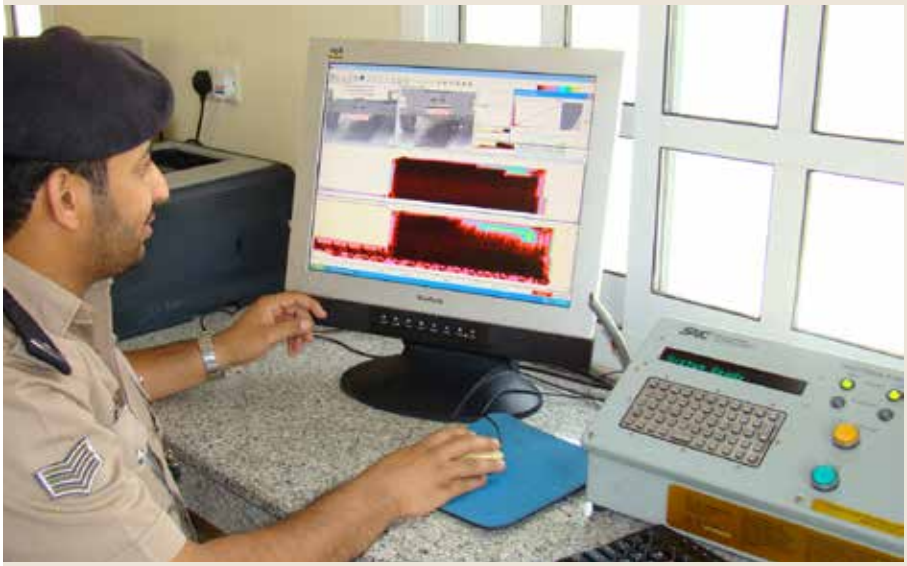
The ROP's Ports Security Directorate was established to protect marine transport routes and the Sultanate's seaports. Police coastguard stations have also been built in all the industrial and commercial ports and fishing harbours along the Omani coast.

In recent years the ROP has scored notable successes in its fight against crime, and between the first half of 2016 and the same period in 2017 it recorded a significant reduction in actual and attempted theft and robbery, as well as other felonies.

The ROP has introduced a criminal investigation competition to encourage greater interaction and competitiveness between the country's investigation directorates and further improve its crime-fighting figures.

In April 2016 the ROP's Directorate-General of Customs launched its automatic direct transfer service to the Gulf Cooperation Council states. The Directorate-General of Customs also launched its single-window, one-stop service – Bayan – at Sohar Industrial Port, Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and several other customs facilities in various parts of the country.

In a move to reduce the human and material damage narcotics cause to society, the ROP is using specialised task forces to tackle the problem of drug trafficking and the sale and use of narcotics, with noteworthy success.



The Directorate General of Customs fulfils multiple responsibilities and with exemplary efficiency, thanks to its well-qualified personnel and labour-saving technology.

In February 2016 the ROP began providing a number of services through its Bayan window, including permits and licences for goods subject to government import or export restrictions, e-industry exemptions issued by the Ministries of Finance and Commerce and Industry, and the e-exemptions system for charitable associations subject to regulation by the Ministry of Social Development; this system creates a link with the private sector, which comprises the land, sea and air carrier/shipping agent/ cargo agent / clearance office and the customers.

In a move to reduce the human and material damage narcotics cause to society, branches of the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances have been set up in all the Sultanate's governorates to tackle the problem of drug trafficking and the sale and use of narcotics. This has enabled the police to record a significant increase in detection rates.

The ROP has adopted the strongest possible measures to prevent narcotics from entering the country and pursue drug dealers and users, because it recognizes that they constitute a global problem which has a seriously damaging effect not only on those directly involved in them, since they also pose a threat to society as a whole, as well as the economy, public health and security.

Training

Training is a top priority for the Royal Oman Police and this is reflected in its reputation for discipline and efficiency.

The ROP attaches great importance to training. At the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences and other training centres, police cadets undergo basic training on joining the force; this is then extended to additional on-the-job on-site training courses.

After completing their training at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences, the new police officers join their respective units. Their courses include theoretical as well as practical input, since this is regarded as an essential part of the training of an effective, competent police officer. The Officers' Institute has been set up in response to the growing numbers of trainees and to meet the ROP's current and future needs.

The Royal Oman Police engage in security and traffic duties and their vigilance contributes to safety on the roads.

The road accident figures for 2015 showed a drop of 48% in the number of fatalities, 14% in the number of injuries and 26% in the number of accidents. This represents a steady trend over the three years since 2012 and reflects the ROP's efforts to reduce traffic accidents.

A study is currently being carried out on road safety in the Sultanate and the steps taken in this regard by the competent authorities are being evaluated. The aim is to further improve the situation in the short, medium and long terms, reduce deaths and injuries caused by traffic accidents, identify any shortcomings on the part of the traffic safety organisations and determine what positive contributions can be made by members of the general public.

At the 2017 Traffic Safety Expo the ROP introduced the Directorate-General of Traffic's new hand-held devices for enabling police patrols to prepare and print traffic violations electronically and obtain details of vehicles, their drivers and any previous offences.

Another item unveiled at the Expo was a driving simulator. This device, which can issue a full report and assessment on a learner driver's performance, will be introduced to provide training on preventive driving programmes run by the Traffic Safety Institute. It will thus be possible to evaluate learners without their needing to go out on to the streets, thereby protecting them from the perils of the road and saving time and effort for all concerned.

The ROP is recognized as being among the Sultanate's most advanced e-government departments and it has won several awards in this connection both at home and abroad.

The ROP websites provide a wide range of services including enquiries about lost documents and smart e-forms for sponsored and non-sponsored visa applicants and tourist visas, as well as customs clearance (the Bayan portal); this last is part of the customs computerisation project designed to enable the importer/exporter (or accredited agent) to obtain a goods permit and clearance from the Directorate-General of Customs. All customs declarations can be submitted via a single portal – **www.customs.gov.om.**

These websites provide access to all the services provided by the different branches of the ROP, as well as details of police-related laws.

Additional facilities are also available through an SMS service launched in cooperation with the local telecommunications companies.

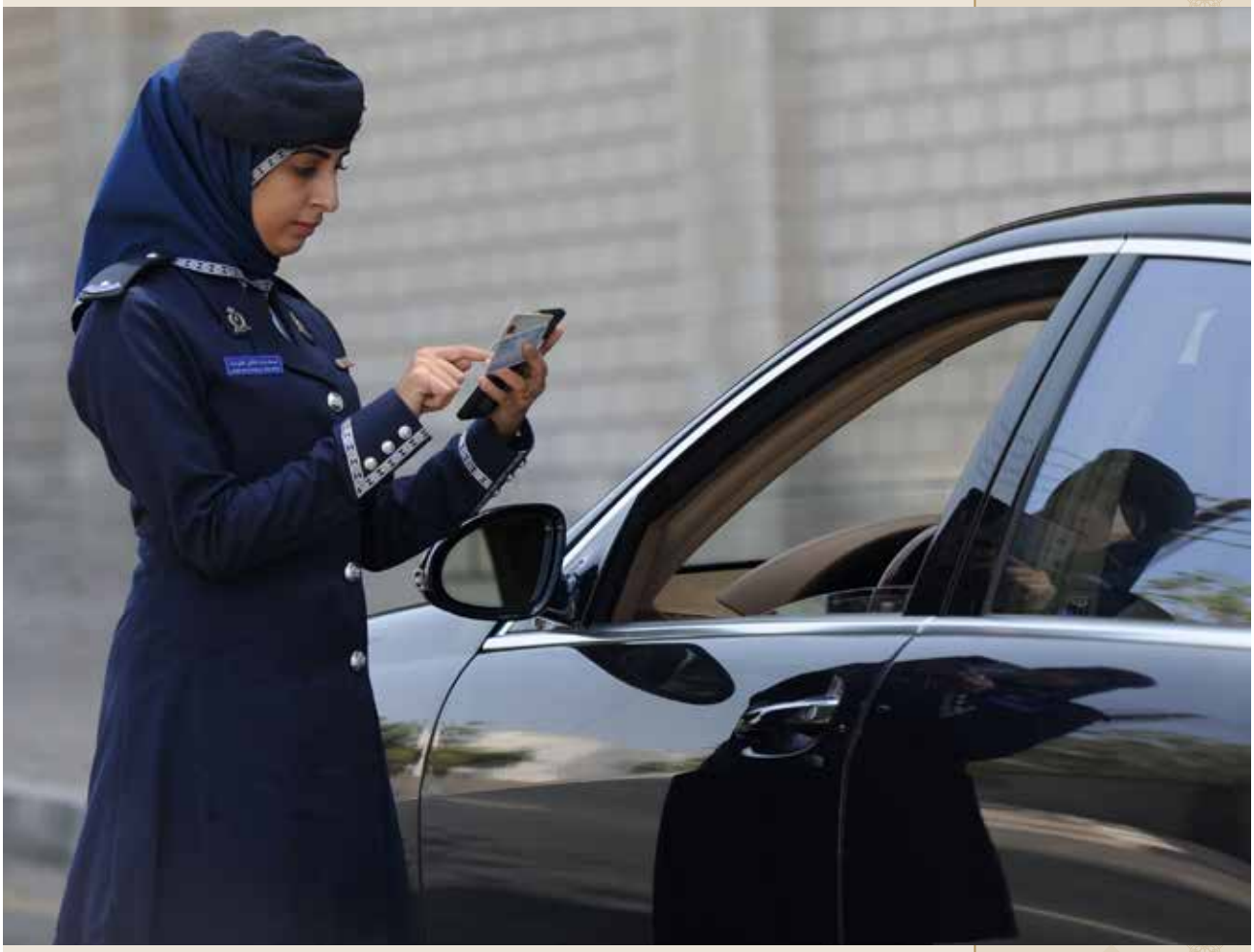
The police stations have been computerised with the introduction of an integrated system that links them with the Public Prosecutor's Office, enabling case files to be transferred electronically. The system also enables paper reports and notifications about burglaries and other crimes, accidents etc. to be converted into a single, standard e-format.

In response to the global trend towards the use of smartphone apps, the ROP has developed a range of apps to deal with queries such as the payment of Omani or Gulf traffic fines, municipal violations, vehicle registration renewal, or procedures to be followed in case of emergencies.

These apps ensure that police services are easily accessible to the public and save considerable time and effort on all sides.

Smartphone apps facilitate users' speedy access to services.

New hand-held devices are assisting police patrols in processing and printing traffic violations electronically, while giving them instant access to details of vehicles, drivers and previous offences, if any.



E-services available for ROP employees through fixed or portable appliances enable them to deal with matters such as queries about vehicles or people, and to record traffic violations and monitor motor vehicles on hand-held devices.

Members of the ROP force are furnished with electronic devices that operate over fixed & mobile networks & this greatly facilitates their many daily policing tasks.

PACDA (the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance) stations are equipped with hi-tech materials and facilities capable of handling all emergency situations and adapted to the rapid pace of development in the Sultanate.

The Directorate-General of Civil Defence

The protection of life and property is the principal objective of the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance.

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) was established by Royal Decree No. 3/2013, issued on 8th January 2013.

In pursuit of its aims of protecting lives and property, it provides a broad range of services including civil defence, fire-fighting, search and rescue, and tackling incidents involving hazardous materials.

The PACDA's premises are equipped with hi-tech materials and facilities to enable the service to keep abreast with the pace of the Sultanate's development. These include motor vehicles, lifting apparatus, hydraulically operated ladders and other equipment for rescuing people involved in road accidents, trapped in high buildings or electric lifts, etc.

The PACDA K9 team, which uses trained dogs to search for corpses or living persons trapped under rubble, began its operations in early 2016.

There are 53 civil defence stations in the Sultanate and 34 ambulance stations.

CIVIL DEFENCE (PACDA) CENTRES IN THE SULTANATE

TOTAL
59
CENTRES

Governorates	Joint Centres	Civil Defence Centres	Ambulance Centres
Muscat	5	7	3
Dhofar	2	5	--
Musandam	2	2	--
Al Buraimi	1	2	--
Al Dakhiliyah	4	2	1
Al Batinah South	6	1	--
Al Batinah North	2	--	--
Sharqiyah South	1	2	2
Sharqiyah North	2	1	1
Al Dhahirah	2	1	--
Al Wusta	2	1	--
TOTAL	28	25	6

"...Focusing on human resources, providing the means to improve their performance, motivating them to make the best use of their energies and potential, diversifying their creative abilities and enhancing their proficiency – whether academic, scientific or practical; this is the basis of real development and provides the cornerstone of a solid structure built on firm foundations, since it is the human element that creates and reinvigorates civilizations."

Qaboos bin Said

(Council of Oman annual session, 2008)

Human Resources...

Current Successes & Future Aspirations

Current Successes & Future Aspirations

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos designed the development strategy he pioneered for the Sultanate around the central importance of the Omani citizen as both the country's most precious resource and the prime target and beneficiary of development.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said has watched two generations mature and a third enter the world since he led the Renaissance that altered Oman's destiny in 1970, and the achievements of this almost half century are reflected in the altered lives of those three generations. It was to create the conditions for a healthy, educated, fulfilled and happy population that the Renaissance was conceived and executed, and the manifestation of that is visible all around Oman today. The successes enjoyed by the present generations are what will define their aspirations for the future and what will create the means to manifesting them – the healthy aspirations of a healthy and happy people.

The advantages that separate the lives of today's adults from those of their grandparents, or even their parents, have changed their concept of how the future is created, mobilising a determination to engage more fully in the process. Omanis of all age groups and social categories today have a better understanding of concepts of equality, of equal opportunity, of active participation in the work of development. It took exceptional prescience in 1970 to see that the key to this success lay in the groundwork of education, health, and consistently fair governance. His Majesty drove home this message year after year, addressing the latest achievements of the Renaissance, but the words were always backed up by the actual process of turning the country around, and turning the hopes and dreams of its citizens into a reality in which they could all share and for which they could all take responsibility. This is the success story of Oman.

When human welfare is placed at the heart of the development process, a clarity surrounds the plans and programmes adopted. All of Oman's development strategies in the decades since 1970 were measured by a yardstick of public benefit. In education, in health, in roads, electricity, water, communications infrastructure, in every public service introduced or enhanced, the goal has been to serve all governorates without exception. Wherever a citizen chooses to establish himself or raise a family on this good land, the objective of policy has been to do the utmost to try and make this possible, to support the well-being of communities wherever they are

Fast forward to today, where the 2017/2016 school year saw the appointment of more than 1,700 teachers, including from the first batch of graduates of the National Educational Rehabilitation Programme. Moreover, some 55 new school buildings were completed in various governorates.

At third level, there are 58 government and private institutions of higher education in the Sultanate, the most prominent being Sultan Qaboos University, as well as Nizwa, Dhofar, Sohar, Sharqiya, and Muscat Universities, all of them national institutions. In addition, private universities and colleges have a current combined capacity of 118,000 students. A further 6,500 scholarship students are in study programmes abroad.

found. Justice and balance have been true markers of this generous approach to governance.

As nations grow and advance with science, education becomes paramount. Education was perceived from the early days as a necessary top priority, as the foundation on which would be raised a generation capable and willing to bear the responsibility of participating in development. The Ministry of Education bore heavy responsibilities in creating a curriculum that would turn education into a life-enhancing, exciting journey.The Sultanate has made remarkable strides in healthcare. Health establishments are positioned widely throughout the country, ensuring that everyone has access to adequate medical treatment.

Primary healthcare services are provided free of charge. The World Health Organisation has regularly singled out Oman for praise for its endeavours in this respect. Under its Health Vision 2050 strategy, the Ministry of Health is conducting a major overhaul of its healthcare delivery system with a view to serving the entire population with the best that modern medicine has to offer.

Despite the fall-off in oil revenues, the Sultanate›s financial and economic situation is broadly stable. Development programmes continue apace, for the many important social dimensions that they impact. Parallel goals include creating an attractive environment for investment and investors, strengthening partnership with the private sector and supporting small and medium enterprises so that they can remain competitive. The Sultanate monitors carefully its position on various competitiveness indicators and a recent ministerial committee was established under the self-explanatory title, the National Competitiveness Committee. The Committee quickly recommended the establishment of a national office for the promotion of competitiveness, to be entitled the National Bureau of Competitiveness.

In May 2017, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said expressed his satisfaction at the progress achieved by the country›s overall development process in both its economic and social dimensions, thanking the various State institutions for their commitment to maintaining public services at their current high standard.

International and regional organisations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, ABEGS (the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States) and ALECSO (the Arab League Organisation for Education, Culture and Sciences, have praised the Sultanate's exemplary initiatives and commitment to school education.

Education

The seeds planted by the Renaissance today will become the fruits of tomorrow.

The education system in the Sultanate has seen major changes across the decades of the modern Omani Renaissance. The huge investment made by the government in all aspects of education has paid off handsomely.

Several international and regional organisations, including UNESCO, the World Bank, the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, have paid tribute to these efforts, in particular to the Sultanate›s determination to provide education for all, to achieve gender equality in education, as well as to its initiatives in introducing modern materials to the classroom. Oman has made major strides in upgrading the post-primary curriculum, which carries an ethos supportive of peace and tolerance, children›s rights, human rights, road safety and the environment. These modules refine the educational model of the well-rounded human being, competent and well qualified to adopt the challenges of the contemporary workplace and broader society in the twenty first century.

Statistical indicators confirm the success of the Sultanate›s commitment to achieving the goal of education for all. In the place of top priority is the endeavour to ensure that children are enabled to complete primary education. At this date, the Sultanate has achieved an enrolment ratio above 98%. Gender equality in school education was achieved within two decades.

The goal of expanding and improving early childhood proceeds apace care and education programmes.

The philosophy of education has as its goal the nurturing of an individual devout in his or her belief in God, committed to the principles and values of the Islamic religion, and sincere in his or her respect for homeland and leader.

The Sultanate has well exceeded the specified target of **25%** to reach a **40%** uptake of improved services. In the ongoing battle against illiteracy, of particular focus in the **15-44** age bracket, Oman brought literacy in this group to **97.8%** in **2015**, the latest figures available.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the development and management of school education at all grade levels (1-12). The Ministry has endeavoured, as it developed the current educational system, to keep abreast of contemporary changes and emerging trends. Its task is to define, and constantly redefine, the components of education that will best serve young, adolescent and adult pupils and students entering a world of fast changing global demands and values. The core principle will always be what enables them to become the most evolved human beings they can be, such that they can contribute to the progress of Omani society. This of course necessitates that they keep pace with global progress in technology and information, though not at the cost of losing their Omani identity. The Omani identity has been shaped from a long history, infused by the faith and heritage of Islam and by the deep roots of Oman's own tradition and landscape.

In May 2017, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said approved the broad outlines of the philosophy of education in the Sultanate. The philosophy informs long term goals and strategy, as debated and proposed by the Education Council and concerned educational bodies. The strategy is constantly under review, and the Ministry adapts and refines policy as it applies to all stages of the educational process in accordance with the philosophy and objectives agreed.

The document outlining the education philosophy, which will act as a basis for policies into the future, is a major reference for the development of curricula and teacher training. It provides guidelines for a model of integrated learning and an enhanced concept of citizenship and identity. It promotes understanding of the individual's religious, social and legal obligations towards themselves and towards others. A good citizen will respect Islamic values, demonstrate loyalty to Sultan and nation, as well as a balanced attitude to the contemporary world and an ability to relate to it from a healthy and confident perspective.

An effective educational system may be expected to inculcate scientific thinking skills and a willingness to contribute positively to the sustainable development process taking place throughout Omani society. Today's curriculum, across the board, derives from a comprehensive, integrated, original, modern and innovative approach, which includes guidelines on how to achieve spiritual, psychological, intellectual, moral, physical and social refinement within the context of Omani citizenship and identity. It favours a belief in God, an adherence to the principles and values of the Islamic religion and a sincere respect for fair government. The philosophy of education in the Sultanate of Oman today is acutely conscious of contemporary realities and takes full advantage of global trends and educational models insofar as they benefit the performance of the system and the evolution of the individuals it sends out into the world.

Private schools operate in tandem with public schools, and the Ministry of Education oversees technical and administrative aspects of their functioning.

Schools

The continuing education scheme espoused by the Sultanate now reaches out to all governorates. This worthy policy has brought access to education to the remotest areas and the courses and programmes available are constantly expanding and kept up to date.

At the other end of the educational spectrum, the Ministry of Education has long recognised the crucial value of establishing a good learning basis in infancy. Pre-school education is heavily incentivised, as is the Ministry's encouragement of the private sector to enter the field, and enrolment has been rising steadily. Today 53.6% of all children of school-starting age (4-5 years) are enrolled in kindergartens.

The Ministry exercises its responsibility for providing school education, grades 1-12, through the medium of the public schools located in every governorate, wilaya and village in the Sultanate. In 2015/2016, there were 1,068 public schools. International schools run by the private sector are under the direct supervision of the Ministry.

Private schools work in parallel with public schools. The Ministry of Education supervises the technical and administrative operation of these schools through the examination system and through its approval of educational programmes and curricula in private schools. Two principal school types offer special education: private monolingual and bilingual international schools; and international schools offering curricula and educational programmes accredited by international systems.

The enrolment rate in the educational system during the 2015/2016 school year was up by **3.16 %** over 2014-2015.

The Ministry is in a constant quest to improve the educational process, as the knowledge-based society of the twentieth century advances and interest grows in the development of creativity and innovation among students. Amongst its responses has been the introduction to the curriculum of a project-based learning approach that values creativity. Another is the educational innovation programme, with its 'innovation incubators', that promotes initiative among students, supported by research capabilities. The Learning Innovation Programme teaches innovative learning concepts and is implemented experimentally in four schools in Muscat Governorate, called incubators for innovation.

Oman is now a participant in the International Chemistry Olympiad, with its own national competitive programme enthusiastically supported. Meanwhile information technology has arrived in the primary school, with educational aids derived from modern technology contributing to the development of learning and equipping school-leavers to deal with life's problems and challenges using the tools and skills of the age.

The Ministry of Education implements important initiatives, such as improving the professional competence of teachers and improving the quality and efficiency of teaching methods.

The Cognitive Development Programme for Students in Science, Mathematics and the Concepts of Environmental Geography is one of the standout educational projects in which the Ministry has engaged since the academic year 2007/2008; to encourage a rigorous and disciplined approach to research and investigation and thought; to develop innovative abilities and raise the success figures for student participation in science and mathematics. Meanwhile information technology is employed to best effect in basic education to enhance learning strategies and to stimulate the practical and applied aspects of course studies and thus benefit school-leavers in facing life's problems.

The Ministry, meanwhile, has rolled out several important initiatives, including developing the professional competence of teachers, enhancing the quality and efficiency of teaching methods, establishing the Career Guidance Centre, the Vocational Training Centre for Teachers and the National Centre for Educational Evaluation and Examinations.

Modern technology is a core component in the process of developing a comprehensive education strategy.

The learning disabilities programme assists students with learning difficulties by providing a stimulating and supportive educational environment that will enable them reach their full potential.

Comprehensive Education for All

Great efforts have been made to provide a comprehensive and accessible education for all.

The Sultanate's drive to provide comprehensive and accessible education for all has not neglected the special needs sector, serving pupils and students with hearing and mental disabilities. It has invested heavily in the provision of quality educational requirements for this group, including specialised teachers, equipment, educational devices, adequately designed and equipped school and study rooms. The Ministry of Education directs its efforts in this regard principally through three dedicated special education schools. The three schools had a combined enrolment of 487 pupils for the 2015/2016 academic year. The numbers have seen a decline as awareness grows and parents understand better the value of integrating their children, where possible, into the basic education system with their peers.

The educational integration programme provides separate classrooms for students with hearing and mental disabilities attending basic education schools.

The Learning Disability Programme helps students with learning difficulties by providing a supportive and stimulating learning environment that will help them reach their full potential, enhance their academic, social and emotional abilities, and offer them equal education opportunities with their fellow students. There were 613 schools signed up to the Learning Disability Programme at the end of the 2015/2016 academic year.

The programme is designed to improve the verbal and linguistic performance of students with speech and language disorders and has been in place since 2004/2005. Remarkable improvements have been observed and recorded in the performance level of students enrolled in the programme from an academic, psychological and social perspective.

In the 2015/2016 school year, there were **1,675** pupils with special needs attending **214** regular schools throughout the governorates.

Adult education centres are made available as needed in all regions of the Sultanate and offer the same curriculum and range of subjects as are taught at regular morning classes.

The Educated Knowledge-Based Society

The literacy programme has been a major spoke of the Sultanate's educational strategy from the earliest days of the modern Renaissance.

Literacy has marched in lockstep with the advance of education among young people. This is in keeping with an education philosophy for which the guiding principle is the equalisation of rights and duties in Omani society and the generation of equality of opportunity for all citizens of all ages and abilities.

The effort to eradicate illiteracy fully and create a knowledge-based society, whose members are aware of their responsibilities and roles in advancing the development of the country, continues unabated.

Since its introduction, the adult education programme has been responsible for training batches of young Omanis working in a variety of establishments and disciplines to improve their career possibilities by acquiring an academic qualification.

Adult education mirrors each of the various stages of formal education, from the 7th grade up to completion of the 12th grade. The overall programme offers two options: regular study at adult education centres, and free home study.

Adult education centres are opened at locations throughout the Sultanate on the basis of a request by individuals seeking to enrol. The curricula and subjects taught at the regular morning classes are applied in the adult education centres.

In 2015/2016, there were **19,177** students participating in the adult education programme nationwide. Of this number, **18,567** were studying at home and **650** attending classes externally.

Overall illiteracy across society was down to **7.1 %** in 2015,

as compared with **8%** in 2014

Training & Rehabilitation Programmes

Academic and specialist training institutions turn out a constant stream of qualified cadres through programmes that make the best use of available techniques and technology.

The value to the national workforce of continual re-education and rehabilitation is a matter to which His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has given much focused attention over the years. He has always had the vision to see beyond current requirements, to study the emergence of new developments worldwide and how they might adapt to benefit processes in the Omani labour and business markets. Human resources, and the advancement of capabilities and performance, are vital if the successes of government policies are to be maintained and improved on. The Ministry of Education shares this vision, and has sought to advance the qualifications of its own cadres with the help of training and rehabilitation programmes that equip them with adequate technical and administrative skills. These programmes are tailored in terms of grade level, and target skills to the specific demands being met. Programmes are conducted under

the umbrellas of centralised and decentralised training. The former are centrally planned and implemented, and 2016 saw 135 of these programmes active, involving 6,122 Ministry personnel.

Decentralised training is designed and takes place under the supervision of regional educational directorates, zones and participating schools. There were 652 such programmes running at locations across the Sultanate in 2016, involving 32,258 trainees.

Over and above the rehabilitation programmes, education personnel may be seconded to establishments offering courses in various disciplines, enabling them to advance in knowledge and improve their professional competencies. All of these skill-boosting programmes raise the overall performance of educational personnel, making them better qualified to cope with the demands of the modern classroom.

No. of Pupils & Schools in Government School System

School Year 2017/2018

No of Students

Male	Female	Total
295935	292404	588339

Basic Education Schools

	Male	Female	Co-Ed	Co-Ed & Girls	Total
K1(1-4)	0	0	280	0	280
K2(5-10)	296	156	1	0	453
Together Classes (K1+K2)	0	1	58	222	230

Post-Basic Education Schools
Two-class schools (11-12)
Multiple class schools (10-12)

Male	Female	Co-Ed	Co-Ed & Girls	Total
60	55	0	115	230

Morning 1096 — **Total** — Evening 33

Male	Female	Co-Ed	Co-Ed & Girls	Total
356	212	339	222	1129

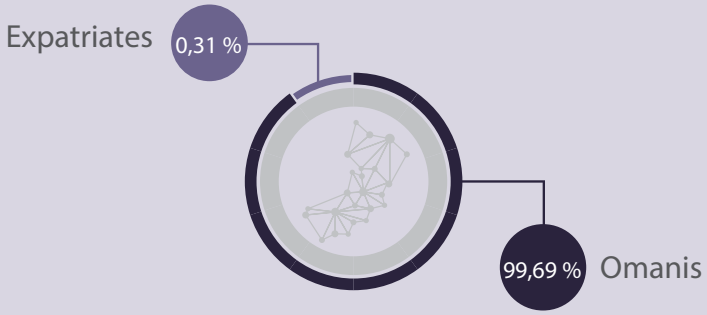
School Year Statistics 2018/2017

Teachers

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	Total Teachers
Omanis	13148	33765	46913	56000
Expatriates	5097	3990	9087	

Administrative & Technical Personnel

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	Total Admin & Tech. Personnel
Omanis	4351	6257	10608	10641
Expatriates	33	0	33	



Higher education continues to both underwrite and reflect much of the success of the modern Omani Renaissance.

Higher Education

The demand for expertise to meet the needs of the Sultanate's labour market depends on the full engagement and collaboration of the higher education sector.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the availability of higher education and the presence of centres of scientific and cultural research are the criteria which best predict the likelihood of genuine progress occurring in a country or society. At a certain point in the development cycle, higher education transcends the role of mere transfer of knowledge and evolves to manifest fully as progress on the ground. While this level of integration is still largely a preserve of the countries of the advanced industrial system, the marketplace need for third level specialist qualifications is rising to new levels of urgency in developing countries, where progress demands strong national cadres in the various disciplines.

Higher education has been a pillar of the constantly expanding structure that is the modern Omani Renaissance. In practical terms, this has materialised in the founding of numerous third level institutions which offer a broad spectrum of advanced learning in everything from philosophy to health, commerce, education, law, counselling, art, arts and humanities. Graduates emerge to bring their qualifications to an increasingly sophisticated workforce. Postgraduates and scholarship students take up external study programmes, and these scholarship schemes undergo constant review, with areas of specialisation or, as appropriate, study location adjusted as befits the requirements and priorities of the labour market.

The Ministry of Higher Education, represented by the Directorate General of Colleges of Applied Sciences, supports the educational process in numerous ways. The Directorate supervises six Colleges of Applied Sciences, distributed across the Sultanate (Sohar, Nizwa, Sur, Ibri, Salalah, Rustaq). In the 2015/2016 academic year, it had 6,655 students enrolled in various courses.
On 25 May 2015, the Education Council decided to convert the College

The Colleges of Applied Sciences benefited greatly in 2016 from new regulations bearing on scientific research which approved financial support for scientific research and scientific publishing.

of Applied Sciences in Al-Rostaq into a College of Education for the training and rehabilitation of Omani teachers.

The Colleges of Applied Sciences attach great importance to scientific research as a powerful resource in the discovery of new knowledge, and a key parameter in raising the perceived status of third level institutions.

This conviction is reflected in the development of policies and strategies that have a bearing on scientific research. In this context, 2016 saw the promulgation of legislation organising the process of scientific research at the Colleges of Applied Sciences, which led to the introduction of financial support schemes for scientific research and scientific publishing. The Colleges of Applied Sciences deliver support to the research community in the form of studies and research papers, both published and unpublished, in various disciplines. A total of 77 such research studies were completed during the 2016/2017 academic year.

On 18 June 2016, the Council of Ministers issued a statement confirming that the number of places reserved for holders of the General Education Diploma at various private and public institutions throughout the Sultanate would be retained for the 2016/2017 academic year. Nor were any changes anticipated in allocations to external missions. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said believes strongly that the education sector should never be compromised, given its crucial value to development of the nation's human resource banks. He has always encouraged young people to broaden their horizons and take on the challenge of further education, for it is through the accumulation of knowledge and skills that advance to higher earnings and greater job satisfaction is achieved. This proactive approach to education will generate a paradigm shift in the perception of education as a means to more evolved and conscious lifestyle choices.

Colleges of Applied Science are suited to those wishing to acquire specialist scientific skills in any of a range of disciplines.

Private Higher Education

An observer of the higher education situation in Oman will quickly see its potential for major investment by the private sector. Universal access to quality primary and secondary education across the Sultanate has had the effect of encouraging the uptake of third level opportunities.

This in turn fuels higher career expectations and a more qualified national workforce. The increasing presence of private third level institutions broadens opportunities for ambitious school leavers, but is not restricted to holders of the General Education Diploma. Adult education is available to all who wish to complete their education and that includes both public and private sector employees who are prepared to take on the additional burden of study for career rewards down the line.

The private higher education sector has seen steady growth, with a proliferation of colleges now offering qualifications in general and specialist areas of study. In 2017, Oman had 20 private colleges and eight private universities, distributed widely throughout the country and offering certification in the form of diplomas and bachelor and master degrees. Student uptake at these institutions is growing rapidly, with 70,294 students enrolled across the 28 colleges in 2017.

The Sultanate's commitment to the development of private higher education, to ensuring its quality and the long-term stability of the institutions established with a view to protecting the national development process, is backed up by state funding, which comes in many direct and indirect forms. The state believes that its subsidising of the sector will benefit the overall development of education, raise standards and enhance the level of services provided to the student body.

Support takes the form of provision of suitable land for the construction of campus facilities and equity funding up to 50% of the share capital, to a ceiling of three million RO. In addition, several private universities have benefited from generous grants, of RO17 million apiece, as specific directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Private universities are also facilitated by special tax and customs exemptions which would otherwise burden their academic budgets.

In its task of ensuring quality across the sector, the Ministry has been rigorous in its oversight, from the commissioning of Oman's first private college to monitoring the educational process on an ongoing basis at all private third level institutions. The quality assurance process takes place by various means and by close coordination and integration with the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority.

The Ministry also oversees the Performance Indicators Project for Higher Education Institutions, which monitors quality standards rigorously. The Ministry also operates a scheme by which academic programmes are licensed to private third level institutions. Programmes are analysed by specialists distinguished by relevant expertise in local, regional and international higher education institutions, to assess quality and compatibility with accepted academic standards. A full review

Private institutions of higher education have come a long way in terms of academic quality, and today the Sultanate has 20 functioning private colleges and eight private universities distributed across the country.

examines whether a proposed course is keeping pace with the advance of information technology, and whether it adequately covers the skills and knowledge necessary to prepare a graduate to compete successfully in the labour market. Twenty five new academic programmes were approved in 2016, of which 15 were offered at bachelor level and ten at master level.

With a growing number of private institutions entering the third level education market, higher quality standards are also being observed across the board.

Unified Admissions Centre

The changeover from a traditional to an electronic admissions system in the Sultanate had a significant impact on the process of registration for and admission to colleges of higher education. The HEAC (Higher Education Admissions Centre) serves the purposes of coordinating and executing admission procedures for school-leavers who have completed their General Education Diploma and are seeking admission to third level institutions both within the Sultanate and abroad, using modern technology to sort applications and closely match the preferences and point scores of student applicants with the entry requirements of respective institutions and the admission quotas available for each course.

In the 11 years since its establishment, the HEAC has grown exponentially and today uses multiple electronic systems. The unified admissions system for the first undergraduate stage and the higher education statistical system are the two principal systems managed by the centre. Other computerised registration and admission systems are overseen by the Centre in coordination with the Directorate General of Scholarships, including the system of acceptance into undergraduate studies.

It is supremely efficient and has won awards at local, regional and international level.

The unified admissions system has over **40,000** applicants for undergraduate study registered annually

in ,2016/2017 23,776 students were admitted to institutions of higher education, both public and private, as well as to internal and external scholarship missions, from a total of **32,172** school-leavers successful in the General Education Diploma. At **73.9 %**

The admissions system works across all **63** third level colleges operating in the Sultanate.

The announcement that **1,500** additional external scholarships were to be provided in the 2017/2016 academic year, in addition to the **7,000** internal third level scholarships on offer was greeted with relief throughout the educational sector, and particularly among students and their parents or sponsors.

Not only would the increase mean more opportunities for capable General Diploma holders to continue their studies, but pressure in the jobs market would be reduced by an equal amount. Moreover, students of exceptional ability sent abroad to take up specialist studies valuable in the Omani labour market would benefit from the experience of broader cultural and scientific horizons.

The Directorate General of Scholarships is tasked with identifying and supporting selected school-leavers and delivering them to government-supported overseas scholarship programmes, or arranging their uptake of scholarships offered by sister countries. Scholarships are offered for primary degrees in disciplines of benefit to the Sultanate's qualification-hungry labour market. The Directorate subsequently follows up the study progress of scholarship students and assists them with practical aspects of their stay abroad.

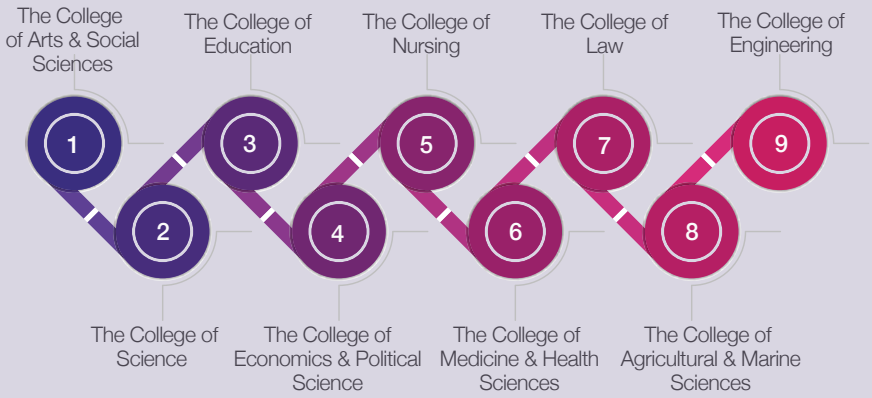
The Department of External Scholarships acts in accordance with agreements concluded between the Sultanate and sisterly and friendly countries, or between the Ministry and various prestigious overseas academic institutions, to enrol exceptional students by way of the scholarship system in scientific and other programmes of unique value, which can deliver skills and knowledge that will greatly benefit the Sultanate's diverse development aspirations.

The Department of Internal Scholarships allocates 9,638 internal scholarships every academic year. These scholarships include several programmes supervised by the Department, the most important of which are the scholarships allocated to students from social security families, by which study fees are paid by the Ministry over and above the monthly allowance. Students from low income families may also benefit from full scholarship programmes under which the Ministry pays all study costs.

The Department of Graduate Studies, which specialises in the affairs of postgraduate students enrolled in masters and doctoral programmes, or in specialised and fellowship courses both within and outside the Sultanate, continues to open new channels for postgraduate studies in countries around the world. It also maintains contact with students studying at their own expense, responding to their inquiries and offering guidance on accredited universities in their chosen specialties, or rendering them assistance of one form or another.

Sultan Qaboos University was a major landmark in the development of the Sultanate's higher education project and indeed its overall development project. A beacon of the Renaissance culture of progress through learning, its graduates and the products of its research and expertise have impacted all sectors of national development since its foundation in 1986. Thirty years on, it has a well-established academic and research reputation that has shown itself capable of substantial and remarkable achievement. It has done so with the help of state-of-the-art laboratories, five academic libraries housing the latest specialist publications, and a regular schedule of academic events. The University hosts conferences, seminars and international forums, offers workshops on general and specialist topics, and aspires to, and earns, accreditation for its departments and disciplines from world-class institutions.

The University's open ethos enriches the educational and intellectual aspirations of the student cohort occupying its three-level qualification system. Its degree-certified undergraduate, master level and doctoral level courses are distributed over nine Colleges:



The University has also enhanced its reputation for serious scientific research, as well as public service in the community, and international cooperation.

The University of Sultan Qaboos is listed among the top 50 of the world›s youngest universities. It had 15,278 students enrolled in the 2016/2017 academic year. Of this number, 99% were Omani nationals, with 128, or 1%, of the student body being from overseas.

SQU offered 60 masters programmes in 2016/2017, in addition to 30 doctoral programmes.

Offering a solid basis and generous support for scientific research, thanks to the wisdom and insight of His Majesty the Sultan, the university has achieved ground-breaking success in research studies of a strategic nature and which address many of the issues facing Oman today in the fields of environment, energy , health sciences, humanities and social sciences, communications, industry and resources.

The University is proactive in its promotion of innovation. In one of its more recent successes, a research team from the Faculty of Engineering obtained a patent for the creation of

a multi-component portable wireless charging device. A novel method of separating oil from water was identified that uses nanostructured zinc oxide membrane applications and that is expected to become a cost-effective and energy-efficient alternative to techniques currently in use. Another patent protects a production method for value-added molasses. Introduced by a research team from the Faculty of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, it involves features associated with the crystallisation of sugar.

SQU personnel and students submitted a total of 14 patent applications in 2016.

The University hosted a packed conference schedule in 2016/2017, the most prominent among which were the 15th Science Festival at the Faculty of Science, the 9th Scientific Agricultural Festival, the Youth Media Forum, the Documentation and Informatics Forum, the 3rd International Conference on Language, Linguistics, Literature and Translation, the 1st Postgraduate Forum for Graduates of the Faculty of Education, the 3rd FOSS (Free and Open Source Software) Conference, the 1st Meeting of the Paediatric Oncology East and Mediterranean (POEM) Group and the Oman Thoracic Conference, in addition to the Annual Art Education Exhibit, the Career and Training Opportunities Fair and the 7th Student Product Exhibition displaying 43 projects undertaken by students from colleges around Oman. These and other events throughout the year bring energy and life to the academic process, expanding student horizons and encouraging social and intellectual mobility.

A reputation for significant scientific research is enhancing the reputation of Sultan Qaboos University and catapulting it into the future.

Decades of support for the public health system and sound continuous planning have been responsible for improving the overall health of the population in the Sultanate.

In the years of the modern Renaissance, the national health system has been responsible for transforming core concepts of healthcare and of its supporting services. The transformation has been largely in line with the radical approach taken to development in all fields.

The careful planning pursued by the Sultanate by a sequence of health development plans running consecutively every five years since 1976 has created a health system consisting of targeted health programmes and services that have raised the overall health of the population to unprecedented levels. The Ninth Five-Year Plan for Health Development (2016-2020) entered its second year in 2017, and it marks a new departure in methodology compatible with demographic and population changes and with new global paradigms in medical care and technology. The new Five-Year Plan takes a results-based and long-term approach, with a 30-year health planning perspective (Health 2050).

Sound planning and uninterrupted development, as implemented by successive Ministries of Health since 1976, have given the Sultanate the advanced healthcare system it enjoys today.

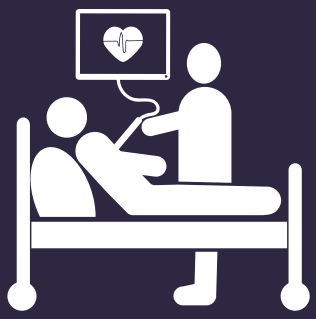
It represents a quantum leap in the process of future health planning.
The Ninth Five-Year Plan defined outstanding aspects of future health needs in determining its overall strategy and goals: governance, leadership and delivery of health services, human health resources, health information and research, health products and vaccines, medical technology, health funding and cooperation and partnership between the sectors.

Like the nation's other major stakeholders, the Ministry of Health has tailored forward plans with a view to meeting the goals of sustainable development (2015-2030). The Third Goal of sustainable development relates directly to health. Goal Three encompasses 13 sub-goals which translate into indicators functioning to evaluate the principal goals scientifically.

Goal Three of sustainable development aims to ensure that every citizen, irrespective of age, has the means to enjoy a healthy and fulfilled lifestyle, compatible with the health system's 2050 outlook.
The overall plan has other direct and indirect health goals and targets, and all of these goals and indicators have been developed in standardised format for easy management of health-related objectives.

The long-term vision of Health 2050 is the result of strategies that have been thoroughly worked and re-worked. Its perspective is one that sees the current system as a transition to one that will harvest the most effective innovations in healthcare worldwide, as they arise, for application at home.

The healthcare system consists of three integrated components: primary healthcare, secondary healthcare and tertiary healthcare. Primary healthcare is provided at health centres and local hospitals in all governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate. Secondary care is provided by referral hospitals in the Sultanate's main wilayats. These hospitals offer more skilled and specialised levels of healthcare. Tertiary care encompasses high-level technical healthcare. This is provided in the major hospitals in the governorate of Muscat, namely the Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital and Al Nahda Hospital. All of these hospitals provide comprehensive medical treatment and act as referral hospitals to all parts of the Sultanate. Al Masarra Hospital in the Governorate of Muscat provides tertiary-level care, and specialises in the treatment of psychiatric and neurological diseases.



The Sultanate has a total of **74** hospitals, **49** of which are owned by the Ministry of Health. These hospitals provide 6,589 beds, which is a ratio of **15.5** beds for every **10,000** members of the population. Of these beds, 5,034 belong to Health Ministry hospitals, constituting **76 %** of the total of all hospitals in the Sultanate.

On 11 May 2017, the Ministry of Health launched the Al-Shifa National Healthcare Information System, which links the health files of all patients of the Ministry's various health institutions throughout the Sultanate using a unified national, or civil, number to create the National Electronic Health Record. The NEHR enables all 139 health institutions, including hospitals and health centres, to access patient data instantly, facilitated by high speed MPLS routing. This makes clinical data fully mobile, and standardised to international protocols.

Al-Shifa adds immense value to the quality of the health services provided, ensuring that a patient continues treatment wherever he or she is currently located. Even more importantly, the collation of clinical information into one comprehensive file greatly facilitates the supervision and management of existing and potential health conditions.

This is in addition to the health services rendered to the employees and relatives by the Diwan of Royal Court, the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Oman Police, Petroleum Development Oman and Sultan Qaboos University. The University Hospital (SQUH) offers all three levels of healthcare (primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare) to all citizens. Visits to outpatient clinics in 2016 stood at more than 15.5 million. The increase in the number of visits to clinics and patient admissions followed an increase in other services, such as medical laboratory, x-ray and dentistry services.

The number of patients treated at hospital internal departments stood at approximately **341,000** inpatients in 2016. More than **111,000** surgical operations were conducted in 2016.

The logic behind the Health Ministry›s emphasis on primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare stems from a conviction that progress in these areas will bring down the rates of communicable diseases, raise the average life expectancy and allow for more focus on problems arising from non-communicable diseases,

which typically require continuous and advanced healthcare.

As for primary healthcare, the Ministry of Health, in its successive five-year plans, focuses on ensuring support for the development of health services that provide highly effective and low-cost primary healthcare. This includes an expansion in the number of establishments providing primary healthcare to people throughout the Sultanate, as well as regular support and upgrading of those institutions so that they can provide a service of high quality. These efforts have had a tangible and remarkable outcome - a significant improvement in health status of the Omani population.
By the end of 2016, Oman had 232 primary health-care institutions, polyclinics and local hospitals run by the Ministry of Health, including 65 health centres with beds, 118 health centres without beds, 20 polyclinics and 29 local hospitals.

The Sultanate's steady progress and development in child care has been recognised and documented as a positive model internationally.

In 1970

infant mortality was high, at **118** out of every **1,000** live births within the first year of life.
181 infants out of **1,000** live births died before the age of five

In 1985

this figure had fallen to **45**

In 2015

a figure that had dropped to **11.4**

An ambitious national programme is training and qualifying cadres specialised in quality assurance and enhancement in the delivery of health services.

The Ministry of Health is acutely aware that the quality of healthcare is heavily dependent on the availability of a qualified and adequate workforce. As such it has given particular attention to strategies that support the development of the workforce in its pursuit of a superior health service contributing to the better overall health of the population.

In 2016 , **583** medical and paramedical graduates from Ministry of Health institutes joined the workforce, This is in addition to **3,055** qualified medics and paramedics who graduated from higher education institutions in 2016

making for a total of **13,382** in recent years

all contributing to the rise in Omanisation ratios in the health service. A growing cohort of qualified Omani doctors is emerging yearly from Sultan Qaboos University and private third level medical colleges, while nursing and technical institutes affiliated to the Ministry of Health are turning out highly trained medical and paramedical personnel to swell the ranks of an increasingly competent and sophisticated health system .

The Ministry continues to develop health management policies that streamline the administrative process, to enhance its response to the challenges posed by a constantly evolving healthcare system. Its concerns are focused on several key areas, the most important of which is the matter of maintaining support for the information system across the entire territory of the Sultanate as a necessary component for proper planning that addresses shortcomings. Insofar as concerns the quality of health services, a programme has been unveiled that will train and qualify a national cadre of quality assurance personnel to oversee improvement in the health service on the ground. This will involve seconding a number of selected healthcare personnel to quality management study programmes at master and doctoral levels.

The private health sector is a valuable extension of the Sultanate's public health service and is enjoying steady growth

There are currently 19 private hospitals, **462** public clinics, **310** specialised clinics and health centres, 251 dental clinics, 48 clinics specialising in Chinese and Indian medicine, **27** medical laboratory centres and **7** MRI centres in the Sultanate. There were **672** pharmacies operating nationwide in 2016.

Job training programmes are a top priority, given their role in improving and developing employee skills that enhance work performance.

Civil Service

The Ministry of Civil Service executes important public service functions, of which the most important is the management of public service personnel. The overall quality of a country's economic development and administrative policies is only as effective as is the quality and motivation of its civil service.

The Ministry of Civil Service is also an essential point of reference for ministries and government units dealing with administrative or civil service issues. It supervises the streamlining of administrative work in these units by taking on the training and upgrading of personnel to standards compatible with current requirements. Services to government units and agencies take the form of work improvement programmes designed to meet the objectives outlined in Royal Decree No. 142/2008. This responsibility involves the implementation of policies that promote better work practices across the civil service, impacting its organisation, recruitment, procedural, legislative and information aspects, while directing and coordinating efforts to ensure optimal use of available human and financial resources.

The civil service at the end of 2016 was servicing 38 government units by means of **177,717** employees, of which figure Omanis accounted for **86.9%,** or **154,512** males and females across the sector. Males accounted for **52%** of the Omani total, and females **48%.**

Technology's most recent contribution to the enormous oversight task borne by the Ministry of Civil Service is the automated system for remote training which is available to civil service employees through the Ministry›s website. The system was the outcome of a long process of scrutiny, and favourable reviews of its performance. Qualification requirements are specified and uploaded onto the hi-tech automated system and a bank of training programmes for the various specifications made accessible remotely. Not only does the system provide maximum access to the broadest numbers of personnel, but it greatly reduces staff training costs, and is time efficient and less disruptive to work routines.

The system was launched in October 2016 and already has proved to be equally popular with employees, who can self-assess their abilities and pick the most suitable courses to match their career ambitions, then complete the relevant training in their own time.

The remote training scheme is a tool of immense value to the strategy of raising motivation levels within the civil service. Motivation, as provided by the training incentive, is key to raising the standard of knowledge and skills within the service to keep pace with constant change. Not only do national strategic visions demand that new technology and new paradigms be quickly understood, but technology is transforming the workplace at its core, and a sluggish civil service will not keep pace. Self-motivation, and self-directed remote training, is working. There are situations where major changes across the workforce need to be implemented in a time-efficient and coordinated manner and so on-

site training has not been discarded, but takes place as necessary in the workplace impacted by the change. The Ministry of Civil Service values its exchanges with the private sector, seeing the latter's flexible and innovative approach to work practices and market developments as especially beneficial to the challenges of adaptability it faces with its own work force. Out of this interaction have come a number of novel partnership ideas involving the exchange of experiences between public and private sector employees. Both sectors also have much experience to exchange in the domain of management practices. One mechanism that has proved particularly successful in upgrading performance within the civil service is the assignment to selected personnel of tasks similar to those carried out by equivalent grade functions in the private sector. These personnel are now better equipped to interact with the private sector as circumstances demand.

This particular initiative was launched in December 2016 and aims to have trained 678 government employees in 25 training areas over the course of 2017.

Because human resources are the most crucial component of any enterprise, and because the efficient rollout of any development plan demands that it is administered by competent and qualified individuals, the Ministry of Civil Service analysed several training systems for civil service personnel for suitability to its own work force, looking at comprehensiveness, multiplicity of grade levels, and diversity of content, so as to be adaptable to administrative, technical and professional personnel . Training programmes conducted in 2016 served 45,219 civil service employees, 44,727 within the Sultanate and 492 overseas.

In addition to mass training within the service, selected qualifying individuals are given leave to attend academic institutions to earn scientific and other academic qualifications of benefit to their careers and to their responsibilities, and this, too, is bringing a fresh dynamic to public administration.

In addition to the Ministry's endeavours, there are training grants provided additionally by sisterly countries that have proved to be rewarding experiences on many levels for their fortunate beneficiaries and, consequently, strengthened bonds of goodwill between the Sultanate and those countries. So far, 104 State administrative employees of both sexes have participated in this grant scheme.

The Ministry of Civil Service is one of the arms of government where enormous strides have been made in the exploitation and application of information technology. The result has reflected positively on the level of organisation within the Ministry itself and in the services it provides. 'Mawrid': the software system introduced to manage the vast human resouces data base covering all units of the civil service, greatly facilitates the work of establishing and harmonizing procedures throughout the government sector. The result is better work practices and a better service rendered. Technology supports easy access to, and ability to update data.

The system has an administrative and a financial application. The administrative application has been in a process of gradual adoption and is now running

By the middle of 39 ,2017 government units had completed their vision and mission statements and 32 government ministries had completed their service manual.

in most branches of the civil service, a total of 38 branches at the end of 2016. The financial application is up and running in 29 government units.

The Ministry's terms of reference include proposing organisational structure adjustments at civil service units in keeping with the general objectives outlined in the Royal decrees establishing such units, and reviewing them in such a way as to achieve optimal effectiveness of these structures. Civil service bodies operate within a legal framework, as exemplified in the Law Regulating the Administrative Apparatus of the State and decisions and resolutions of the Council of Ministers and of the Civil Service Council. These decisions are themselves tempered by standard, customary principles of organisation, including principles of transparent purpose, of unity of command, of oversight and the like. The Ministry also assesses extant regulations as they apply in individual civil service units for their effectiveness in serving the objectives of the unit. It is proactive in diagnosing organisational problems as they arise with a view to resolving them quickly, where necessary providing such technical assistance as will facilitate this end.

In implementation of these terms of reference, seven comprehensive studies and 53 partial studies relevant to specific government units were completed during 2016. These studies included full reviews of the organisational structures of these units and proposals for useful amendments where necessary with a view to eliminating overlap or duplication in the exercise of functions assigned to them individually and achieving optimal performance in each.

There has been a concerted effort to bring to fruition the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bearing on improved government performance and accelerated completion of the e-government project. The Cabinet has approved several initiatives in this regard, including one involving the identification by respective government entities of a guiding vision and mission under which to function and which is compatible with the government's broad mission to increase efficiency throughout the administration. Another initiative involved the compilation of a directory of services that would document the functions of each governmental entity, define the requirements for such services and establish time frames for their implementation. The Ministry of Civil Service in 2016 lent technical support to all concerned parties, conducting workshops on various aspects of the initiatives and training specialised staff on preparation of the directory of services. It also provided uninterrupted technical support to the task forces responsible for preparing the directory at the various government units.

By mid-2017, 39 government units had completed their vision and mission statements and 32 government ministries had completed their directory of services, listing all services provided by the government unit, the data required by the employee and the beneficiary, the documents required for the service to be implemented and the time required for its completion. A proposal to develop a customer service charter was also tabled.

Manpower

The principal task of the Ministry of Manpower is to optimise the combination of services provided by the labour, technical education and vocational training sectors. The constant upgrading of human resources is key to the success of the development process. National growth and achievement of the economic objectives of Oman 2020 will depend on greater productivity from a more knowledgeable workforce. As such, the Ministry oversees an intelligent investment strategy that drives individual motivation to pursue new knowledge and skills, to diversify and generally hone individual talent through training and further education. To create this consciousness in the work force is to guarantee the success of the Sultanate's ambitious national plans by guaranteeing the success of individual potential.

The construction sector accounted for the highest numbers of employed in 2016, at 34.8 % of the national workforce, followed by wholesale, retail and vehicle repair (19%), real estate, leasing and business activities (10%), manufacturing, and transport, storage and communications at 8.8% and 7.4% respectively.

The private sector workforce took in 228,323 male and female appointees in 2016, distributed over all professions and sectors. In addition, 62,665 job seekers found employment.

In the professions, basic engineering occupations accounted for the highest uptake, absorbing 28.6 % of the sector workforce. This was followed by the clerical professions (22.7%) & the service professions (16.8%). The data showed males concentrated in the basic engineering occupations, at a national total of 17,880 or 39.4% of male appointees, while females were concentrated in the clerical professions, at 7,572 in total or 43.7% of female appointees nationwide.

An increase in the expatriate quotient of the private sector labour force was observed in 2016, by a figure of 165,855 male and female employees, bringing the total up from 1,776,153 in 2015 to 1,942,008 in 2016, an increase of 9.3%.

The year 2016 saw the completion of 8,890 inspections to ensure that establishments were compliant with Labour Law on employment practices.

Addressing this trend, a nationwide inspection campaign covering 8,890 establishments was conducted in 2016 to check compliance with Labour legislation. Details reviewed were the national and/or expatriate status of employees, adherence to working hour, holiday and rest period provisions, payment of wages to employees in accordance with specified schedules and, generally, whether the establishment was compliant with the terms of the law in relation to working conditions, occupational health and safety provisions. Employers and employees were offered guidance on their statutory rights and how to protect these.

In furtherance of the e-government process and to ease the delivery of services to State and private sector employees, enterprises and beneficiaries generally, the Ministry of Manpower has introduced multiple electronic systems, including electronic licensing, electronic filtering, a wage protection system, and a work application system up to the contract-signing stage.

The electronic filtering system enables job seekers to access suitable job opportunities, to submit applications round the clock to all job locations without the need for direct input by the Ministry. The system allows job seekers to view all jobs on offer and to choose what best fits their qualifications and career direction. The job is chosen from personal conviction. One significant positive effect of this self-directed system is to reduce unnecessary mobility and increase stability in the workforce.

Increasingly confident and competent young Omanis are taking up their rightful place and making their mark in the labour market.

The Public Authority for Social Insurance, working with an insurance system that is based on principles of justice and interdependence, continues to bring the support of this system to the process of strengthening the fabric of Omani society.

Social Insurance

The social insurance sector has expanded and refined steadily since the introduction of social insurance regulations in 1992 for Omanis working in the Sultanate's private sector. The General Organisation for Social Insurance (GOSI) has built on a system based on equality and sustainable principles of interdependence and justice to strengthen the social fabric and affirm the spirit of solidarity and cohesion in the Omani identity. This rewarding strategy has proved to be a shot in the arm for the increasingly prominent private sector, which was providing employment to 217,829 insured workers at the end of May 2017. Social insurance coverage has grown year on year since its introduction, from the core group of Omanis working in the private sector when the GOSI first came into being, to include, as a voluntary option, Omanis working abroad, then Omanis working within the GCC, then the self-employed and others.

The insurance protection offered has itself expanded. After incorporating risks linked to old age, disability and death, it went on to cover occupational injuries and diseases as of 1997. Qualitatively also, the scheme has advanced dramatically, with contributory pension and salary + benefits calculation features, a hike in the minimum pension and increased benefits for victims of work injury and occupational disease.

Article 20 of the Social Insurance Law issued by means of Royal Decree No. 72/1991 stipulated the sources of its funding, among which contributions are the most important.

Positive developments in the social insurance sector have done much to strengthen the broad social fabric and deliver reassurance to the vulnerable.

On 18 June 2006, Royal Decree No. 60/2006 was issued, incorporating amendments to the Social Insurance Law. Under the amended law, insurance was extended to naturalised persons working in the private sector who had obtained Omani citizenship subsequent to the enactment date of the Social Insurance Law.

Social insurance systems depend on reliable sources of finance. Article 20 of the Social Insurance Law promulgated by way of Royal Decree No. 72/1991 specifies the sources of financing, one of the most important of these being individual contributions.

GOSI currently fulfils its mandate through a succession of -5year strategic plans, the first of which ran from 2011 to 2015. The second plan was initiated in 2016 and will run till the end of 2020. It uses the much-lauded Balanced Scorecard (BSC) methodology as a strategic planning and management performance tool. BSC assesses performance from four perspectives: from a learning and growth perspective, from an internal perspective, from a customer/client perspective and from a financial perspective. These key perspectives are then broken down and linked to specific aspects of the strategic plan, creating a basis for measuring performance precisely and identifying local successes and bottlenecks.

Technical Education

The list of disciplines covered by technical education curricula has lengthened to meet the needs of the labour market.

Technical education is a major player in Oman's forward aspirations. Technical education is what creates the difference between a stagnant and a dynamic work force, the latter capable of shedding over-reliance on external resources. An efficient technical educational sector should be able to supply the majority of the specialisations required by a fast developing modern economy.

The Ministry of Manpower follows up the progress of work at the seven existing colleges of technology in the Sultanate, namely: The Higher College of Technology in Muscat, the Al Musanna College of Technology, the Nizwa College of Technology, the Ibra College of Technology, the Salalah College of Technology, the Shinas College of Technology and the Ibri College of Technology.

In 2016/2017, there were 41,043 students enrolled at the various the technical colleges, up from 23,527 in 2009/2010. Graduate numbers also increased, from 3,648 in the 2011/2012 academic year to 5,461 in 2016/2017.

Technical colleges currently offer 39 different specialist and accredited courses, in engineering, business studies, information technology, applied sciences, and other programmes, such as pharmacy, photography and fashion design.

Technical education builds bridges of cooperation with government institutions and the private sector through its student projects and contributions to scientific research.

The Ministry of Manpower has partnered with public and private institutions to carry out field surveys that help identify labour market requirements in the various disciplines. It then uses this data to promote academic programmes that meet these needs.

IT programmes of general and specialised focus were updated by way of a joint initiative that brought together IT specialist committees within the technical colleges and experts from the IT Authority. The outcome of this initiative was launched academically in September 2016. New courses have also been introduced in renewable energy, distributed across all relevant fields of engineering and applied science. Technical education builds bridges between government institutions and the private sector, which harvests the product of scientific research and student projects. Technical education ensures that successful entrepreneurs are empowered to manage their own projects rather than join the job queue, and this is reflected in a rising trend in student projects and campus companies. It promotes entrepreneurship and supports students in their endeavours to derive practical benefit from their innovations and research projects and to develop valuable personal skills that will serve this purpose. Student initiative is supported and

At the end of 2016, there were 410 private training establishments in Oman, of which 185 were accredited institutes.

rewarded as a policy in all colleges. Vocational education and training is a twin pillar of the developing labour market. The Sultanate's vocational training sector is extremely adaptable and offers a huge range of training programmes, booster courses, and flexible opportunities for both employees and job seekers to learn or upgrade valuable skills.

The Ministry of Manpower oversees six vocational training centres across the Sultanate - in Seeb, Saham, Sur, Ibri, Shinas and Al-Buraimi, in addition to two training institutes for fishermen, in Al-Khaboura and Salalah respectively. These centres had a male and female uptake in the 2016/2017 academic year of 4,240 students and trainees attending 33 separate course programmes, categorised as apprenticeships or professional training, or qualifying for diploma certification.

In line with developments in industry and the overall economy, vocational training centres and training institutes for fishermen have been regulated into a legal framework that defines how they operate. The updated legislation provides for a streamlining and regrading of training qualifications to match labour market requirements in the various areas of technological advance.

The spectrum of professional programmes on offer at these centres includes such recent additions as Business Knowledge, with a course schedule geared towards budding entrepreneurs and the self-employed generally. All training programmes and courses have been developed and reviewed to accepted international standards before their adoption.

The Ministry of Manpower has oversight over private training institutions of all kinds, including institutes, training centres, training units attached to private colleges and universities and training service agencies. The Ministry grants licences for the establishment of new training institutions, renews existing licences, classifies and approves proposed training programmes and training courses, supervises training programmes associated with employment (government support programmes), controls the quality of the training process, approves the appointment of members of administrative and training bodies and certifies the qualifications granted to successful graduates and trainees.

At the end of 2016, the Sultanate had 410 functioning private training establishments, including 185 institutes, 16 centres, 15 training units and 194 training service agencies.

Overall, these institutions handed out 33,429 certifications between January 2016 and May 2017.

In order to facilitate and simplify procedures and save time and effort, the system has been computerised, with one-stop shop licensing available to private training institutions, in addition to follow up procedures to monitor the certification process and all training activities.

The Ministry of Social Development offers a multidisciplinary spectrum of programmes and services delivered to exemplary standards.

Social Development

The status of social development in Oman today fully reflects the stability and improved standard of living achieved over the past half century. The Ministry of Social Development manages a raft of services that have transformed the quality of life of all Omanis. Social development services are targeted to best meet the needs of the various social categories, so that all may be free to avail of opportunities to reach their full potential, to achieve an adequate standard of living in a cohesive family environment and within a prosperous community. Various support and empowerment programmes are available to the socially vulnerable. Programmes of social benefit fall under the umbrella of the State's overall sustainable development strategy, and of the social policies that promote more direct government intervention, while it simultaneously encourages the private sector to become more involved in social development projects.

Specialist centres assist and rehabilitate persons challenged by disability and help integrate them into society as a productive force.

Social programmes and services, such as guidance and family counselling, serve individuals and groups facing social, economic or psychological challenges.

From a belief in the importance of strategic planning with a view to anticipating demographic requirements and, in parallel, raising personnel performance levels and cutting costs, the Social Development Strategy (2016-2025) was designed by the Ministry of Social Development with a view to facilitating access to programmes that encourage participation in social activities and the opportunity to contribute to national action.

The social welfare sector encompasses a set of programmes and services offered to vulnerable social groups and individuals that will enable them to lead a more fulfilling life. The sector was servicing 81,942 cases at the end of 2016 at an annual cost to the State of RO129,129,600. The total number of persons receiving social security benefits was 161,378, representing 6.5% of the population.

Through a partnership initiative worked out between the Ministries of Social Development and of Higher Education, 2,432 students from social security families were enabled to proceed to higher education in the 2016/2017 academic year at the expense of the State. They attended various public and private universities and colleges both inside and outside the Sultanate. Moreover, 400 grants were allocated to enable beneficiaries to undertake the haj.

The Ministry of Social Development follows up applications for social security payments, disaster relief and the like, processing the data collected under research. It also sponsors programmes for the care, rehabilitation, training and empowerment of juvenile offenders, helping them to reintegrate into society. It oversaw 445 cases of this nature in 2016.

To help equip persons of disability for lives of greater self-reliance, a broad range of welfare programmes and social services is available. The Vocational Evaluation and Rehabilitation Centre offers care and rehabilitation services to mentally disabled persons who are deemed eligible for vocational rehabilitation. It provides medical aids and prosthetic devices to persons suffering from physical disabilities to facilitate mobility and assist them in managing their own lives. It distributed many such devices in 2016.

The Ministry also provides or arranges counselling services, including family counselling, for cases referred to its attention for reasons of economic, social or psychological difficulty. Its philosophy in handling such cases it to find solutions that support family stability and cohesion where possible, especially given the speed of social change being experienced today.

The Centre for Child Welfare sponsors children who have been deprived of natural family care as a result of unusual social circumstances, providing them with full board and lodging as well as educational, social, cultural, recreational and other age-appropriate activities. Nursery care from infancy is allocated to institutions supervised by the Ministry of Social Development, where basic care, along with educational, social and recreational support, is provided for infants from six months to three and a half years of age. The nurseries are overseen by the Ministry's suitably qualified staff to ensure their compliance with the appropriate

regulations and to administer reform in the event of violation. The Ministry had 199 nurseries under its supervision at the end of 2016, housing 8,100 infants.

The Ministry of Social Development oversees many civil and professional associations, as well as branches of the Omani Women's Association and the social clubs of expatriate communities in the Sultanate. It monitors the work of these associations to ensure their compliance with the provisions of the Civil Associations Law and with regulations issued by the Ministry relevant to their activities. It reviews the agendas of their annual general meetings and the action agreed by members.

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, celebrated Omani Women's Day on 17 October 2017 at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Recreation. The Council of Ministers issued a formal statement on the day themed "Women and the family economy", honouring the women of Oman and thanking them for their contribution to family, community and country, as equal partners alongside their male counterparts.

Oman has 60 branches of the Women's Association, with 10,441 members between them. There are 30 charitable societies and organisations, with a combined membership of 3,211. Thirty professional societies share 2,713 members and 16 expatriate social clubs a combined total of 6,058 members.

During 2016, national representative teams were crowned with multiple successes at regional and international competitive events.

Sport

The list of sporting achievements logged by teams representing the Sultanate abroad continues to grow. Picture shows the national Olympic football team.

Sport has enjoyed decades of enthusiastic patronage by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, enhancing a tradition within the sector itself of discipline, motivation and the pursuit of excellence. Over the years, all of this positive investment has been repaid by individuals and teams demonstrating feats of distinction. Oman has produced sportsmen and sportswomen in many fields and they stand as role models for new generations of athletes eager to raise the flag of their country at competitive events across the world.

National sporting teams won laurels in 2016, not only in the GCC region, but far beyond. The Olympic football team managed second place in the Gulf Olympic Teams Cup in Qatar, while the national beach soccer team brought home silver from the Continental Beach Soccer Tournament in China and again from the Asian Beach Games in Danang, Vietnam in September.

Individual performance at the Danang Games was even more spectacular, with Barakat Al Harthi winning gold in the 60 metres before joining his relay teammates Khalid Al-Ghailani, Samir Al-Riyami and Yehia Al-Noufali, to win a third silver medal for Oman.

Volleyball – successes were: In September 2016 Oman bagged silver at the 25th Arab Beach Volleyball Championship held in the Moroccan city of El Jadida . The U16-s won the silver at the GCC championships held in Bahrain in 2016; the youth U17-s team won silver at the 14th Arab Volleyball Championships in Jordan in August 2017; and Oman's Salam Club also won silver at the 26th GCC Clubs Championship in Doha.

Handball - An important achievement

was added to the Sultanate's growing list of beach sport successes at the 2016 Beach Handball World Championships in Budapest, Hungary, where the Oman men's team earned overall ranking of seventh place in the world after coming in seventh on the final scorecard.

Bodybuilding - At the 70th IFBB Men's World Amateur Bodybuilding Championships in Benidorm, Spain, both Abdulla Al-Jabri and Haitham Al-Zadjali brought home silver as runners-up in the 70 kg and 85 kg competitions respectively.

Weightlifting - In Malaysia Ahmed Al-Habsi brought honours to Oman with the country's first ever gold medal triumph at the IWF Youth World Weightlifting Championships. Al-Habsi earned his gold in the clean and jerk competition with a lift of 120 kgs, after earlier winning 5th place in the snatch competition, for a fourth place finish in the overall rankings.

Olympic Games - Meanwhile ace sprinter Barakat Al-Harthi qualified in third place in the qualifying races for the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in Brazil.

Oman Sail - Omani sailor Fahad Al-Hasni was voted Sailor of the Month for September 2016 by the popular British magazine 'Seahorse' after a year of spectacular success.

A welcome newcomer to the Omani sports scene arrived in 2016, with creation of the Oman School Sports Association and the endorsement of its statutes by the Ministry of Sports Affairs. The Association takes over responsibility for organising all sports projects and activities geared towards identifying new young talent and partnering with relevant agencies to provide them with the support and attention they need to excel.

America's Cup 2016 -The Sultanate continues to host international sporting events, as exemplified in its ground-breaking sponsorship of the opening round of the 2016 America's Cup. The Louis Vuitton America's Cup World Series Oman saw six international teams compete in the curtain-raiser event off the Muscat coast on 27-26 February 2016. Oman was the first Middle Eastern country to host what is universally considered to be 'the pinnacle of sailboat racing.' The rivalry among nations to host stages of the America's Cup is intense in the extreme and the selection of Oman was recognition of its strong sailing tradition, reinforced in the post-Renaissance period with the successes of Oman Sail, and superb infrastructure.

World Military Cup - The Sultanate also beat strong competition to host the World Military Cup for Soccer 2017, the championship for national military teams organised by CISM, the International Military Sports Council. The event took place at stadiums in Muscat and Seeb between 13 and 29 January 2017 and Oman crowned its success in winning the selection by winning the World Cup itself.

Golf - Following a preliminary meeting with executives in early November 2016, the Sultanate went on to host the 36th Arab Golf Championship in the second week of the same month. Thirteen Arab countries took part.

Professor Khalid bin Saif Al-Nabhani has been recognised for exceptional scientific achievement, being awarded a higher doctorate by Memorial University in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, for his work in the field of technologically enhanced radioactive materials. In his research under the title: Technologically Enhanced Naturally Occurring Radioactive Materials in Oil and Gas Production: A Silent Killer, Professor Al-Nabhani managed to complete his risk evaluation work, remarkably, in two and a half years. He is the first Omani and Arab professor in a North American university to have achieved such a high academic honour.

The speciality that is Professor Al-Nabhani's focus represents a significant and promising new field of academic study. He is already widely recognised for his contributions, having published five academic papers in the area in various relevant leading scientific publications. Some 1,400 scientists and academic researchers from around the world and from the oil and gas industry and the nuclear power industry have expressed their interest in these studies and researches.

Laith bin Ishaq Al-Kindi, a student at the Sultan Qaboos University College of Arts and Social Sciences specialising in the Arabic language, won second place at the 24th Annual International Competition of the Holy Qur'an in Egypt in April 2017.

Al-Kindi managed to stand out from a large field of participants from across the Arabic-speaking region to come second in the category of Holy Qur'an memorisation and interpretation of verses relating to jihad.

The annual event is hotly contested, with 60 participants representing 42 countries attending this year. The contested subjects included memorisation, interpretation and academic study, spread over four categories.

Adding to a growing list of medical achievements in 2017, the Royal Hospital successfully carried out the Sultanate's first liver transplant on a patient suffering from cirrhosis and cancerous liver tumours. The operation was carried out by Professor Mohamed Rela, internationally acclaimed liver specialist and one of the most prominent surgeons involved in liver transplantation worldwide. He led a medical team from the Royal Hospital consisting of Dr Nadia bint Abdullah al-Harthia, Consultant in Liver and Digestive Diseases, Dr Ahmed bin Mohamed Al-Kindi, Senior Consultant in Liver Surgery at the National Liver Transplant Programme, Dr Suleiman Al-Maamari, Consultant Liver Surgeon, and Dr Ramla Al-Qassab, Senior Consultant in Anaesthesia.

This successful procedure constitutes breaking ground for the constantly evolving healthcare system in the Sultanate. During the past ten years, patients requiring liver transplants have been sent overseas to undergo liver transplant surgery. The recent procedure was the outcome of an amicable collaboration with an Indian hospital and enables liver transplantation to be included among the health services provided by a medical establishment within the Sultanate, adding to its significance.

The go-karting career of phenomenon Shihab bin Ahmed Al-Habsi continues to soar. The young Omani shot to second place in the 2017 OK Junior category of the PFI's Kartmasters Grand Prix that ran from 5 to 7 August at the Trent Valley Kart Club track in Grantham, UK.

Shihab was in top form in the final race, outstripping popular names on the European and international circuits, only to be pipped into second place. Despite some sensational manoeuvres by the young champion, time was not on his side.

Al-Habsi managed to complete the final race in 57.82 seconds, leaving the winner Morgan Porter to take overall first place. Porter's time in the final race was 57.92.

Omani touring vessel Shabab Oman II, which travels the world with its message of peace and understanding, brought home the coveted and justly earned International Friendship Trophy for Tall Sailing Ship of the Year 2017. The trophy is the most prestigious prize awarded to sailing ships in long-sail competition. It was announced in August 2017 in Szczecin, Poland.

The prize is awarded to the ship that best expresses the meaning of friendship, love and understanding among the participating vessels and is selected by a process of voting by the team captains of participating ships.

In September 2017 the Shabab Oman II revealed that it will be participating in the International Maritime Exposition in the context of its second international tour (Friendship and Peace Sail) which has to date covered 11,000 nautical miles to call at 14 ports around the world.

The Sultanate Armed Forces Shooting Team logged important successes at the International Military Shooting Championship held at the Pirbright Camp shooting ranges in Bisley in the UK in June 2017.

The team came in first to win both the Army Rifle Association (ARA) and National Rifle Association (NRA) events in both team and individual categories. The SAF shooting team went on to win the coveted Sultan Qaboos Cup, sponsored by His Majesty, the Supreme Commander of the SAF. The Cup is awarded to the individual winner of two separate range contests. The Cup was claimed by Air Corporal Azzan bin Seif Al-Nahli . Overall, the team won 40 cups and 122 gold medals, 27 silver medals and 12 bronze medals.

Champion stallion Maisoor maintained his unbroken winning streak for the Sultanate's Royal Cavalry after sprinting home in the 2,200 metres at the UAE Arabian Derby in March 2017. The Derby is open to -4year-old Arabian purebreds.

Maisoor's win meant he was unbeaten over nine races. Owned and bred by the Royal Cavalry, the promising grey colt is the progeny of Ahasen on the damside, sired by Burning Sand. Ahasen was sired by Saut du Loup and is also a product of the Royal Cavalry stud. Maisoor's run of victory is further confirmation of the quality of Omani breeding stock.

Maisoor hasn't tasted defeat since winning over the same course the first round of the Arabian Triple Crown in February 2017, a 1,600 metre sprint for -4year-old Arabian purebreds.

Meanwhile Doncaster's President of the UAE Cup (UK Arabian Derby) was won in the final strides by Arabian purebred Nafees in September 2017, who beat a strong field to romp home in the 2,000 metre race for Arabian four-year-olds.

Guided to victory by Tadhg O'Shea and cheered on by trainer Charles Gourdain, Nafees dominated the final stages of the hotly contested run, winning by two and a quarter lengths to sign off a lucrative season for the feisty four-year-old, a fitting end to the Group 1 season for this category.

"The desire to build a modern state
equipped with the latest science and technology
does not mean that this country intends to turn its back on
its glorious heritage and history. On the contrary, it always
seeks to establish a harmonious blend
between modernity and tradition."

Qaboos bin Said

(24th National Day, 1993)

Heritage, Culture and the Arts

Strong links with the past are built into His Majesty's philosophy of human progress and he sponsors all initiatives that help build Oman's intellectual and cultural heritage into the structure of its forward development.

Heritage, Culture & The Arts

Authentic Past to Enlightened Present

The protection of Oman's heritage, in all its forms and expressions is one of the modern Renaissance's particular ongoing success stories.

A genuine respect for heritage, tangible and intangible, has inspired the ongoing process of Oman's Renaissance. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said understands the powerful currents which carry the impact of past on present. Personally, and through the policies of successive governments, he has supported the preservation of Oman's heritage in all its forms and manifestations. A particularly powerful medium for expression of the enduring thread of identity and character is the arts, which have more than fulfilled their creative mission of reinventing and re-illuminating the historical and cultural balance that is deeply rooted within the Omani personality.

Ensuring that these channels are kept clear is key to protecting the national identity of Oman. It contributes to the establishment of respect, understanding and peace within society and furthers the life-enhancing goals of achieving sustainable development and the intelligent transfer of knowledge, skills, meaning and values from generation to generation.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said's own convictions have been both inspiration and fuel to the process of maintaining the links between present and past and making the intellectual and cultural heritage of Omani society the ground base for creation of the modern state, as well as a catalyst for national development.

The Sultanate has developed a reputation for supporting economic development projects of a cultural bias, seeing culture as having a significant economic and social impact.

Addressing Oman's 24th National Day on 18 November 1994, His Majesty explained the rationale of respecting the authentic past:

"It was clear to us that the concept of heritage is not merely represented in castles, forts and artefacts, but also embraces literature, the arts and the intangible inheritance that is transmitted from one generation to the next, and that the preservation of our heritage will not be whole or complete until we have given attention and care to each and every one of its components. We may say, thank God, that over the years we have truly accomplished a major part of this honourable national objective."

The Sultanate has undertaken many development projects of cultural focus, highlighting its purposeful attention to this field. These projects have in turn had a significant economic and social impact, an impact which has delivered handsomely on the goals set for them.

The establishment of a specialised Ministry for Heritage and Culture was key to kickstarting the focus on culture in the larger context of the sustainable development process. The Ministry has managed to preserve the heritage and cultural resources of the Sultanate, while investing them with economic value through channels such as tourism and projects embracing literature and the arts.

In so doing, it has sponsored the creation of specialised public museums, presided over the restoration of castles, forts and towers and the conservation of archaeological sites. All of these projects in turn have added value to the growing tourism sector. Alongside this material expansion had been an equally important flowering in the 'intangible' cultural sector, as the many aspects of Oman's cultural heritage, represented in the arts, crafts, customs and traditions, have gained new validation.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture was joined by several other standalone cultural institutions, including the Office of His Majesty's Advisor for

Cultural institutions, each in their field of specialisation, take good care of Oman's rich heritage of historical sites and monuments, restoring and preserving them for future generations.

Cultural Affairs, the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, the National Museum and other governmental institutions concerned with the dissemination of culture and the preservation of heritage. Academic chairs were established at universities, the Royal Opera House Muscat was completed and the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Culture, Arts and Literature introduced. These cultural and artistic achievements were accompanied by others at local, Arab and international level, all contributing to a new respect for creative talent, to probing depths of greater authenticity, to an expansion of cultural consciousness that embraced broader horizons in human progress, and to a future in which Oman would continue to break new ground in culture, the arts and literature.

These cultural institutions, each to its field and specialisation, have endeavoured to nurture Oman's cultural legacy, to conserve its historical buildings, monuments and sites. They have combined to collect and preserve historical manuscripts and documents, to support theatre, cinema, music and the instrumental arts, and to underpin the work of creative writers in their various fields of cultural competence.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture's long-term project of restoring castles, forts and archaeological sites is ongoing, as is its promotion of museums and museum activities, of excavations at prehistoric sites, and of historical and archaeological inventory and documentation. It has to date completed ten documentary studies of archaeological sites. Five equivalent studies have been published covering five traditional alleyways of historical value. Another 12 studies are being carried out in this field, and the project of documenting archaeological dwellings of unique architectural value has been completed, along with several other miscellaneous monument restoration projects.

Insofar as concerns the survey and excavation of significant archaeological sites, the Sultanate has been continually active, working independently or in conjunction with local or international academic institutions. During the 2016/2017 season, there were 15 ongoing archaeological expeditions active throughout the Sultanate, the most important work being done by the French mission and the Japanese mission, which completed documentation work at Ibri and Duqm, as well as the documentation of archaeological sites and the study of soil samples at the Bat site.

Several excavations were conducted at sites affected by the passage of such development projects as the Al-Batinah expressway, stage two covering the remaining burial sites affected by the project.

The Ministry works to highlight the cultural role of the Sultanate from a broad perspective, representing a modern and comprehensive vision. It operates by implementing programmes of national scope and by fostering cultural communication with the external world through the medium of regional and international organisations. In this manner Oman has strengthened cultural relations with many overseas countries, maintaining a history of active participation in international organisations of which it is a member. It works with the international community to advance

At mid-2017, there were 69 public libraries registered with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and distributed throughout the Sultanate.

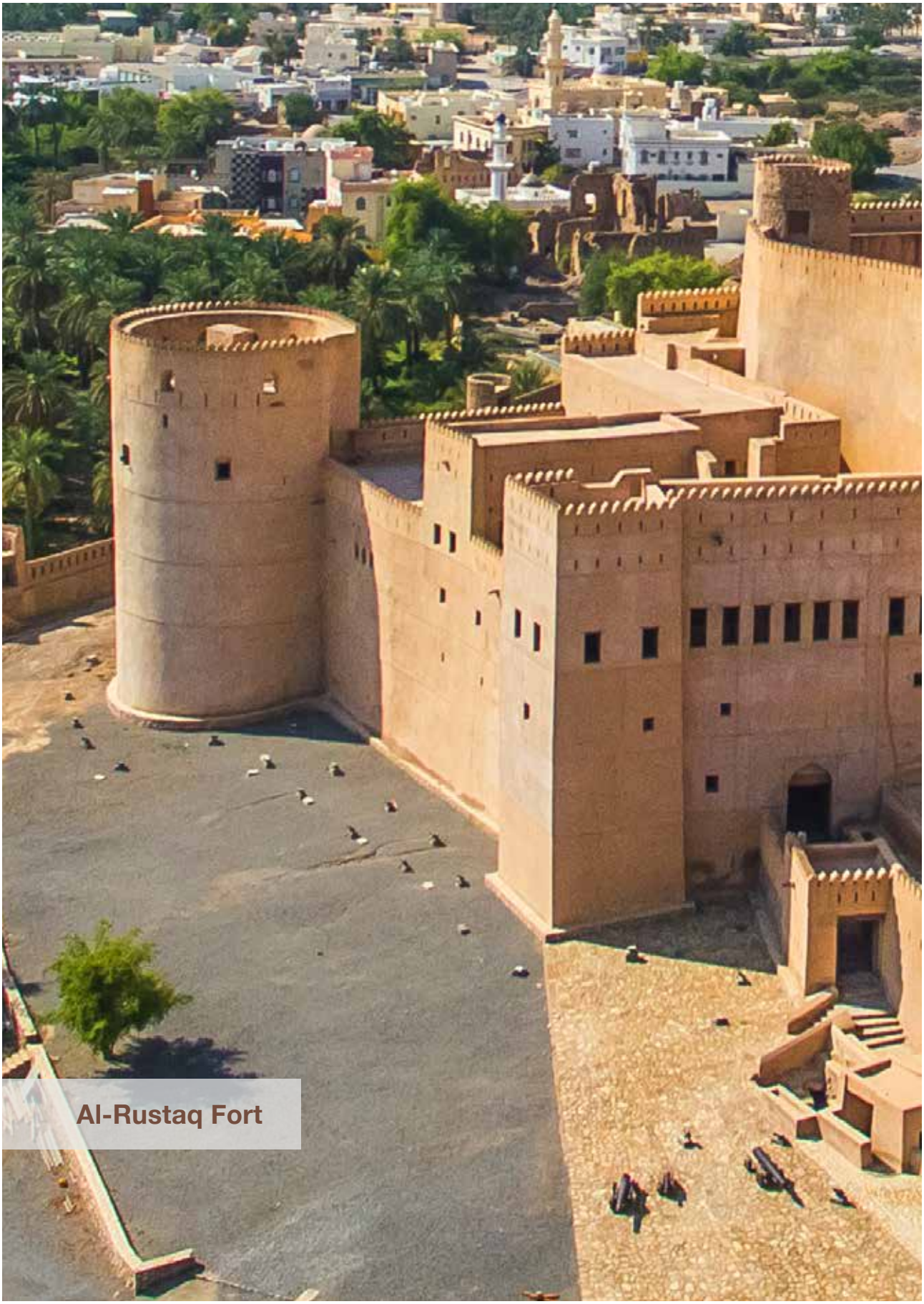
the process of cultural development at every level and neglects no opportunity to contribute at meetings and gatherings associated with the international conventions that govern the protection of heritage. Its positive present-day relations with neighbouring and friendly countries reflect the long tradition of Oman's cultural influence across the centuries. Internally, the Ministry has implemented a multi-centred and multi-faceted national cultural programme, rolled out segmentally since the Ministry's own foundation and creating the backdrop against which its annual cultural programmes and activities are published. It has also strengthened its communication with Omani intellectuals and writers, encouraging them to publish, perform or produce their original works and to participate in cultural activities and occasions.

Under the umbrella of promoting interest in Oman's cultural heritage, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture sponsors or hosts festivals and conferences, including the Omani Poetry Festival, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2017 in Wilayat Sur, South Sharqiyah, the 22nd Literary and Artistic Forum for Young People in Buraymi and the 4th Asian Scientific Forum, Expo Science Asia. Last year, the Ministry extended its library with an expanded list of modern and reprint publications. It also lent its patronage to the endeavour to extend and enrich the national network of public libraries created under Ministerial Decree No. 229 of 2007 Regulating Public Libraries..

At mid-2017 there were 69 libraries registered with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, distributed throughout the governorates and wilayats of the Sultanate, among them five new libraries announced during 2016 and 2017.

Regionally, the Sultanate sustains its bilateral cultural relations with the GCC countries through participation in relevant events and festivals. It hosted the GCC Poetry Forum in 2016 in Dhofar and participated in the 22nd GCC Science Forum in Qatar. The Sultanate also took part in the 9th International Invention Fair of the Middle East (IIFME) in Kuwait, as well as in the 10th Arab Open Robotics Championship in Qatar.

Several agreements, memoranda of understanding and executive programmes in the cultural field were signed with Arab and overseas countries, including an MOU signed by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in the Republic of the Philippines, bearing on cultural cooperation for the period 2016-2020, and an MOU with the Philippine Ministry of Culture and Sports, also for the years 2016-2020. Always solicitous of its relations with international organisations, the Sultanate regularly participates in meetings of cultural interest in the context of its membership of various international organisations, such as the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council States, the League of Arab States, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).



Al-Rustaq Fort

Museums house a people's living memory, connecting the past with the present and helping to consolidate identity, disseminate cultural awareness and acquaint them with ancient glories.

Museums

The National Museum houses more than seven thousand artefacts

Museums encapsulate the ancestral memories of a people, memories which link past with present, which contribute to the consolidation of identity, the enrichment of culture and dissemination of cultural awareness among individuals. It brings knowledge of ancient civilisations and bygone times to life in all of their political, social, natural and geological ramifications.

The Sultanate recognises the important role museums play in reflecting the dialogue of cultures, languages and societies, how effectively they promote intercultural understanding and a sense of the value of historical knowledge and respect for the past. The Omani people have enduring bonds with their illustrious ancestors and with the many civilisations they interacted with across the millennia.

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 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.

The National Museum was the first museum in the Middle East to

The National Museum is the Sultanate's most prominent cultural edifice. It is dedicated to highlighting Oman's long heritage, from the emergence of human settlement in the Arabian Peninsula many millennia ago up to the present day.

incorporate Braille into its Arabic guide system for benefit of the blind. It was also the first museum in the Middle East to adopt the open storage system. It was also the first museum in the Sultanate to include a museum learning centre, the first to introduce a system of preventive conservation, and one which meets the highest international standards. And, finally, it was the first museum in the Sultanate to incorporate a UHD audio-visual theatre.

From its opening to the public on 30 July 2016 and up to the end of March 2017, the National Museum had welcomed 52,768 visitors of all age groups and from all parts of the country, as well as abroad.

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 wildlife. With a need now to modernise and expand the museum in line with contemporary development trends, the Ministry has set in motion an ambitious plan to restructure the facility to an overall plan conceived and overseen by the Smithsonian Foundation. On completion, the museum will represent a quantum leap forward to the very vanguard of museum design.

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

The Ministry of Defence oversees the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, which opened in 1988 at the Castle of Beit Al-Falaj in Ruwi. The Museum houses a collection of exhibits that illuminate Oman's complex military history.

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 opened inside the building of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.

The Ministry of Defence runs the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, which opened at Bait al Falaj Fort in Ruwi in 1988 and contains exhibits highlighting Oman's military history. 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 museum was built in 1995 and officially opened in 2001. It is located at the entrance to the city of Muscat.

Muscat Municipality runs the Bait al Baranda Visitors Centre and Museum, which presents a potted history of the city of Muscat and is also a venue for exhibitions and training courses.

The Office of His Majesty the Sultan's Advisor on Cultural Affairs oversees the Land of Frankincense Museum, which opened on 23 July 2007 as

Museums are also windows on the past and they shed light on darker aspects of ancient history. Pictured: the Land of Frankincense Museum.

The Sultanate has many special interest museums, some under government and others private sector supervision.

part of Al Baleed Archaeological Park in the Governorate of Dhofar. It has a historical hall with six sections documenting Oman's history as a whole over the ages.

The Oil and Gas Exhibition Centre portrays the history of the formation of oil over different periods and the stages of its extraction. It is a depiction of the journey of oil discovery in the Sultanate, in particular, while 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.

On 8 January 2014, the Education Museum at the Saidiya School in Muscat was opened. The museum documents the evolution of public education in the Sultanate. The Saidiya School itself occupies a prime and prestigious position in this story and was the inspiration for the foundation of the museum.

There are privately-owned museums such as Bait al Zubair Museum in Muscat, which opened in 1998 and exhibits a collection of antiques, jewellery collectibles, traditional weapons and costumes from the various governorates of the Sultanate. Ghaliya's Museum of Modern Art, opened in 2011 on the Mutrah corniche, has rooms representing the typical modern house in the period from the beginning of the 1950s to the mid-1970s.

Overall, the Sultanate has museums covering many themes and time periods, some under government and others under private sector supervision.

Oman's Cultural Interface

Cultural exhibitions, held locally and attended overseas, constitute a medium through which Oman can demonstrate aspects of its unique culture. The Sultanate attends all of the most important international book fairs, proactively and enthusiastically, and has been distinguished by its important and memorable contributions.

The Sultanate is most often represented at these events by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, by the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and by independent publishing houses. It is a regular participant at the international book fairs of Cairo, Casablanca, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Algeria, Khartoum, Tunis, Sharjah, Kuwait and Tehran.

Participation in these exhibitions has achieved many objectives, the most important of which are identification of strengths in Omani creative writing and the publication of works that best represent high points of intellectual and literary activity in the Sultanate. This has greatly advanced Omani literary output and given validation to intellectual discourse, establishing bridges of dialogue and communication between national cultures and communities, while providing a window for writers and readers to engage in enlightened dialogue about Oman's past and present.

The Muscat International Book Fair is one of the leading international book fairs in the region, being both a highlight event in the Arab literary calendar and one that holds

Cultural exhibitions reflect aspects of Oman's cultural life. The Muscat International Book Fair is a hugely popular event.

Represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, along with private Omani publishing houses, the Sultanate is a regular participant in the major international book fairs.

distinction in the larger world as a pioneering annual publishing forum.

The 22nd Fair in 2017 was the largest in terms of the number of titles on display, 450,000 in all spread across all branches of knowledge. Access to the full list was available by way of the Fair's electronic search engine. A total of 757 publishing houses from 28 different countries were present or represented.

A unique feature of the 2017 Fair was the inclusion of Sohar as a 'city guest of honour', where its portrayal provided a glimpse into the cultural, intellectual and social richness of one of Oman's many history-laden cities. The role of the exhibit, which will be repeated, is to introduce these cities to local and international attention in appropriate settings.

The Muscat Fair was held for the first time at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, where it was distributed over three fully integrated halls dedicated to cultural events, with an expanded programme for children, an activities corner and pop-up cafes in a number of participating pavilions. The venue and layout supported opportunities for representative figures from the publishing industry to interact with the public and for authors to sign copies of their newly published works and to negotiate and sign contracts with publishers.

All in all, the 2017 Fair hosted 54 direct cultural events, dozens of daily activities organised by participants, such as the above-mentioned 'cultural cafes', and more than one hundred separate family and child events.

Many cultural events were held on the margins of Muscat International Book Fair 2017, breaching new horizons in science and knowledge.

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) manages a collection of more than one million documents and 36,000 paper and digital manuscripts of eclectic provenance, as well as maps, photos, stamps and coins.

Archives & Documents

The Sultanate manages a comprehensive archive of documents significant to its heritage and history.

Documents and manuscripts are powerful repositories of the product of man's creativity over the ages, of science and knowledge in the various areas of human endeavour. The Sultanate, as other nations, carefully preserves important records of the past that document the course of national action.

Royal Decree No. 60/2007, introducing the Records and Archives Law, was drafted to establish the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) in order to create a comprehensive modern system for the management of documents and archives in the Sultanate.

The Authority's statistics indicate that it has been able to collect more than one million documents and more than thirty six thousand paper and electronic manuscripts in the various sciences, along with maps, photographs, stamps and coins. In addition, since 2016, the NRAA has begun the collation of documents assembled from units of the State administration, in application of the Records and Archives Law.

It continues to execute the national plan for collation of documents prepared during 2014. Phase One targeted nine sources, subsequently expanded by an additional ten sources which had volunteered to perform the preliminary sorting using their own human and material resources. Consequently, by the end of 2016, 139,630 files relating to the original nine Phase One targeted units had been sorted, along with 46,562 additional files relating to the ten parties subsequently added.

The NRAA does more than collect. It sponsors academic research bearing on Omani history and has produced a body of important studies in this field.

On 19 December 2016, the Permanent Exhibition of Documents and Archives was opened. It adds an important new dimension to the Omani cultural and tourism landscape. It makes accessible to public viewing documents that give context to Omani history, illuminating circumstances and trends with facts of geographical, demographic or geopolitical significance that impacted events across the centuries.

On 1 May 2017, the Authority unveiled a system for the secure destruction of documents, the goal of which was to destroy paper and electronic documents and the like, for use by government and security agencies, companies, private institutions and individuals.

The NRAA serves a valuable function preparing and supplying documents of benefit to academic research and studies relating to Omani history. It has self-published a series of its own researches and studies in this respect. At international level, the NRAA has hosted and sponsored conferences and seminars on the study of documents and archives referencing the Sultanate in one form or another. In this context, it sponsored in December 2016 the Fifth International Conference on "Historical, Economic, Social and Cultural Aspects of Oman's Relations with the Countries of the Horn of Africa". The conference took place in the Republic of the Comoros and was accompanied by a major exhibition on cultural and historical aspects of Oman's links with the Horn of Africa.

The Fifth International Conference on Oman's Relations with the Countries of the Horn of Africa was held in the Republic of the Comoros.

An important influence in the Sultanate's cultural revival, the Cultural Club hosts literary, cultural and other events that stimulate intellectual discourse and facilitate dialogue among Omani intellectuals and with their overseas peers.

The Cultural Club & Literary Forum

The Cultural Club has been and continues to be an influential venue in recognising creative activity.

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 National Book Support Programme provides opportunities for individuals in possession of original literary, intellectual or academic material to find publishing outlets for their work. The programme has facilitated the publication of numerous titles of cultural or intellectual value that would otherwise not have seen the light of day.

The Literary Forum seeks to enrich the Sultanate's literary, intellectual and cultural landscape through the creation of literary and intellectual activities that expand the national bank of knowledge. One means to this end is the publication of books, which themselves serve as launching pads and fuel for its many annual seminars, as indeed does the output of the "Literary Forum in Support of the Omani book".

Royal Decree No. 52/2012 gave birth to the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, which oversees several affiliated bodies specialising in culture, ideas and the arts.

Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture & Science

The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Sciences (SQHCCS) has had a powerful material impact on the literary and artistic movements witnessed by the Sultanate. The Centre fosters cooperation with cultural institutions in other countries, introducing Omani culture in a receptive environment.

The Centre 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 supports several bodies concerned broadly with culture, including the Oud (lute) Hobbyists Association, the Photographic Society, the Oman Traditional Music Centre, the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers, the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture, Washington, the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature, in addition to fulfilling responsibilities related to the affairs of mosques, Islamic institutions and libraries and Quranic schools.

The Centre is also responsible for overseeing the Sultan Qaboos Academic Chairs, consisting of the 16 chairs, professorships and fellowships established in the name of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos at 13 international universities. These endowments range in discipline from the humanities to the applied sciences. The Sultan Qaboos Chair in Arab and Islamic Literature at Georgetown University in Washington DC, established in 1980, is the oldest

Supervision of the Sultan Qaboos mosques, distributed throughout the Sultanate, is one of the functions of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science.

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers facilitates communication between Omanis and non-Arab speaking peoples and belongs to a long tradition of open dialogue with diverse cultures.

of these academic endowments. The most recent is the Sultan Qaboos Fellowship in Mathematics, established in 2014 at Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge, in the United Kingdom.

One of the most important tasks assigned to these chairs is that of conducting studies and research in their respective fields. Graduate students undertaking masters and doctoral studies are supervised, and seminars, conferences and scientific workshops are also facilitated.

The latest addition to the Sultanate's expanding network of cultural institutions, an affiliate of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science, is the Sultan Qaboos Youth and Culture Complex in Salalah, inaugurated on 21 November 2016 on the directives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The new complex is already becoming an important resource in the national campaign to raise levels of cultural and intellectual awareness among youth. Its presence in the physical and social landscape of Dhofar will have a reverberating effect in achieving these objectives through its activities and interactions with the community.

The complex comprises several facilities, specifically a Cultural and Artistic Activities Centre, a Sports Activities Centre and affiliated cultural, artistic and heritage-focused clubs, sport and recreational activities, fitness and physical health amenities. It also incorporates a welfare department, a club serving disabled members and associated administrative facilities.

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers reflects His Majesty's belief in the value of facilitating communication within Oman's very cosmopolitan community. The College provides a vital service,

The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers has proved to be an effective medium in enhancing communication between Omanis and non-Arabic speaking peoples.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Letters reflects His Majesty's belief that a healthy exchange of ideas between writers & intellectuals is the lifeblood of a country's cultural & intellectual life.

which contributes to the removal of language barriers and strengthening of connection between the cultures that inhabit the human landscape of the Sultanate.

In July 2017, the College received its 25th intake of students, representing 41 different nationalities, to undertake an intensive programme of language and cultural study lasting six weeks.

Winners of the coveted Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature were announced by the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Culture and Science on 19 December 2016. Registration for the sixth season of the Award began on 26 July 2017 and is open to all Arab nationals in acknowledgement of their respective bodies of work. The study themes of its three categories are, in the Culture category: Economics; in Arts: Architectural Design; and in Literature: Literary Criticism.

The winners of the Fifth season, which was restricted to Omani nationals, were, in the Culture topic of Translation: Hamad bin Sinan Al Ghaiti for his work "Endless Forms of Beauty"; Bashair al Khair Band for "Al-Aazi and Al-Razha" in the Arts topic of Omani Traditional Arts; and Dr Joukhha bint Mohammed Al-Harthiya, for her novel "Narinja" in the Literature topic of the Novel. The winners were awarded the Order of Sultan Qaboos for Culture, Science, Arts and Literature, in addition to a cash prize of RO50,000.

On 26 December 2016, the Centre celebrated the winners of the 26th Sultan Qaboos Competition for Memorisation of the Holy Quran, which had drawn a record 2,012 contestants, as compared with 1,537 in 2015 and 1,083 in 2014. The ever-increasing popularity of the competition is a positive and encouraging sign of the great value it represents.

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music maintains a strong archive of traditional Omani music, including audio and video records, as well as audio, visual and televisual field documentation of traditional singing styles.

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music collects and documents material representing the oral and folk traditions of Oman's indigenous music, thus ensuring that it can survive and thrive.

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music researches and documents Oman's traditional musical arts, as well as collecting, recording and documenting its oral folklore. The Centre has assembled an important archive of Omani traditional music, including audio and video records, and documented most of the differentiated Omani traditional singing styles, their practitioners and festive and ritual occasions where they are performed. It also collects poetry and verse, folk melodies and drum performances, along with the names of notable practitioners and their signature styles across the entire Sultanate, from Musandam to Dhofar.

The Omani Society for Fine Arts helps to support and develop the fine arts in the Sultanate and raise the level of awareness in the community about the visual arts and culture. As well as protecting the arts, it also seeks to enrich them by encouraging them to derive their inspiration from the Omani and Arab cultural heritage and the intellectual and aesthetic values of the society in which they have their roots.

The Society has sponsored many events and activities that serve the arts by fostering the development of appreciation and awareness of creativity.

The Photography Society has excelled repeatedly in international competition, most recently bringing home the World Cup for Photography in both the Under-21 and Under-16 categories held in association with the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP) conference in Jeonju, Korea in August 2016. This was a third victory for young Omani photographers, repeating similar feats in 2012 and 2014 to consolidate the reputation of the Sultanate in this exciting field.

The Lute (Oud) Players Amateur Association, which celebrated its 10th anniversary on 5 March 2017, organised multiple events throughout the year and hosted artists and musical groups to exchange ideas and expand mutual repertoires. The Association benefits from its membership's hobbyist enthusiasm for this versatile traditional instrument, currently enjoying a revival of interest among musicians.

The Royal Opera House in Muscat is a magnificent monument to cross-cultural dialogue, celebrating a love of music in all its highest expressions, from Oman and from across the world.

Royal Opera House Muscat

The magnificent Royal Opera House Muscat 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.

The programme of the seventh season of the Royal Opera House Muscat, launched on 14 September 2017 with the opera “Aida”, spans a broad horizon, offering superb productions in opera, ballet, jazz, musicals, mixed performances and special events.
On 12 October 2017, the Royal Opera House Muscat celebrated its 5th anniversary.

The Royal Opera House Muscat is a prominent symbol of intercultural dialogue.

Successes for Members of The Photographic Society of Oman 2017

Contest

Palanga Photo Salon

Held under the auspices of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP)

Contestant

Samir bin Issa Al Busaidi

Image

Desert workers' shadow

The photo was taken from a high angle at a location in the Omani desert and shows the shadows of five workers.

Prize

Gold medal

Host Country

Lithuania

Contest

27th FIAP Colour Biennial

Organised by the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP) on alternate years.

Contestant

Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Touqi

Image

Omani face

The curious head of a small boy emerges from of a line-up of men during a traditional performance.

Prize

Silver medal

Host Country

Norway

"We have been carefully monitoring the current global economic situation and the turbulent effect that deteriorating conditions are having on international institutions. And we should like to point out that the policies followed by our government over recent years have – thank God – been largely instrumental in enabling our economy to avoid the negative impact of this situation."

Qaboos bin Said

(Council of Oman annual session, 2008)

Economic Development

In 2016, the Sultanate managed to reduce public spending to RO12.9 billion from RO13.7 billion in 2015 and RO15.1 billion in 2014.

Economic Development

In its accelerated drive to diversify the economy, the Sultanate is establishing economic, industrial & free zones to incentivise domestic & foreign investment.

The global economy has been gradually shifting gears since oil prices began their downward drift in mid-2014. The impact has been mixed, sometimes benefiting consumers at the expense of producers. Nowhere has it had more dramatic effect than in the oil-dependent economies of the Middle Eastern region. In 2016, Oman was receiving an average US$40.1 per barrel for exported oil, as compared with US$56.5 in 2015 and US$103.23 in 2014. The drop was quickly reflected in the Sultanate's oil revenues, down by almost two thirds in less than three years, from RO10.2 billion in 2014 to RO5.6 billion in 2015 to RO3.6 billion in 2016. It has handled the impact by focusing on diversification of revenue sources.

Measures to offset the budget deficit and regain control over the national purse were required at short notice, while an energetic approach to incentivising non-oil revenue sources was pursued. The Income Tax Law was amended, as was the fee structure associated with licensing non-Omani workers and the pricing of certain services provided by the Royal Oman Police. Tax collection was streamlined to greater efficiencies, involving more active oversight, and company tax exemptions curtailed somewhat, as were the terms of customs duty exemptions, with modified tariffs applied to major consumers of electricity for commercial, industrial and government use. A unified service fee system for municipal services was introduced and fees for services provided by ministries and government agencies reviewed, and adjusted as appropriate, to better reflect the cost and level of service provided.

The State Budget for 2017 focuses on achieving financial sustainability, reducing and containing the deficit within secure levels and continuing to review and reduce public expenditure, especially consumer and non-essential spending.

The government has adopted a policy of gradual implementation of these measures to avoid 'sudden impact' consequences to the economy or community. Care is taken not to affect the services provided to citizens and to prevent the economy from plunging into recession.

The 2016-2020 Five-Year Plan singles out five promising growth sectors and a number of potentials. To maintain focus and see through the objectives of the Plan, especially with respect to economic diversification, Tanfeedh ('implementation' in Arabic) was launched with a mandate to improve the investment climate and ease business practices in ways that would benefit diversification and attract domestic and foreign investment. The programme also reviews laws and regulations that may need updating, and promotes electronic technologies in the delivery of government services. Its overall purpose is to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of private sector growth. Phase One has three main areas of focus: manufacturing, tourism and logistics, along with the supporting sectors of financing and innovative funding, employment and the labour market.

Phase One rolled out 121 initiatives and projects for implementation in 2017. The product of these initiatives is expected to contribute a combined RO1.7 billion to GDP and create 30,000 jobs for Omani citizens. An implementation and follow-up support unit was established as a tool to drive forward initiatives and programmes proposed by Tanfeedh.

Estimated revenues in the 2017 budget were assessed in the region of RO8.7 billion, including RO4.45 billion in net oil revenue, RO1.66 billion from gas and some RO2.6 billion from non-oil sources.

Financial performance in 2016

In 2016, the Sultanate managed to reduce public spending to **RO12.9** billion from **RO13.7** billion in 2015 and **RO15.1** billion in 2014.

Current spending was **RO9.3** billion, or **72.2%** of total public expenditure, while investment spending came in at **RO2.9** billion and contributions and support at **RO659.7** million.

Total revenues for 2016 were RO7.6 billion, as compared with RO9.1 billion in 2015 and RO14.1 billion in 2014. Crude oil revenues stood at RO3.6 billion, or some 48% of total revenue. Gas revenues grew by 3.5% to just over RO1.5 billion in 2016. Other revenues, including income from customs, the corporate sector and capital investment, grew by 25.5% to RO2.4 billion, from RO1.9 billion in 2015. The deficit of RO5.3 billion was financed through domestic and international borrowing and financing from reserves.

Several broad considerations were given weight in estimating revenue: the Sultanate's commitment to a planned reduction in oil production in line with OPEC's decision in this respect and the initiation of gas flow from the Makarem reservoir in the last quarter of 2017.

Budget 2017

The State Budget for 2017 was more than usually focused on the matter of financial sustainability. Of prime concern was the need to reduce and then contain the deficit, and that hinged on a continuing review of public spending, especially in the consumer and non-essential categories. Public spending efficiencies are still a goal that, once achieved, will bring sustainability to the process. On the income side, genuine strides are being made in raising the contribution of non-oil revenues to the public purse, helped by measures to stimulate private sector investment. The shift in perspective to greater budgetary economies and lower public debt going forward will be accompanied by a phase of external borrowing to finance development projects and meet budgetary requirements in order to maintain desired growth levels.

Total public expenditure for the year was of the order of RO11.7 billion, a decrease of RO200 million over 2016. Development projects were not sacrificed in the drive to conserve funds, ensuring that work progresses to completion on all projects without interruption or delay. All payments for government contracts were also guaranteed. The budget also allocated RO395 million to subsidise electricity and cooking gas, fund housing and development loans and provide operational support for government companies.

Budget revenue estimates for 2017 came in at RO8.7 billion, including RO4.45 billion in net oil revenue, RO1.66 billion from gas and RO2.6 billion from non-oil sources. In estimating revenue, several considerations were highlighted, viz. the Sultanate's commitment to the projected reduction of oil production to meet OPEC directives, and the initiation of gas flow from the Makarem field in the final quarter of 2017. Also considered was a review of mechanisms in place to monetise and expand the provision of preferential services with a view to collecting fees compatible with the level of these services.

The budget deficit stands at RO3 billion. With the deficit accumulating for a third consecutive year, the deficit reduction target was seen as a top priority in Budget 2017. The deficit will be financed by external and domestic borrowing and reserve financing.

Item	Figure (million RO)		
	2014	2015	2016
Current expenditure	9,606,2	9,164,0	9,319,9
Investment expenditure	3,584,2	3,315,2	2,928,6
Contributions & subsidies	1,981,4	1,219,7	695,7
TOTAL	**15,171,8**	**13,698,9**	**12,908,2**

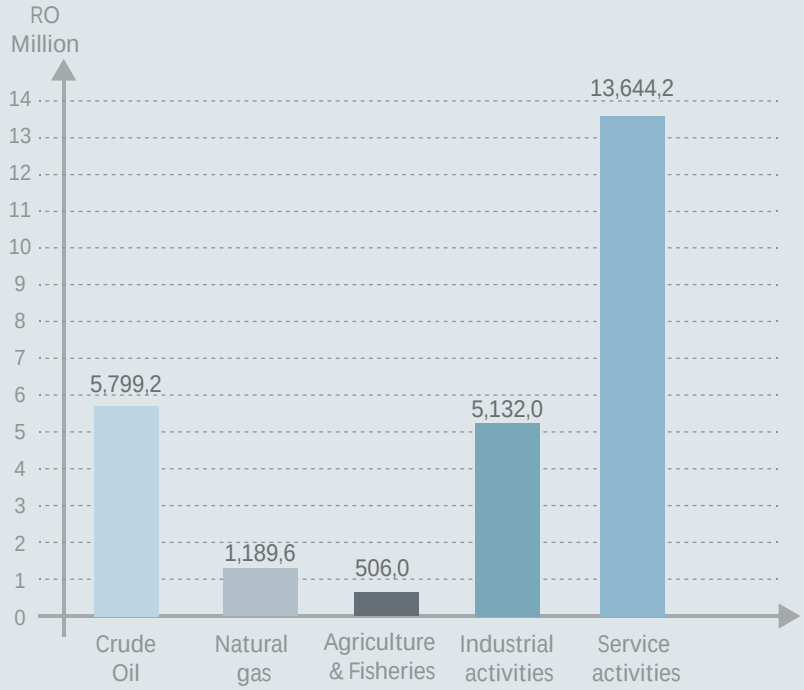
Government expenditure from 2014 to 2016

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current rates was down 5.1% to RO25.5 billion, as compared with RO26.8 billion in 2015. The decline came largely from the drop in oil activities from RO9.1 billion To RO6.9 billion. Meanwhile non-oil GDP increased by RO111.6 million to RO19.2 billion

GDP at current prices in 2016

Item	Figure (Million RO)
Crude Oil	5,799,2
Natural gas	1,189,6
Agriculture & Fisheries	506,0
Industrial activities	5,132,0
Service activities	13,644,2

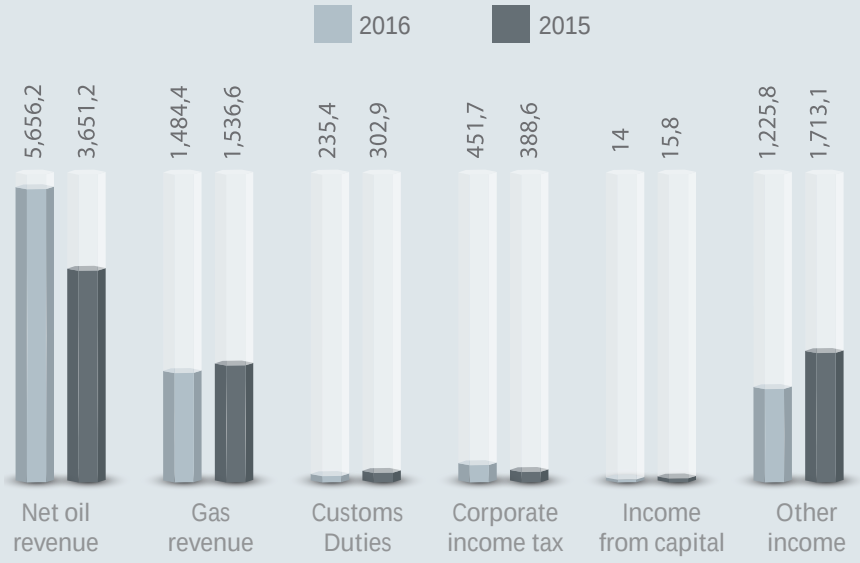
Source:
Monthly Statistical Bulletin published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information - August 2017



Total Government Revenues for 2015 & 2016

Item	Figure (Million RO) 2015	2016
Net oil revenue	5,656,2	3,651,2
Gas revenue	1,484,4	1,536,6
Customs Duties	235,4	302,9
Corporate income tax	451,7	388,6
Income from capital	14,0	15,8
Other income	1,225,8	1,713,1
TOTAL	**9,067,5**	**7,608,2**

Source:
Monthly Statistical Bulletin published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information - August 2017



Oman's economic policies derive from its strategy of opening the door to international markets and investors. In modernising pertinent legislation and regulations, it is creating an environment conducive to the growth of broad-spectrum domestic and foreign investment across the economy.

The Business Environment

The Sultanate›s economic policies are aligned with its broader strategy of opening up to international markets. This strategy demands an environment that will be conducive to the growth of local and foreign investment across the economy. It involves the updating of laws and regulations and the creation of investment-friendly incentives and facilities, along with an adequate air and seaport infrastructure.

The Sultanate has many attractive features to offer potential local & foreign investments.

The Sultanate has embedded features of particular attractiveness to domestic and foreign investment. Principal among these are its long established and maintained security and political stability. It also enjoys a free economic system, allowing foreigners up to 100% ownership of projects. No restrictions exist on the transfer of funds and profits abroad, and individual income is not taxed. The rate of inflation in the Sultanate, at 1.1% in 2016, is low.

InvestEasy is a comprehensive one-stop e-services portal adapted by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to facilitate the development of economic projects and provide services needed by the business sector. The portal accelerates the process of establishing a business or company, enhances the business environment and its ease of use has had an immediate positive effect on investment. Its impact is evident in the 194,000 transactions logged by the portal in 2016, a massive spike upwards from the 35,000 logged in 2015. It offers 77 business-related services to the sector.

The value of direct foreign investment stood at RO6.7 billion at the end of the second quarter of 2016. The oil and gas sector accounted for 42% of this total, at RO2.8 billion. Financial brokerage contributed RO1.4 billion, or 20.6%, and manufacturing RO900 million, or 13.4%.

The Sultanate›s trade policies are regularly recognised in positive international ratings. In 2017, the Sultanate was ranked first in the Starting a Business category for the Arab region in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business rankings and came regional third for the sub-

In 2017, the Sultanate was ranked first among Arab countries on the World Bank's Starting a Business Index and third among Arab countries in the Rule of Law, Companies Support and Political and Economic Environment sub-indices.

index categories assessing rule of law, companies support and political and economic environments. Oman was also ranked third in the Arab region for political stability, absence of violence and organisational environment, fourth for both education spending and human resources and fifth for ease of payment of taxes.

On the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organisation) 2017 Global Innovation Index, the Sultanate came in at 77th place. WIPO surveys 130 economies worldwide every year using dozens of metrics, from patent filings to education spending, for innovative potential, and publishes its findings on its website. In telecommunications, the Sultanate was listed fourth in the world and first in the Arab world on the International Telecommunication Union's 2017 Global Cybersecurity Index. These steadily improving figures reflect the consistency of Oman's political and economic progtress, as well as the facilities being provided by government to encourage the flow of foreign investment.

The Invest Easy e-portal is an electronic service developed by the Sultanate to facilitate the establishment of economic projects and ease their access to necessary services.

Tender Board

The Tender Board is responsible for issuing tenders, opening bids, analysing and assigning all government tenders valued at over RO3 million.

The Tender Board is responsible for inviting tenders, opening and analysing bids and awarding all government tenders valued at over RO3 million. Excluded from the process are security and defence contracts and contracts involving companies with independent legal entities and wholly owned by the government, or for which a legal provision is provided. The Board exercises its functions through a set of procedures which stimulate better performance by government agencies and the efficient use of public funds.

In 2016, the Board approved 59 tenders valued at RO285.4 million, the most expensive of which were for construction of a RO32.4 million water transmission line from Bousher to Seeb in Muscat Governorate; the leasing of a storage space in Sohar for the strategic wheat silo project at a cost of RO30.4 million; supply of medicines valued at RO23.9 million to the Ministry of Health; and operation and maintenance of principal grid lines and pumping stations, along with grid energy storage and ancillary facilities, on behalf of the General Authority for Electricity and Water at a cost of RO19.8 million.

During the first half of 2017, the Tender Board approved projects costing RO137.5 million, the most important of which involved allocation of the remaining works of the Jebel al Akhdar water supply project in Nizwa, Governorate of Al-Dakhiliyah; automation of the value added tax system; the laying of an internal road system at the Amerat Industrial Estate in Amerat, Muscat Governorate; and the supply of medicines to health units throughout the Sultanate via the Ministry of Health.

There were some positive developments for the oil and gas sector in 2016. Oil and gas exports commenced at the Musandam gas plant, where 900,000 barrels of crude oil and 10.4 million cubic feet of gas shipped over the course of the year.

In 2016 also, the foundation stone of the US$6.4 billion Liwa Plastic Industries Complex was laid; Sohar refinery's US$2.7 billion expansion commenced; as did work on the US$2.1 billion Gas Storage Project. Finally, work began on the Rabab Harweel Integrated Project, expected to cost US$4.5 billion and be ready for production by 2019.

Companies operating in the oil concession areas tested 53 exploratory wells in 2016. In addition 29 appraisal wells were drilled and tested for gas. The Sultanate's reserves of crude oil and condensates were assessed in the region of 5.2 billion barrels at the end of 2016. Total natural gas reserves were expected to top 24.8 trillion cubic feet. During 2017, the world's largest solar steam production project for oil production, Miraah ('mirror' in Arabic),

Positive developments in 2016 brightened prospects in the oil and gas sector.

The Sultanate›s average natural gas production during 2016 was around 106.1 million cubic metres per day, with associated gas production representing %18.2 of total production, or 19.3 million cubic metres per day.

came on stream in southern Oman, producing a daily EOR (enhanced oil recovery) steam output of 6,000 tonnes and enabling a carbon dioxide emissions reduction of 300 thousand tonnes annually. Once complete, the US$600 million Miraah project will save 5.6 trillion British Thermal Units (BTUs) of natural gas each year.

The average per barrel price received for Oman's oil in 2016 was US$40.14, down from US$56.45 in 2015 and US$103.23 in 2014. However, crude oil and condensate production rose to 1.004 million bpd versus 981,000 bpd in 2015, and exports rose to 321.9 million from 308 million barrels over the same period. The People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Japan are the main importers of Omani oil.

Natural gas production in 2016 averaged at 106.1 million cubic metres a day, with associated gas accounting for 18.2%, or 19.3 million cubic metres, and non-associated gas for 81%, or 81.8 million cubic metres, a day. In addition to internal production, Oman imported 5.5 million cubic metres of natural gas a day from the UAE's Dolphin Energy. The Sultanate's exports of LNG during the same year came in at a total of 8.5 million metric tonnes.

In early 2017, the Sultanate reduced oil production by 45,000 bpd, in compliance with the agreement by OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers to reduce production and stabilise oil prices. Average production in the first five months of 2017 was back to 968,000 bpd, as compared with 998,000 bpd per day in the same period of 2016, bringing the Sultanate's total production of crude oil and condensates to 146.3 million barrels, as against 151.6 million barrels for the same period of 2016. The average price of Omani oil during the first five months of 2017 rose 50.8% to US$51.6 per barrel, compared with US$34.2 per barrel for the corresponding period in 2016.

The Sultanate's average natural gas production in 2016 was about 106.1 million cubic metres per day.

The ratio of associated gas to total gas production was 18.2%, amounting to 19.3 million cubic metres per day.

Non-associated gas accounted for 81% of total production, or 81.8 million cubic metres per day

Supplementing domestic output, 5.5 million cubic metres of natural gas per day was imported from Dolphin Energy in 2016.

The Sultanate exported 8.5 million metric tonnes of LNG in 2016.

As of 1 April 2017, the capital of the Central Bank was increased to RO1 billion to enhance the Bank's ability to exercise its functions and cope with local and international monetary and financial developments.

The Banking Sector

The banking sector continues to play a key role in financing economic growth.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) works to provide an enabling environment for the finance sector in general and the banking sector in particular, supporting its vital contribution to economic growth and diversification, as well as maintaining the purchasing power of the national currency, the Omani Rial, both internally and externally. In April 2017 the Central Bank was recapitalised to one billion Omani Rials to enhance the ability of the bank to function smoothly and to cope with domestic and global monetary and financial developments.

Keeping abreast of constantly evolving international accounting standards, the CBO issued a circular to banks on 13 April 2017 directing them to apply International Accounting Standard No. 9 bearing on transactions involving financial instruments. The directive was a response to the lessons of the global financial crisis. This standard is considered to be a qualitative leap forward in accounting for financial instruments, especially as relates to default.

In a pre-emptive action to protect the banking and leasing systems, and to increase flexibility in their working procedures, financial institutions have been directed to reassess the terms of restructured loans and to bring dividend distribution in line with capital adequacy ratios. Typifying the flexible approach taken by the CBO in its banking policy, the directives for reassessing the terms were adjusted downwards to 5% and 10% for 2016 and 2017 respectively, with the first application of the full 15% rate deferred to 2018. This step was calculated to reduce the vulnerability of borrowers to challenges associated with the current slowdown in economic activity and to guarantee a flow of credit to the productive sectors. Meanwhile the capital adequacy ratio has risen further, to 17% at the end of December 2016. The ratio of non-performing loans remains low, at 2%.

Credit issued by conventional and Islamic banks and other depository companies rose 10.1% to a total RO22.1 billion at the end of December 2016. Credit granted to the private sector rose by the same rate to RO19.7 billion. Total deposits with the banking sector grew by 5.2% to RO20.4 billion at the end of 2016.

It is hoped that the capital market will play a greater role in financing projects and initiatives adopted in the Tanfeedh national programme promoting economic diversification.

The Capital Market

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which supervises the capital and insurance market sectors, is constantly looking at innovative and competitive financing alternatives that will guarantee optimal recruitment of capital and then link it to productive projects that raise the efficiency of the national economy. The capital market has characteristics and attributes that qualify it to play a pivotal role in project financing.

It is hoped that the capital market will play a greater role in financing initiatives adopted under the national programme for economic diversification, Tanfeedh, given the particular suitability of this form of long-term financing for large projects, as well as being a means to involve all segments of society by channelling private savings into these projects.

During 2016, the capital market provided RO1.6 billion towards financing the establishment or expansion of investment activities in various sectors, including oil, services, industry, transport and others.

In 2016, the Authority announced several new relevant pieces of legislation and amendments to existing regulations. Most notable among these updates were the stipulations around sukuk, or Islamic bond, transactions, along with several amendments to executive regulations of the Capital Market Law and a reclassification of markets raising the number of markets categorised by capitalisation and liquidity to six: the regular market, the parallel market, the follow-up market, the third market, the securities and sukuk market and the preferential rights market. This trend comes at a time when the sector is witnessing an expansion in the quality of financial products on offer and which are expected to be more popular in the coming period.

The National Programme for the Promotion of Economic Diversification, Tanfeedh, hopes to improve the investment environment and ease the process of doing business, thereby benefiting the economic diversification strategy & attracting new investment.

Muscat Securities Market

Trading on the Muscat Securities Market in 2016 was valued at RO959 million, compared with RO1.4 billion in 2015. There was positive interest from local investors, who were responsible for 82.6% of the volume of purchases and 73.6% of sales. The main index rose 7% to close the year at 5,782 points, up 376 points on the year.

The market value of listed companies at the end of 2016 was RO17.3 billion, compared with RO15.7 billion at the end of 2015.

In the first half of 2017, trading volume was down somewhat to RO471.3 million, as against RO560.4 million for the corresponding period of 2016. Market capitalisation at the end of June 2017 stood at RO17.6 billion, up RO322.4 million from the end of 2016.

Muscat Securities Market promotes saving and investment awareness generally.

The Takaful Insurance Law was finalised and published in 2016. It provides the legislative and regulatory framework for the sector and will support the introduction of diverse insurance products suited to the needs of the market, as well as to social and institutional trends.

Insurance Sector

The Takaful Insurance Law was introduced in 2016 to provide the legislative and regulatory framework for the sector, and brought with it a variety of insurance products tailored to market needs and emerging individual and institutional trends. Takaful ('mutual responsibility' in Arabic) describes sharia-compliant insurance system. Proposed amendments to the Unified Motor Vehicle Insurance Policy document were adopted, offering greater protection and transparency to policy holders. Additional benefits and options became available, commensurate with increasing sophistication in customer demand.

Meanwhile, in 2016, the CMA published a guide to quality standards applicable to insurance policy products. The guide outlines the minimum quality standards expected of insurance companies and brokers in the Sultanate.

> The overall volume of direct insurance premiums grew 2% in 2016 to RO450 million, from RO442 million in 2015. Of this total, Takaful policies were responsible for RO42 million, or 9.3% of total direct premiums.

The new Takaful Insurance Law provides the legislative and regulatory framework that will govern the sector going forward.

Domestic trade in 2016 witnessed modest growth across the range of commercial and service activities and this was reflected in GDP.

The value of service activities to GDP rose 1.8% in 2016 to RO13.6 billion, while wholesale and retail trade contributed RO1.9 billion. The flourishing hotel and restaurant sector came in at RO249.1 million; transport, storage and communications at RO1.4 billion; real estate, leasing and commercial projects activity RO1.3 billion; financial brokerage RO1.5 billion; public administration and defence RO3.8 billion, and other services RO3.3 billion.

The volume of foreign trade in and out of the Sultanate in 2016 was RO19.2 billion, of which commodity exports were responsible for RO10.3 billion and commodity imports RO8.9 billion. Oil and gas constituted 56.7% of the export figure, at RO5.8 billion. Non-oil exports were worth RO2.4 billion and the re-export trade in the region of RO2.1 billion.

Commodity exports in 2016

Item	Figure (Million RO)
Oil and gas exports	5,840,3
Non - oil exports	2,398,8
Re-export	2,056,4
Total commodity exports	**10,295,5**

Source:
Monthly Statistical Bulletin published by the National Centre for Statistics & Information - August 2017

The mining sector is one of the five promising sectors expected to underpin the diversification objectives of the current Five-Year Plan (2016-2020).

Mining

The Oman Mining Strategy, which will be operational in the first quarter of 2018, has 12 principal areas of focus, covering objectives over the next 10 years. The strategy defines the Sultanate›s development aspirations for the sector, so as to best serve the overall goal of economic diversification. Mining is expected to be a strong pillar of the 2016-2020 Five-Year Plan.

Mining contributed RO136.9 million to GDP in 2016, or 2.7% of overall industrial activities (RO5.1 billion). Under the Oman Mining Strategy, the Sultanate is hoping to raise this percentage substantially.

The Public Authority for Mining (PAM) was established by Royal Decree No. 49/2014 and mandated to create the framework for exploitation of the Sultanate's valuable mining resources

It was directed to provide the requisite organisational structure for the sector and to coordinate with other State bodies to draft and amend relevant legislation and regulations.

The Authority also commissions geological and mining studies & exploration research. It conducts pre-feasibility studies on proposed projects related to mineral exploitation & maintains a library of geological & mining data, which it makes available to interested parties.

It is protective of Oman's geological heritage and collaborates with relevant agencies to preserve the balance between this protective concern and its exploitation mandate.

It is building solid relationships with national, regional and international organisations having similar or associated interests.

PAM approves mine and quarry design plans and oversees construction.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Industrial Excellence is an incentive award sponsored by the Sultanate to encourage Omani factories to constantly develop their technical capabilities, adhere to standard specifications and participate more fully in Omanisation.

Industry

Industrial activity in 2016 had a combined value to GDP of RO5.1 billion, or 20.1% of the RO25.5 GDP total at current prices. Of this, manufacturing accounted for RO3.4 billion, or 13.5%, representing a healthy advance for a sector expected to be one of the five main pillars of the diversification strategy enshrined in the 2016-2020 Five-Year Plan.

Loans to industry provided by domestic banks totalled RO1.5 billion at the end of 2016, an increase of RO65.5 million over 2015, and representing 7.7% of all domestic bank credit, at RO19.7 billion.
The government is generous in its incentivisation of the industrial sector. Loans granted by the Oman Development Bank to industrial projects were worth RO22.3 million at the end of 2016, benefiting 2,049 projects in all.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Industrial Excellence, assigned annually since 1991, encourages Omani factories to aim high, to develop their technical capability, adhere to standard specifications and subscribe to Omanisation. The history of the competition is one of progressive modernisation of industrial practices, keeping pace with the economic growth experienced by the Sultanate since it was first launched.

The Omani National Product Promotion Campaign, rebranded as the Origin Oman Campaign, is organised annually and takes the form of a series of events taking place nationwide. These include exhibitions of Omani products in schools, shops and major malls, along with mobile exhibits throughout of the Sultanate. The popular success of the mobile exhibits has led to expansion of the campaign, and they now participate in several overseas fairs and events.

Manufacturing is one of the five main sectors singled out to fuel diversification in the Five-Year Plan (2016-2020).

Economic, Industrial & Free Zones

Free zones offer a package of incentives and facilities that are designed to be attractive to investors. Picture shows the Salalah Free Zone in Dhofar Governorate.

Under its economic diversification strategy, the Sultanate has established economic, industrial and free zones which offer attractive incentives to investors from home and abroad.

The Duqm Economic Zone, one of the most recent of these areas, has quickly risen to prominence. Created in 2011, its principal components are its port, dry dock for ship repair, refinery and airport. It accommodates heavy industry, petrochemicals and medium and light industry, as well as areas allocated to tourism and commercial investment, real estate development and logistics.

In 2016, the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park was annexed to the Duqm Economic Zone to increase the area capacity of the latter from 1,745 sq km to 2,000 sq.km. In 2017, the Land Use Agreement was signed between the Duqm Economic Zone Authority and the Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), a subsidiary of the Oman Oil Company (OOC). The OOC is the government's investment arm in oil, gas and related industries and has plans to turn Ras Markaz into a global-scale oil storage terminal.

Also in 2017, work commenced on 10 separate projects in the US$10.7 billion Sino-Oman Industrial City,

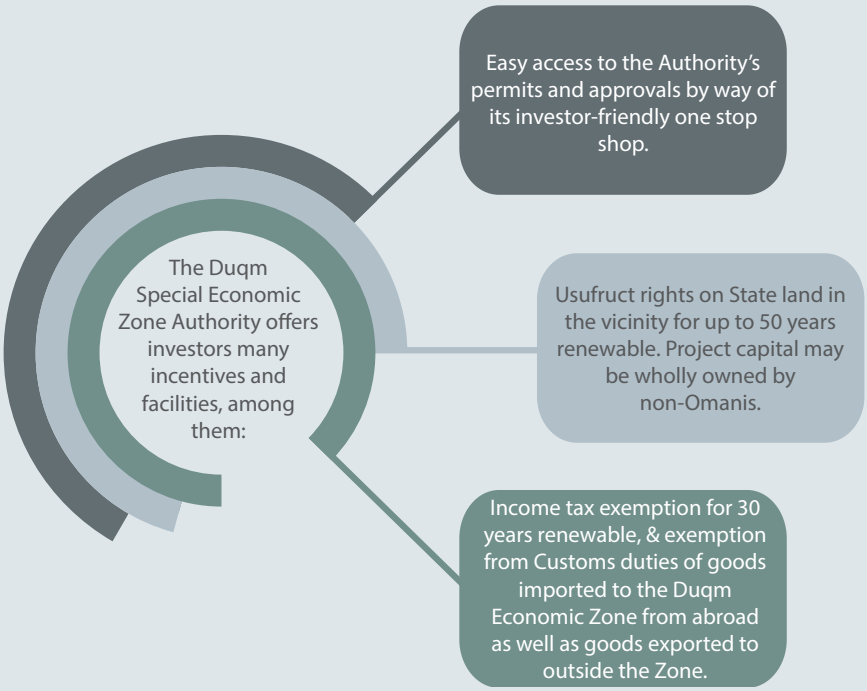
Free zones provide packages of investment incentives and facilities, most notably tax exemptions and a simplification of licence and permit issuing procedures and the importation of goods tradeable within the State.

with investments valued at US3.2$ billion dollars representing the first phase of the city's construction.

This year also witnessed the signing of a partnership agreement between OOC and Kuwait Petroleum International establishing the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Complex. Tenders will be invited for construction of the refinery. Meantime work also commenced on gas delivery to the Duqm Economic Zone by which gas will be fed to Duqm refinery and other petrochemical industries yet to be established in the newly expanded Zone.

The Economic Zone Authority offers investors many attractive incentives and facilities, including exemption from income tax for a period of 30 years, renewable, customs duty exemption of goods imported from outside the Sultanate to the Duqm Economic Zone and vice versa and the right to use of State lands located inside the Zone for up to a 50 years, renewable. Furthermore, project capital may be wholly owned by non-Omanis, and all necessary permits and approvals issued by the Authority, along with many other helpful services, are available by way of its user-friendly one-stop-shop system.

Regulated by the Free Zones Law promulgated under Royal Decree No. 2002/56 in 2002, the free zones offer a package of investment incentives and facilities including tax exemptions, simplified procedures for obtaining licences and permits and the import of permitted goods, exemption from minimum investment levels, the free use of currencies, income tax exemption on profits and other features.



Salalah Free Zone is competing to become a business centre of serious regional and international importance and a world-class centre for high-quality industrial and logistical activities.

To date three free zones have been set up in the Sultanate.

Al-Mazyounah Free Zone – became operational in November 1999 and is in the Governorate of Dhofar near the Omani-Yemeni border. At the end of 2016, 115 companies had signed contracts to invest in the region. Over the course of the year, 28,000 tonnes of non-vehicular goods were handled and 15,320 vehicles transited the Zone.

Salalah was the site of the Sultanate's second free zone. Established in 2006, it is managed by Salalah Free Zone and focuses on attracting vital projects in such fields as logistics, warehousing, re-distribution, petrochemical and textile industries, medical products and projects related to remanufacturing, recycling of plastics , assembly and use of national resources as production components.

The Salalah Free Zone aspires to become one of the most important regional and international business hubs and a world-class centre for high-quality industrial and logistical activities.

The Sohar Free Zone was established in late 2010 as an extension of Sohar Industrial Port and has attracted some RO10 billion in investment to date. The port and the free zone incorporate several heavy and petrochemical industries, prominent among them the Sohar Refinery and Sohar Aluminium Plant. Sohar Port won the Maritime Standard Port of the Year Award in 2016, and Sohar Free Zone brought home the New Investments Award in the 2016 fDi Magazine Free Zones of the Year Awards. fDi Magazine is a bi-monthly publication of the Financial Times Group of England.

In addition to the above three designated areas, the Sultanate has created several industrial zones dedicated to small and medium enterprises. These are supervised by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE) and are distributed across the Sultanate. At the present date, they support a combined 1,700 projects with an investment value in excess of RO6 billion. These projects are responsible for providing 46,000 jobs, including 17,000 jobs for Omani nationals.

To facilitate procedures for investors, the PEIE, acting under the umbrella of Masar ('channel' in Arabic), the investment window, signed several memoranda of cooperation with industry service providers. Masar is a one-stop-shop by way of which the relevant authorities provide services to activities licensed to operate in industrial estates.

In 2016, the port of Sultan Qaboos saw a spike in tourist arrivals, while also servicing some 246 bulk cargo ships, 13 livestock carriers and 316 other visiting vessels.

Ports

The Sultanate has exploited history and geographical advantage in developing the economic strategies of the post-Renaissance period, establishing a series of well-appointed ports along the coastline that serve traditional growth sectors as well as new directions away from dependence on revenue from fossil fuels. These ports have proved to be an astute investment, all the more so today, as the country moves towards a more diversified economy and competes for domestic and overseas investment.

Sultan Qaboos Port in Muscat Governorate is the oldest of the nation's working ports. As the economy boomed and the attractions of Oman brought cruise liners and pleasure craft in greater numbers, this sheltered seaport has become more focused on tourism, with the bulk of goods import-export activities transferred to Sohar in North Batinah Governorate. Sultan Qaboos Port was a busy tourist hub in 2016, while also handling 246 bulk cargo vessels, 13 livestock transporters and 316 other non-passenger ships. As the transition continues, the port handled 93,000 tonnes of cargo in 2016, down from 145,000 tonnes in 2015.

Sultan Qaboos Port has seen a spurt in tourist arrivals after its conversion from a commercial to a tourist port. Import-export activity has been transferred to Sohar.

In 2016, the port handled
620,000
standard containers

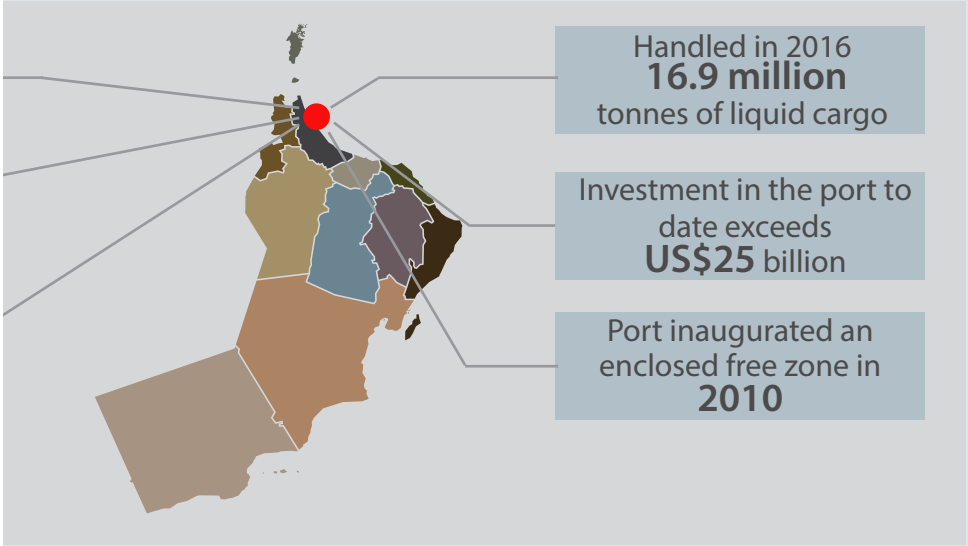
Deepest seaport in the Gulf and South Asia

Has berths up to
25 metres deep

The commercial importance of Sohar Port in the Sultanate of Oman

Sohar Industrial Port serves both trade and industry, due to its association with the heavy and petrochemical industries that are expected to bring the Sultanate to a position of serious commercial and industrial competition in the region. The port has 6,270 metres of berthing, allocated to 21 separate berths ranging in depth from 16 to 25 metres. It is also linked to the 2,500 hectare Sohar Free Zone, which is attracting local and international investment and increasing traffic at the port.

The latest figures available report solid growth through 2016, when 620,000 TEUs were handled, up from 536,000 in 2015. The volume of liquid bulk handled also rose 12% to 18.9 million tonnes, against 16.9 million tonnes in 2015. These volumes were handled by a somewhat smaller number of vessels, at 2,322 in 2016 versus 2,354 in 2015.

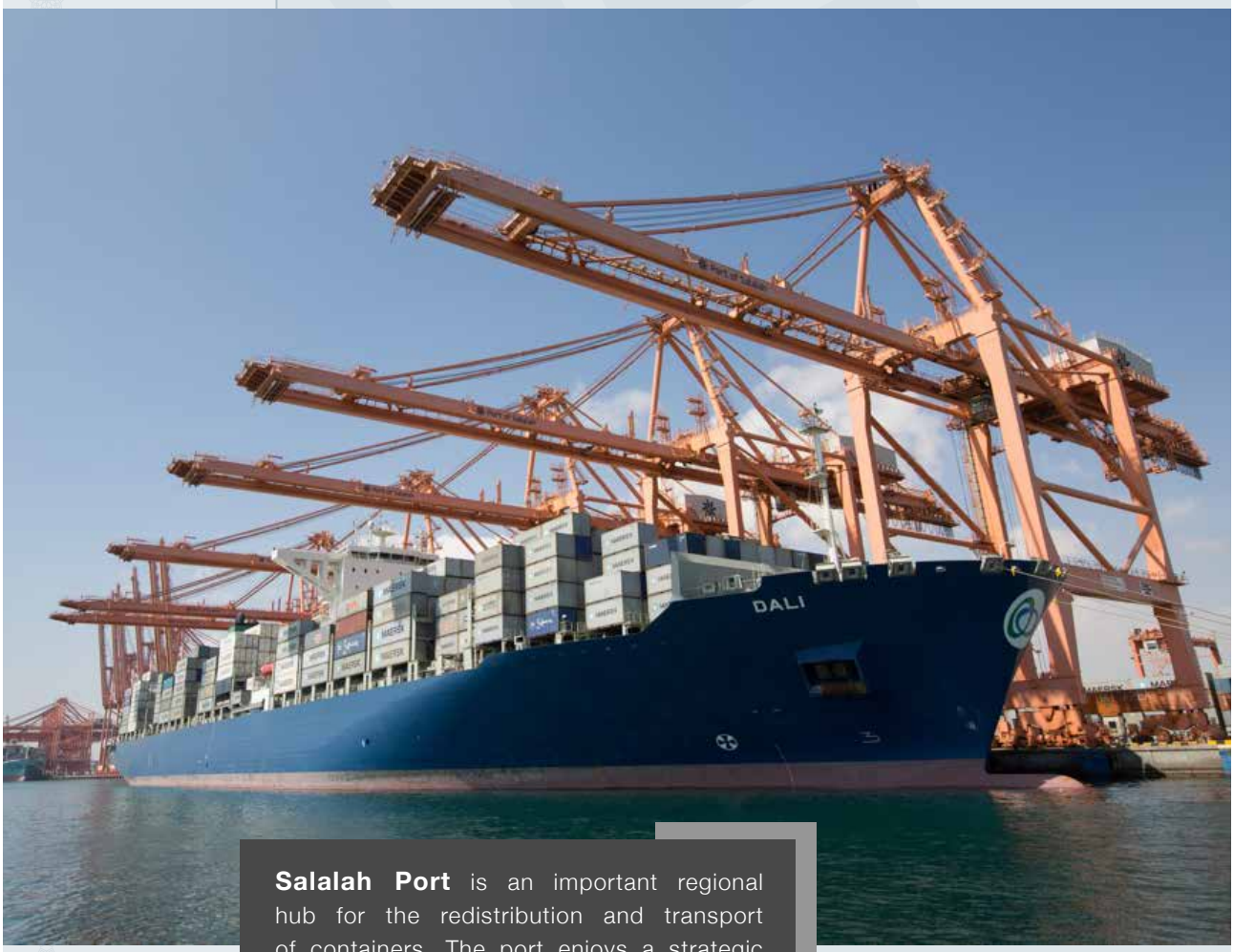


Handled in 2016
16.9 million
tonnes of liquid cargo

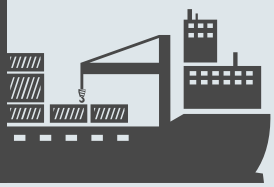
Investment in the port to date exceeds
US$25 billion

Port inaugurated an enclosed free zone in
2010

Salalah Port is a regional container distribution and transport hub. This strategic port overlooks the Indian Ocean at the intersection of major international shipping lanes.



Salalah Port is an important regional hub for the redistribution and transport of containers. The port enjoys a strategic location overlooking the Indian Ocean and adjacent to international shipping lanes. It has 19 berths with a depth range of 3 to 18 metres and a general cargo terminal. The port handled 2,824 vessels in 2016, a major jump from the 1,981 handled in 2015. Container traffic was up from 2.5 million TEU to 3.3 million TEU in the same period.



Duqm is Oman's most modern port, a multi-purpose facility created under the Sultanate's economic diversification plan, it is a pivotal component of the Duqm Economic Zone.

Duqm Port is located in the Governorate of Wusta and is the country's most modern port. Built as a multi-purpose facility under the Sultanate's economic diversification plan, it constitutes a key component of the Duqm Economic Zone. The port is conveniently situated on the Arabian Sea to serve Indian Ocean traffic and boasts an advanced infrastructure. With an 8.7 km breakwater, port basin depth of 18 metres and 19 metre entrance channel, Duqm is capable of handling giant container vessels.

With activity at Duqm already rewarding major investment in the port, ongoing infrastructure projects continue to bring it forward to full commercial operation. A liquid bulk berth is under construction, as are infrastructural works on the government berth, which will be the first of its kind in the country, limited to the service of government-specific interests.

In the province of Musandam, **the Port of Khasab**, located near the Strait of Hormuz, is an active commercial and tourist port. The port covers an area of 159 hectares and has a commercial berth 300 metres long and a 100 metre fixed and 8 metre floating berth for fishing vessels.

The Port of Shinas is an important transit facility for domestic trade between the wilayat of North Batinah Governorate, serving the fishing, livestock and agricultural sectors. The port has undergone several upgrades to its livestock warehouses, and provision of floating berths to facilitate trade and fishing activities. In 2016, 218 vessels passed through Shinas Port, against 149 in 2015.

Several new ports are being constructed along the coastline with a view to directing the Omani economy away from the oil and gas sector and encouraging investment in more diversified sources of national income.

Major projects in logistics sector

South Batinah Logistics Area Project (Warehousing)

A model city linking the logistics system with promising investment opportunities.

Land transport projects include:

Construction and linking of railway system with mining locations

Land bridge to Saudi Arabia.

One stop shop for customs clearance

Construction of bonded warehouses

Upgrading of cold-chain logistics network

Enabling e-commerce

Air transport projects

The Cargo Village project at Muscat International Airport and improvement of operational efficiency of the airport

Maritime Transport Projects

Raising the quality of Omani port services.

Expanding & strengthening Omani shipping lines & increasing competitiveness and advanced service standards among local logistics suppliers.

Implementing the National Port Community System across the Sultanate

Providing a stimulating business environment at all free zones by upgrading facilities, systems & performance

Target indicators in logistics sector up to 2020

Increasing the investment volume by at least RO1 billion

Raising the sector contribution in GDP to RO2 billion

Reducing time delays for completion of clearing procedures for imported sea cargo from 7.2 to 1.5 days

Increasing jobs provided by the sector from the current 67,000 to 100,000

Increasing port capacity from 3.1 million to 7 million tonnes (-20ft equivalent unit (TEU))

Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), as the official representative of the private sector, escalated its drive in 2016 and 2017 to secure greater engagement of the sector in the national economy, thereby to meet the objectives of sustainable development. The Chamber incentivises modernisation in the private sector, facilitating where it can upgrades that will raise incomes for business owners and consequently create openings for the expanding national labour force. It also coordinates with government programmes that encourage private enterprise and self-employment and support small and medium enterprises.

In 2017, the Chamber ran an active campaign to attract foreign investment and urged local companies to enter into partnership agreements with international peers. Chamber delegations undertook multiple overseas visits for this purpose. A new website was launched, the result of a revamp to reflect Oman's recent spurt of economic growth. The Chamber's package of e-services is beneficial in smoothing the path for local and foreign investors and business owners.

The OCCI Chair for Economic Studies was established as a joint project between the Chamber and Sultan Qaboos University to promote serious

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry Chair in Economic Studies hopes to influence the private sector to engage more fully with the national economic diversification strategy, as well as to promote more competitive business instincts.

analysis of current economic issues facing the Sultanate and to examine how the private sector might enlarge its presence in the diversification arena and make business and industry more competitive internationally. The Chamber also signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Scientific Research Council to establish the OCCI Innovation Award promoting cooperation and partnership between the private sector and government. The award promotes a culture of innovation and encourages individual researchers and inventors to use available means to broadcast their activities locally and abroad.

In 2017, the Chamber announced the second edition of its Social Responsibility Award, an incentive developed with an eye to four sectors: industry, services, banking, and insurance and investment. The Chamber hopes the award will have the effect of disseminating a culture of social responsibility in the private sector.

The OCCI Award for Economic Research and Studies was conceived to stimulate the scientific research environment and support the scientific skills of participants. Broadly, it falls into the category of researching novel proposals to address challenges facing the private sector and the Omani economy generally.

Small & Medium Enterprises

SMEs have done much to encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment among young people.

The Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprise Development, Riyada ('leadership' in Arabic), was established by Royal Decree No. 36/2013 with a brief to promote small and medium enterprises, helping them plan and raise finance and services as necessary. The growth of the SME sector has broad appeal for government in its strategy to energise enterprise and meet rising employment demand.

Since its creation in 2013, the Authority has had a positive impact in its dual mission, and self-employment has grown, as has the willingness of institutions both to provide sustainable employment opportunities for Omani youth and to assist entrepreneurs through the growing pains of starting up and managing their own projects. It prepares them to compete effectively in the marketplace and bring value and diversity to the national economy, supported by a spirit of innovation and a familiarity with technology.

The gathering successes of Riyada were evident in 2016, when more than 50 programmes supportive of SMEs, involving collaborations between government, private and civil society institutions, were active. The backing of the State's powerful administrative apparatus and of established private sector corporations creates a reassuring climate for the incubation of SMEs, along with close guidance on contracts and procurement for enterprises registered with Riyada. The decision to grant usufruct land to SMEs is being implemented,

At the end of 2016, 25,700 SMEs had registered under the Riada (Entrepreneurship) scheme, an increase of 14,100 registrations over 2015.

as is the decision to grant leave to government employees wishing to manage their own projects.

Riyada had 25,700 SMEs registered with it at the end of 2016, almost double the number for the previous year. It had issued 9,564 Riyada Entrepreneur Cards, a 6,820 increase over 2015. In 2016, Riyada provided 6,520 consultation sessions to entrepreneurs, 600 entrepreneurs received training, and 16 start-ups were hosted at the Riyada incubator.

The ITA works to foster a safe environment for users of electronic devices by raising awareness of information security and providing high quality security services.

Information Technology

The Sultanate's digital strategy has generated many programmes and initiatives that take Oman along the road to becoming a knowledge-based society.

Oman's digital strategy, drafted to transform the Sultanate into a knowledge society, gathered pace in 2016, with numerous programmes and initiatives running in parallel. The long process of rolling out eGovernment, enlarging the band of quality electronic services available to the public, was stepped up. The Information Technology Authority (ITA) implemented 25 projects for government agencies and organised 14 training workshops, benefiting 550 participants, and linked 57 additional government sites to the Oman government network, greatly enhancing secure communication between government institutions. The ITA collaborates with other organisations in developing electronic government services. In 2016, under the three-year 2015-2018 licence signed with Microsoft, government units were provided with 11,500 MS Office programme sub-licences, bringing them the latest Microsoft software and technology.

Also in 2016, the Authority sponsored training programmes in specialist areas of technology, most notably for IT professionals, for the disabled, for children and towards the development of digital lifestyles. Acting under the strategic objectives of Digital Oman, the ITA has been keen to develop electronic content and smart phone applications and, through various initiatives, to deliver Omani products that are abreast of

global developments in information technology. In this context, the ITA-sponsored SAS Centre for Mobile Applications Development, the first of its kind in the Sultanate, is expected to nurture into existence a national cadre of technologically competent innovators capable of developing ideas into sustainable business applications. In 2016, the Centre trained 193 enthusiasts in the mechanics of creating Smartphone applications.

To encourage the use of free software, the ITA launched the National Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) initiative, which supports applications, technologies and solutions that use free software to develop novel technology applications.

The ITA is diligent in its pursuit of ever more sophisticated protection for users of electronic devices. It promotes awareness of information security and itself provides high quality security services, including protection of networks and electronic portals, secure access to the Internet, remote security operations, information security assessment and IT security consulting. In 2016, more than 279.1 million electronic attacks on government networks were logged, and 1.7 million cyberattacks against government sites. Security levels were raised across 150 government networks, and 344 security reports were sent to government agencies with detailed recommendations on how to upgrade system and network protection. Eighteen government websites were secured and 7,000 security vulnerabilities were inspected and the relevant authorities notified.

The ITA can detect known security incidents within 30 seconds of their occurrence. According to the latest figures, 96.5% of security incidents were detected and processed to solution within 5 working days and 90.9% of risk analysis requests were reviewed and responded to within 3 days.

The National Centre for Computer Safety oversees the protection of data and systems from major cyber threats of national scale, protecting infrastructure and ensuring a safe environment for electronic transactions.

The Sultanate's eGovernment successes have been recognised regionally and internationally. Oman was ranked third in the 2017 Arab eGovernment Report issued by the Institute of eGovernment at the University of Waseda. Meanwhile, it came third in the Arab world and 66th globally on the World Bank's 2017 Ease of Doing Business Report and first in the Arab world and 32nd globally in the Report's Starting a Business category, having advanced 127 places since 2015. Again, the Sultanate ranked 66th globally in the 2016 eGovernment Survey conducted annually by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and has won three eGovernment awards from the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The fisheries sector is one of the main focus areas of the Ninth Five-Year Plan in its goal of economic diversification. The Sultanate has abundant and diverse stocks of both surface and deepwater fish.

Fisheries

Fisheries have been selected as one of the five main props of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), which has economic diversification as its driving motivation.

The Sultanate has a coastline extending 3,165 km over three vast bodies of water. It has healthy surface and deepwater fish stocks, equating on a per capita basis to 33 kg per year, against an average for the Arab world of 11 kg and 18 kg globally, and constituting a positive nutrition indicator for the Sultanate.

In 2016, the national catch grew 8.9% to 280,000 tonnes valued at RO204 million, as compared with 257,000 tonnes worth RO172 million in 2015. Artisanal fishing represented 99% of all production, with the remaining percentage attributed to coastal fishing, commercial fishing and fish farming. The Sultanate exported 152,000 tonnes of fish in 2016, for revenue of RO73 million. Exports represented 54.2% of total production.

The strategy for development of the fisheries sector is being implemented in two phases: Phase One was initiated in 2013 and will run to 2020. Phase Two (2021-2040) has as its principal objectives improving the efficiency of the fishing fleet, extending infrastructure and expanding fish-farming activity to flesh out production, upgrading fish marketing strategies and introducing and exporting value-added spinoff products. An allocation of RO509 million was made available for Phase One. Fish production is expected to reach 462,000 tonnes annually by 2020 and to achieve a direct financial return of RO369.6 million at fixed prices, as well as indirect revenues of RO739.2 million. Moreover, upwards of 8,600 jobs will be created directly, with a further 20,400 workers employed in support activities, for a total of 29,000 additional jobs across the sector.

The national fishing fleet consists of a large number of traditional fishing vessels and a smaller coastal and commercial fleet. Oman has in the region of 22,720 artisanal fishing craft

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is spearheading a major marketing initiative, involving a central fish market and retail outlets at fishing ports. It sees a more active role for wholesale markets, with hand signalling being adopted in an auction-based system.

on the water, along with 688 traditional trawlers and 134 ocean-going trawlers. The sector employs 47,470 artisanal fishermen. A fleet of 4,115 vehicles transport the catch to market.

Under the Phase One strategy to upgrade the fleet, 500 new coastal fishing vessels are being phased into commission, and a further 500 advanced deep sea trawlers join the traditional ocean-going fleet. The new vessels offer long haul fishing crews superior working and safety conditions and are fitted with navigational and other requirements for fishing expeditions lasting more than three days.

Harbour facilities are the core component of fishing infrastructure and key to achieving optimal returns from the industry. Oman currently has 22 fishing ports of varying capacity and the 2016-2020 Five-Year-Plan will add a further eight, while undertaking the rehabilitation of nine existing facilities.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is streamlining its fish marketing policy, after first establishing a central market for fish and smaller retail markets at fishing ports. It sees a more active role for wholesale markets, with adoption of hand signalling in an auction-based system or the introduction of fish brokers in the markets.

The fisheries sector is one of the five main focus sectors in the Ninth Five-Year Plan drive towards economic diversification.

A strategy is in the preparation stages that will define development objectives across the agricultural sector up to 2040.

In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, working in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), drew up a strategy for agriculture up to 2040, incorporating the herd and crop sectors. The strategy included an investment plan for its effective implementation.

The Ministry has been energetic in its efforts to encourage private sector companies to invest in agriculture. In this context, the Oman Food Investment Holding Company was founded as the government's investment arm in the food project domain. Four companies were also created, one specialising in poultry production, another in the production of red meat and the third and fourth focusing on milk production from dairy cows and camels in the northern and southern halves of the Sultanate respectively. In the pipeline are projects to be implemented by the private sector, prominent among them an egg-production scheme to be managed by the Oman Flour Mills Company in partnership with overseas investors. These projects are expected to contribute to raising self-sufficiency ratios in animal products.

A strategy for agriculture up to 2040 that is being rolled out in cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation will see substantial investment in both crop and livestock schemes.

Meanwhile four feasibility studies on the marketing of dates and the processing and marketing of date by-products, such as animal feed and palm wood, have been completed and presented.

At current prices, agriculture contributed RO281.2 to GDP in 2016, up from RO245.3 million in 2015, representing a strong growth rate of 14.6%.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries led crop expansion in 2016 with incentive schemes for farmers that included the distribution of 59,000 palm trees to farmers under the support and replacement programme and the 'one million date palms' initiative.

Also in 2016, 156,000 fruit seedlings of improved varieties were distributed to farmers, and 2,211 feddans (1 feddan= 0.42 hectares/1.038 acres) were planted under the wheat expansion scheme. Modern irrigation systems were extended to more farms, and desalination units to farms suffering from high salinity in the water table.
Animal product volume saw growth in 2016 of 12.4% to 244,000 tonnes, up from 217,000 in 2015.

Oman›s total electricity production in 2016 was up 4.5% to 34,222 GWh, from 32,756 GWh in 2015.

Electricity & Water

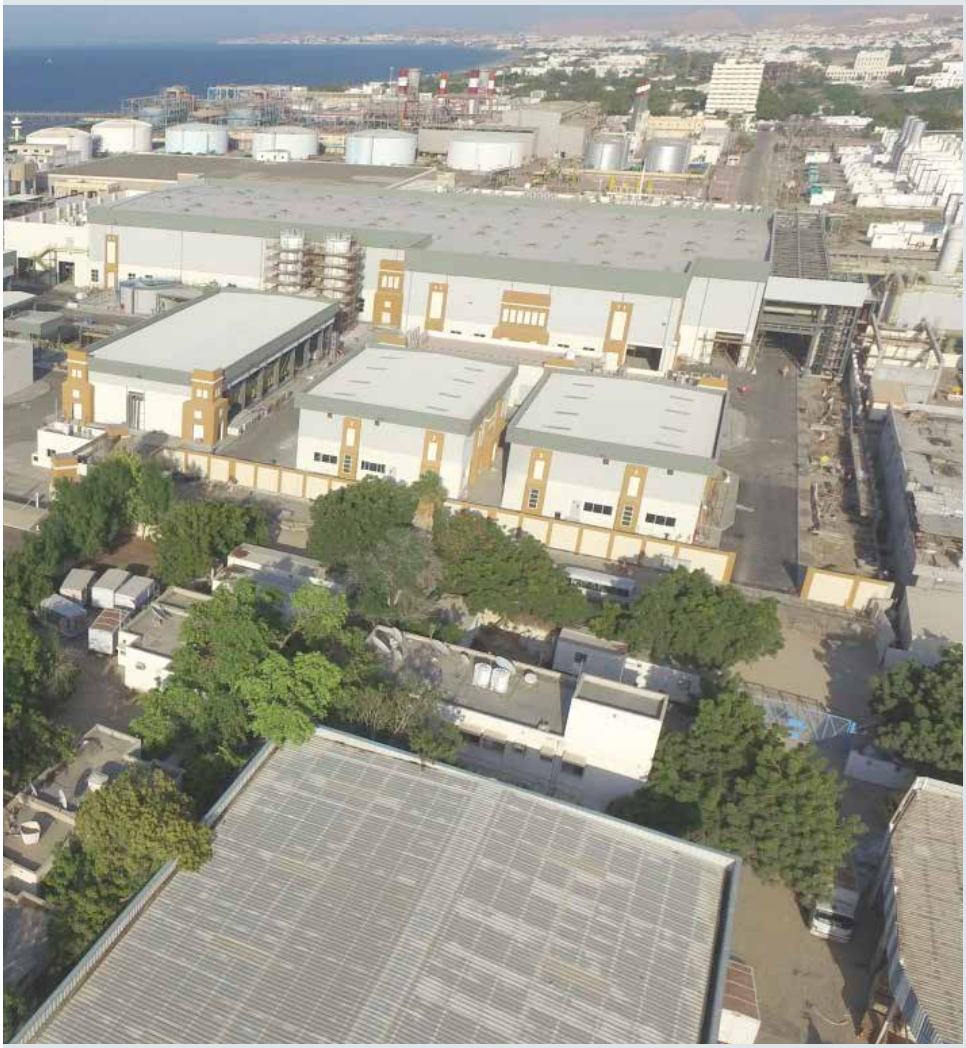
New power plants are being built throughout the Sultanate to cope with the growth in demand for electricity.

The demand for electricity is growing at an annual rate of about 9%, a consequence of the combined effects of economic growth, the expansion of commercial, industrial and real estate projects, major government investments, population growth and urbanisation. The Sultanate is meeting rising demand with new electricity generating plants around the country, while stimulating emerging renewable energy trends in sourcing electricity. National electricity production in 2016 was up 4.5% to 34,222 GW in 2016, against 32,756 GW for 2015.

Water production in 2016 grew 12.2% to 377.9 million cubic metres, against 336.8 million cubic metres in 2015.

The Sultanate is building a series of largescale seawater desalination

Water production in 2016 grew 12.2% to 377.9 million cubic metres, from 336.8 million cubic metres in 2015.



plants to increase water supply, with the desalination plants being seen as the principal source of drinking water, allowing the retention of groundwater as strategic reserve. The Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW), or Diam (from the Arabic for 'sustainable'), has partnered with the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, to expand the output of existing desalination plants and to establish new plants to meet the growing demand for potable water.

It is expected that during 2019 and 2020 four new desalination projects will be up and running, in Salalah, Duqm, Khasab and Al-Ashkhara respectively, sharing a combined capacity of around 256,000 cubic meters a day.

"...We recognize that the tourism sector is of growing international importance and a major source of revenue for many of the world's advanced states. And since God has blessed our country with environmental and geographical diversity and the means to make it a major regional tourist destination, we have taken the decision to establish a ministry to take responsibility for this vital sector. That ministry is the Ministry of Tourism..."

Qaboos bin Said

(Council of Oman annual session, 2004)

Tourism

Sustainable Amenities

The tourism sector in the Sultanate is having a broad stimulating effect on the economy, boosting such sectors as transport, retail, construction, real estate, restaurants and cafes and other spinoff services.

Tourism & Sustainable Amenities

The Sultanate has outstanding tourist potential, and with this potential come attractive investment prospects in the sector that are capturing domestic and overseas attention. Picture shows the unspoiled beauty of Al-Mughsayl beach in Dhofar.

The Sultanate is looking at all sustainable ways to boost tourism as a linchpin economic resource. Tourism is an important source of employment for citizens. It is also a source of hard currency. It is a major attractor of foreign investment and, increasingly in the Sultanate, of local investment, while fuelling spurts of growth in other economic sectors such as transport, retail, construction, real estate, catering and hospitality.

Consequently, tourism is one of the five main focus sectors of the Ninth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) in the drive to economic diversification. The other four sectors are manufacturing, transport and logistics, fisheries and mining.

Several well-respected international reports have tagged the Sultanate's tourism sector for strong growth, enhanced as it is by supportive government policies that promote political stability and security, as well as by enthusiastic investment in the sector and, ultimately, by the country's unique natural and historical assets. These positive components of a healthy tourist industry have brought the Sultanate quickly to sixth

place among Arab countries on the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index for 2017, as reported by the World Economic Forum (Davos).

Globally, Oman ranked 66th on the biennial index from a pool of 136 countries analysed. Meanwhile, Muscat ranked 7th in the Arab world and 106th globally on the AT Kearney Global Cities Index for 2017. The Chicago-based agency, which gave San Francisco top ranking, assesses cities on the basis of economic development, governance, increasing presence of business incubators, innovation, infrastructural improvements and attraction of foreign direct investment.

The Sultanate was visited by 2.8 million tourists in 2016, a solid 14.4% increase over the 2.4 million recorded for 2015. The first five months of 2017 saw a growth rate of 43% (1.3 million visitors) as compared with 909,000 for the same period in 2016. Tourism revenues stand currently in the region of US$1.8 billion annually. The hotel and restaurant sector contributed RO 249.1 million to GDP in 2016, representing 1.8% of the total RO13.6 billion from all service activities.

Oman's Tourism Strategy 2016-2040 reflects the aspirations of the Sultanate to become a significant destination for tourists and adventure visitors, as well as for the business and conference sector.

Oman's Tourism Strategy

Ain Athoum, where cascades of fresh water cool and refresh the green landscape in the monsoon season.

The main thrust of Oman's Tourism Strategy consists of highlighting the Sultanate as a unique and rich tourist destination with contemporary and exotic traditional experiences existing side by side.

11 Million international and local tourists

By 2040 it is hoped to have facilities capable of accommodating upwards of

The selected model assumes an average annual growth rate of around **3.5 %**

Raising the GDP contribution of the sector to around **6 %**

Oman's Tourism Strategy 2016-2040 expresses the broad aspiration to turn the Sultanate into a leading visitor destination, targeting the traditional rest and relaxation market, as well as adventure and activity-based tourism and the business and conference sector.

The strategy identifies nine holiday and tourist models where the Sultanate could be expected to compete successfully: rest and relaxation breaks, cultural tours, nature and adventure, special interest tourism, short breaks and rest breaks, festivals, meetings and events, one-day visits and visits by friends and relatives.

12% public sectors

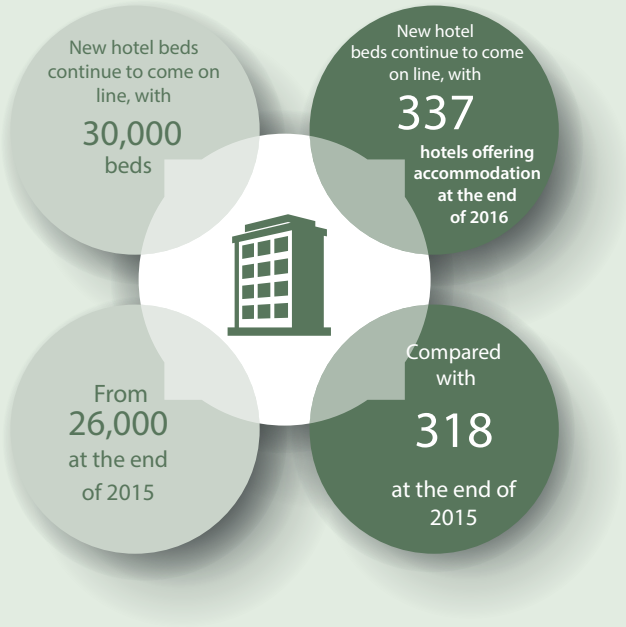
private sectors **88%**

with investment between 2016 and 2040 rising to **RO19** billion

This could create up to **500,000** job opportunities by 2040

The hotel sector offers a broad range of options for both local and overseas visitors, such as hotel apartments, hotels of every category, rest houses, camping facilities, guest houses and heritage homes.

The Hotel Sector



There were 19,000 hotel rooms in service in the Sultanate at the end of 2016, of which over 3,560, or 18.9%, carried the five-star grade.

The Sultanate's hotel sector in fact spans a generous range of options for both visitors and residents. All accommodation categories are well represented, along with hotel apartments, campsites, guest houses and heritage hotels. A new classification was introduced in 2016. Green status has been awarded to hotels in Muscat and Batinah South.

The Government continues to encourage the private sector to invest in hotel accommodation, which is expected to witness quantitative and qualitative advance in the years up to 2020. The Ministry of Tourism closely monitors construction and service levels at tourist establishments, ensuring that they comply with the standards they purport to offer.

There was a 19.9% increase in guest numbers at 3,4 and 5-star hotels during 2016

19.9 % | a figure of 1.5 million | against 1.2 million in 2015

The occupancy rate rose

57.2 % To 57.5 %

Revenues decreased

7.6 % to RO179 million From RO193.8 million in 2015

By way of current and future tourism projects, the Sultanate is looking to diversify the economy and increase the contribution of tourism to GDP by creating an environment conducive to foreign investment.

Tourism Projects

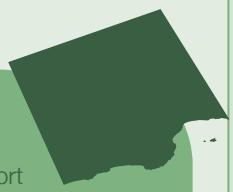
The private sector is being encouraged to invest in hotels and catering so as to broaden the hospitality options available to domestic and overseas visitors. The Muscat Bay Project at Al-Jissah is a high end mixed tourist & residential development.

The recent gravitation towards tourism by investors looking for new opportunities has given rise to some innovative ideas, as seen in the emergence of integrated tourist cities that incorporate freehold hospitality and residential units across a range of categories, in addition to commercial complexes and assorted other tourist facilities. The trend increases the likelihood that the Sultanate, through current and projected tourism projects, will more than satisfy its ambition to fast track the contribution of tourism to GDP. Not only will this turn the sector into a viable medium of economic diversification, but growth in the sector will propel further investment in this exciting growth sphere.

In 2016 and 2017, agreements were signed between the Ministry of Tourism and local and international companies sanctioning the construction of tourism projects in several governorates.

Muscat Governorate is also seeing work on the Jabal Al Sifa project nearing completion. The resort brings together four hotels offering a total of 1,047 rooms and 159 hotel apartments, along with 1,000 housing units, a 200-boat marina, a golf course and a number of hotel apartments. The Sifawi Hotel has already opened, and the marina and some of the residential units have been completed.

Just south of the capital, the 'Muscat Bay' shoreline project at Al Jissah will comprise two hotels having a capacity of 280 rooms, in addition to 399 residential units and recreational facilities. . Ground levelling has been completed on-site and infrastructural and construction works have been initiated for some components of the project.



In the Governorate of Dhofar, the Hawana Salalah resort is a giant project which, when completed, will consist of no fewer than eight hotels with a combined 2,000-room capacity, in addition to 2,980 housing units, a marina, a golf course and 168 hotel apartments. Some of the residential units have been completed, and the three anchor hotels, the 82-room Jaweira, the 400-room Rotana and the 218-room Fanar, are already open to business. In addition, the marina is also functioning.

Officially launched in November 2016, the Baleed Resort is the first luxury villa resort to come on stream in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate. The resort was designed with an eye to its cultural and social context and closely reflects Oman›s architectural heritage. The resort encompasses 96 villas of varying capacity, 40 hotel rooms, multi-sport facilities, shops, the Al Hosn Event Hall, three international restaurants and several entertainment venues. The resort is run by the acclaimed Anantara Group and is located near the Land of Frankincense Museum and Al-Baleed Archaeological Park, which is on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

In November 2016, the Qatari Diar company laid the groundwork for the Diar Ras Al Hadd project, an elaborate resort expected to cost some **RO250** million. The resort covers **a 200** hectare plot and when it is finished will incorporate hotels, commercial and heritage facilities, residential villas and other amenities. The site was chosen on account of the region's temperate climate year-round, as well as its proximity to the Ras Al Hadd Reserve.

In 2016 and 2017, agreements were signed between the Ministry of Tourism and local and international companies for the construction of various tourism projects distributed throughout the governorates. In November 2016, the development of the City Walk project, which will be located in the Northern Hail district of Muscat Governorate, was signed, allocating an area of **48,000** square metres with **355** metres of sea front to construction of a commercial complex incorporating retail units, restaurants, office space and a cinema complex. The project will be implemented over the coming **5** years and will cost between **RO60** and **RO80** million.

In March 2017, the Ministry of Tourism signed an agreement to develop the Naseem Al-Sabah Resort, an integrated tourist compound in the vicinity of Muscat. The overall scheme will contain **2** hotels, one of which will have a **5**-star rating and **300** rooms. The project will also include **696** residential units, a seaport and a yacht club, as well as a thriving and diversified business village with office suites, a commercial centre, restaurants and other recreational and service facilities. With a budget of around **RO350** million, construction is expected to take **9** years to complete from its 2017 start date. The resort site is at the northern Al Mawaleh beach in Seeb.

Also in March 2017, the Ministry gave the green light for development of the Qurayat Tourism Complex, located in the wilaya of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate. This ambitious **282,300** square metre project, costing **RO385** million, will be completed in three phases, each stage taking five years to completion. Phase One is expected to come on stream at the end of 2021. The resort will have three hotels of **3,4** and **5** star ranking respectively, offering a total of **750** rooms. In addition, **4,000** residential units will be marketed freehold. Among the recreational facilities on site will be a **9**-hole golf course and a water park.

Finally, in April 2017, the Nakheel integrated tourism complex development got the go-ahead to break ground at a **500,000** square metre site at Ramis Beach in Barka, South Batinah. This ambitious **RO256** million scheme will add a further **485** hotel rooms and **1,436** residential units to the hospitality and recreation sector, the residential units being available for purchase by non-nationals. The resort will also include a commercial centre, a traditional market, several restaurants, a water park, recreational facilities, educational and other services. This project will also be developed over three stages spread over a **10-15** year period, with Phase one construction commencing in 2018.

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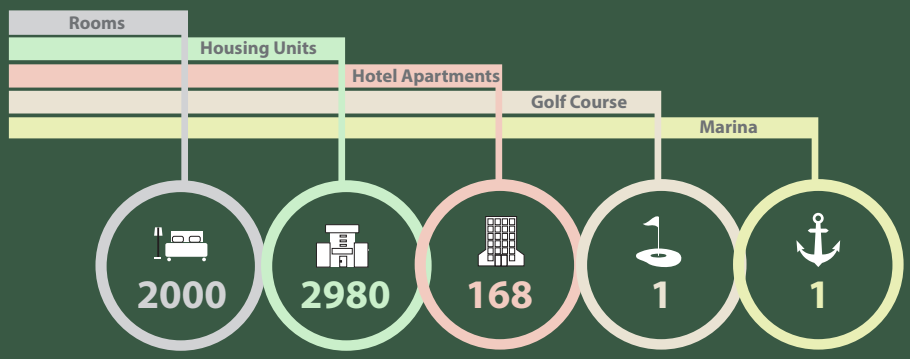
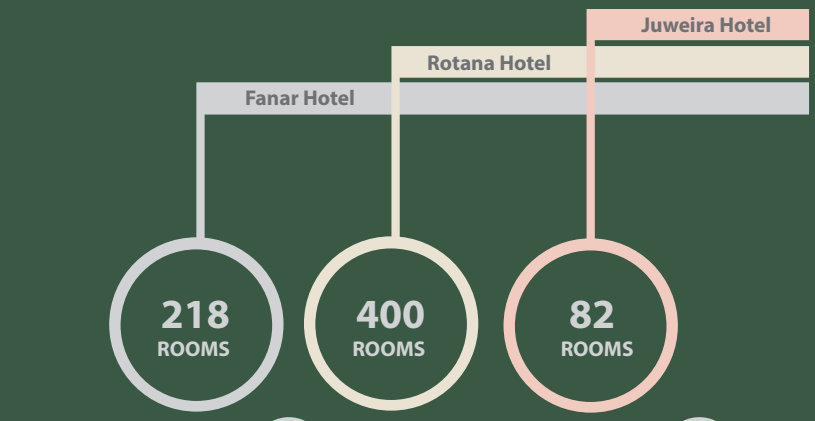
Salalah Beach Resort Project (Hawana Salalah) in Dhofar Governorate



The Project Consists of 8 Hotels



Hotels Under Construction
Number of rooms: 1,300
5 HOTELS

Ready Hotels **3 HOTELS**

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre is a principal axis of the conference and business sector in the Sultanate. The Centre was inaugurated in October 2016.

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre is the centrepiece of the Sultanate's business and conference enhancement drive.

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre will be the principal anchor of the Sultanate's conference and business service industry. Inaugurated in October 2016, it was conceived as a fully integrated destination for fairs and exhibitions and executed in timely coordination with the government's overall tourism strategy, in particular its business and conferences wing. Successful marketing will ensure that this sector makes a generous contribution to the tourist economy, with 600,000 visitors expected annually from this sector.

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre forms part of the mammoth urban development project of Al-Irfan, a world-class multi-service scheme being undertaken by the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran). Omran is the investment arm of the government of Oman operating in the tourism sector.

Phase One was launched in October 2016 and, by mid-2017, the Centre had hosted more than 55 local, regional and international events. Already, the Centre has won major kudos by beating established rivals in a global competition to host the World Cancer Congress 2020. Work on Phase Two is expected to be completed by mid-2018.

The Centre's forward-looking plan should enable it to keep pace with the growth of conferences, exhibitions and meetings in the Middle East region, making the venue itself, and Oman overall, favoured destinations for business tourism and large-scale international events.

The Centre incorporates four hotels, two under construction, two in the planning phase, a shopping centre and a business district.

The Crowne Plaza Hotel brings on stream in the final quarter of 2017	**296** rooms
The JW Marriott Hotel will add a further in the second quarter of 2018	**304** rooms

The Irfan project was designed to create an urban area in the heart of Muscat Governorate that will accommodate a population of 280,000 residents, workers and visitors.

Its innovative infrastructure has embraced international best practices in ensuring the overall sustainable performance of the project. It will reduce energy and water consumption by 50% and reduce dependence on cars by way of an environmentally friendly mass transportation system.

At the heart of the Centre is a large hall with a capacity of **3,200** people, an event building with two large rooms, **450** seat theatre, meeting rooms and a central restaurant court.

The Omani environment has been an area of particular interest to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos since his accession and he has backed his patronage with protective legislation and resource allocation, seeing the environment both as a crucial component of our living natural heritage & an essential component of tourism growth.

Pristine Oman – Tourism's Gilded Asset

The Sultanate has given top priority to environmental protection ever since the start of the modern Renaissance.

From the very conception of the modern Renaissance, the Omani environment has been fiercely protected by the patronage and policies of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Driven by a lifelong passion for nature and habitat, His Majesty's conservation policies as early as the 1970s were in many respects way ahead of their time. Today, tourism can largely thank this respect for natural heritage for what may be said to be the Sultanate's single greatest tourist asset.

Oman's National Strategy for the Protection of the Environment has claimed many victories over the decades of its existence. Manufacturing plants of one kind or another have long been subject to legislation and regulations protective of the environment, of natural resources and of wildlife. Conservation is a non-negotiable factor in all plans and projects with the potential to harm the environment and environmental considerations are key features of all development plans from the earliest design stages.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs has been drafting programmes and activities such as would be appropriate to nature tourism, especially insofar as concerns natural reserves, conservation of the marine environment, implementation of coastal and coral zone management schemes, supervision of marine protected zones, rehabilitation of degraded lagoon and mangrove areas. It issues diving permits to companies and individuals.

The Sultanate has more than

1,400	species of territorial plants
500	species of marine plants
93	land and marine mammals, including endangered species such as the Arabian leopard, oryx and tahr
103	types of land reptile recorded in the wild
518	bird species.

The Omani climate and environment is suited to the nesting preferences of many native and migratory bird types.

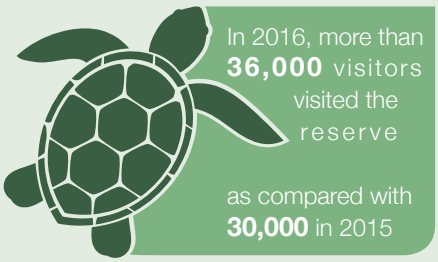
The establishment of nature reserves reflects the Sultanate's commitment to protecting wildlife and preserving ecosystems and maintaining the pristine aspect of natural and cultural landscapes, geological formations and archaeological monuments.

Nature Reserves

The Turtle Reserve in the Governorate of Sharqiyah South attracts tourists and nature lovers throughout the year.

The Sultanate has nature reserves distributed throughout the country, and these rich natural assets can be counted today as equally rich tourism assets. Established in the context of the Sultanate's mission to preserve wildlife and protect ecosystems, they remain untouched by manmade pollution or harm, an abundant complex of magnificent landscapes, geological formations and archaeological treasures.

The turtle reserve in South Sharqiyah attracts enthusiasts from home and abroad every year to observe green turtles (Chelonia mydas) at their nesting grounds, having come ashore from as far away as the Red Sea and the beaches of East Africa and the Arabian Gulf.



The Damaniyat Island reserve is another major attraction for tourists and tourism companies. This unique Sea of Oman destination boasts wonderful coral formations, colourful reef life and two turtle species, the hawksbill (Eretochyelys imbricata) and the green turtle (Chelonia mydas), as well as teeming bird life. There are nine islands in this protected archipelago, characterised by stunning scenery and abundant nature, a true museum in the open.

The Jebel al-Khadhra (Green Mountain) Nature Reserve is yet another unique ecotourist attraction. Jebel al-Khadhra is located in Wilayat Nizwa in the Governorate of Al-Dakhiliyah. It is part of the Western Hajar Mountain range. The Jebel is an important tourist destination for Omanis as well as overseas visitors on account of its temperate climate and green environment. The area is fertile and dotted with orchards, supplying the markets with pomegranates, apricots, peaches, olives, roses and other fresh produce.

The Jebel al-Khadhra Natural Reserve received **162,000** visitors in 2016.

The Al-Saleel Nature Reserve is distinguished by its acacia forests, a natural habitat of the Arabian gazelle, as well as the rare Omani cat and Egyptian eagle.

The Living and Fungal Organisms Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate has long been a focus of both local and overseas attention, being primarily concerned with the resettlement of the Arabian oryx and the rheem or sand gazelle, as well as the re-propagation of the Arabian gazelle.

The Sultanate's numerous nature reserves focus individually on areas of biodiversity appropriate to the microclimate and landscape where they are located. The Wadi Sireen Reserve is home to one of the world's largest and healthiest populations of Arabian tahr (Arabtragus jayakari). The 94 sq km Ras al-Shajar Sanctuary allows visitors to view the Arabian gazelle at close quarters in its vegetation-rich environs. Al-Khuwair Reserve, founded in 2004 to protect the Acacia tortilis trees that grow there in profusion, provides excellent nesting for birds. Meanwhile the Al-Wusta wetlands have become a conservation area of national and regional importance for their extensive mangrove forests and as a sanctuary for migrating birds. Three offshore islands are included in the protected zone: Mahout Island, Hodabiyah Island and Ebb Island, each a unique environment for visiting and resident wildlife.

The Jebel Qahwan Nature Reserve in Sharqiyah South encompasses a diverse landscape of mountains, valleys and plains, with vegetation ranging from sidr, acacia, ghaf, wild fig, and other indigenous trees of vital importance.

Also in Sharqiyah is the Al-Saleel Nature Reserve with its canopy of native acacia covering most of its 220 sq km area. Here herds of Arabian gazelle roam wild and the Omani cat, the simnar, can make a rare appearance, as can the Egyptian eagle, a regular visitor to the park.

Dhofar's vast 4,500 sq km Nature Reserve, Jebel Samhan, is home to countless species of plant and animal life, which inhabit its steep valleys and rocky outcrops. As well as being one of the last refuges of the Arabian leopard, predatory and prey species that have adapted to its extreme and often harsh conditions include the Arabian gazelle and Nubian ibex, wolves, hyenas, caracals, porcupines and hedgehogs. The reserve has many specimens of rare tree and plantlife. Offshore is a rich marine habitat for whales, dolphins, green turtles and all of the multiform species of fish that live in Omani seas.

Dhofar Governorate is renowned for its nine protected Akhwar (singular Khor), a series of lagoons or creeks strung along the coast to constitute together the Salalah Coastal Reserve. The largest and most popular of these as a destination is Khor Rori where, in an earlier incarnation, the port of Samharam was world centre of the frankincense trade. Records of this time, and of Samharam's prominence in the lucrative trade up to the sixth century AD, are preserved in Greek and Arabic annals of the time.

The Khor Al-Baleed Nature Reserve is also of immense historical importance. The ancient city of Al-Baleed was located on the banks of the creek and had achieved trading prominence and prosperity by the first millennium BC. Khor Suli, in wilayat Taqa, is one of the most important protected areas in the region for the diversity of its plant life and of the micro-organisms living in the lagoon. East of Jebel al-Qamr is Khor al-Mughsayl, hugely important for the presence of multiple species of native and migratory birds. Because of its importance as a bird sanctuary, dedicated viewing platforms for enthusiasts have been established on its eastern perimeter.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs has special responsibility for protecting the marine environment and it exercises this mandate by enacting legislation, sponsoring research and studies and drafting strategies for the management and protection of coastal zones.

The Marine Environment

The Omani marine environment is fringed by glorious beaches and spectacular natural backdrops.

Oman's marine environment is rimmed by 3,165 kms of beautiful coastline, offering glittering beaches and crystalline waters in a variety of settings. The bays and rocky coves of Musandam Governorate are unique in all of the Arabian Peninsula. Marine life teems in the Sultanate's many protected mangroves.

The silent beaches of Masirah Island, of the Damaniyat Islands reserve and Ras Al Hadd, are nesting homes for several species of turtle of global significance. In Mahout, which has the Sultanate's largest mangroves, dense flocks of migratory birds come ashore at Barr al-Hikman.

Oman has also been careful to protect its extensive coral reefs, a thriving habitat for marine plant and animal life. The lure of the reef not only attracts whales and dolphins that come close to feed on its abundance, but also adventure tourists in increasing numbers.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs has responsibility for protection of the marine environment, which it executes with the support of environmental legislation, focused research and studies and rollout of conservation and coastal zone management plans. It is proactive in sponsoring marshland rehabilitation schemes, mangrove farming, coral reef management plans and clean-up campaigns.

The conversion of Sultan Qaboos Port from a commercial into a tourist port will effect a qualitative leap for the tourism sector.

The Sultanate's ports serve tourism by facilitating international cruise ship traffic.

Sultan Qaboos port welcomed 149 cruise vessels in 2016

a sharp **41.9 %** increase over the 105 that docked in 2015.

In all, the port handled 249,000 visiting tourists in 2016, up from 176,000 the previous year.

Sultan Qaboos port is not Oman's only port of call for cruise ships, with Khasab in Musandam increasingly capable of handling rising visitor numbers. Sixty six cruise ships docked at Khasab last year, carrying 114,000 passengers, as against 51 vessels and 99,000 passengers the previous year.

The promotion of marine tourism is in fact a major arm of the Sultanate's forward strategy, which views Oman's geographical position as particularly suited to attracting Indian Ocean cruise traffic, in addition to the land-sourced adventure market. Sultan Qaboos Port is in the process of being transformed from a commercial into a tourist port and this alone will create grounds for a quantum leap in visitor numbers to Muscat. In June 2017, the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) signed a partnership agreement with Damac Properties to implement a US$1 billion waterfront project at Sultan Qaboos Port.

The Mina Sultan Qaboos Waterfront Project will transform the port into a fully-fledged tourist, residential and leisure destination incorporating luxury hotels and apartments, restaurants, retail outlets and leisure facilities.

The National Ferries Company is contributing to diversification in domestic tourism transport, with regular services linking several Omani ports. The company operates a fleet of fast ferries, some of which can accommodate more than 200 passengers and 56 cars. In 2016, the NFC shipped 220,000 passengers and 54,000 vehicles between domestic ports, as against 205,000 passengers and 52,000 vehicles the previous year. Freight carried almost doubled in the same period, from 8,000 tonnes in 2015 to 15,000 tonnes in 2016.

Several of the Sultanate's ports cater to visiting international cruise ships, which bring cash to the local economy.

The Sultanate's planning strategy seeks balance in development by close examination of proposals, including scrutiny of land use in all urban contexts, village to city. Government and private agencies are involved in reviewing all urban plans.

Urban Development

Strong planning and oversight is crucial to ensure that the housing sector keeps pace with demographics and that urban development is in line with national aspirations. Land distribution is carefully monitored and the law engaged as necessary to support national interests, which include long term objectives and immediate social housing needs.

The planning strategy of the Sultanate is directed towards achieving and maintaining balance throughout the various stages of development. To this end detailed plans are drafted well in advance, with identification of land use needs for the expansion or creation of cities, towns and villages. The government and private bodies involved review urban plans, advised by a technical committee on the mechanisms of implementing urban projects within the bounds of extant standards and specifications.

During 2016, the Ministry of Housing prepared a series of plans and outlines, allocating some 60,000 parcels of land throughout the Sultanate to various uses. Of these, upwards of 36,000 land parcels have already been distributed. In addition, 129,000 real estate transactions were recorded, 55,140 land parcels of diverse usage were registered for the first time and 230,000 title deeds changed hands. There was an overall sharp escalation in real estate activity in 2016. Total real estate transactions for the year were valued at RO6.6 billion, compared with RO 5.2 billion in 2015.

New measures regulating activity in the real estate sector were introduced also in 2016. The measures were necessary to serve the growing demand for housing in all segments of society. They will also help facilitate entry of much-needed private sector investment into the housing construction market. The process of real estate conveyancing has benefited also from a measure granting brokerage offices powers to complete real estate transactions. The 'residential neighbourhood' model introduced as an incentive to property developers will be an important solution in speeding up the process of providing suitable housing to the public.

Overall planning strategy aims to strike a balance between development objectives, and land distribution and use is strictly monitored.

Public health protection and food safety measures are subject to rigorous field inspection. Moreover, all facilities under construction undergo technical supervision to ensure compliance with principles of urban harmony and the beautification of cities.

The Municipalities

Food and water safety and security are major national concerns, and rigorous health and storage standards are enforced.

Regional Municipalities are a significant contributor to development in the Sultanate, with spinoff benefits to the tourism sector. The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources implements infrastructural projects involving road paving, lighting and sanitation schemes, restoration and maintenance of traditional markets, construction of new markets in densely populated locations, and layout and maintenance of public gardens and parks.

With the continuing drift from rural to urban areas, rising populations and increased food consumption, the Ministry has stepped up its efforts in the important fields of public health and food safety, conducting field inspections at retail and commercial outlets, as well as providing technical supervision of facilities under construction with a view to protecting aesthetic values and architectural consistency in urban landscapes.

The Veterinary Control Service conducts regular field inspections, overseeing stringent regulatory upgrades in work practices at abattoirs. Meanwhile, the Food and Water Laboratories Centre monitors on a continual basis supplies of food and water to the public to ensure their safety and suitability for human consumption. The Centre has an ongoing testing programme that randomly assesses food and water samples at its laboratories for compliance with approved health standards.

The Sultanate has a modern road network connecting all governorates, in addition to highways linking the Sultanate with neighbouring countries

The Transport Sector

A modern road network links all regions of the Sultanate.

The transport sector provides crucial support to tourism. The sector has grown from near non-existence when the modern Renaissance was launched in 1970 to its major presence today, serving the movement of goods and services across the economy and facilitating the movement of passengers and motorists throughout the Sultanate and beyond.

The Sultanate has a modern road network linking even the remotest parts of the country. All rural areas are linked to urban centres and the Sultanate is itself connected by multi-lane expressways to neighbouring countries, ensuring the smooth traffic of goods, services and people moving cross-border on business, tourist and private assignments.

At the end of December 2016, the Sultanate had 14,660 kms of paved roadway, in addition to 16,990 km of unpaved track, all but a few kilometres of which have been planned and constructed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Muscat Municipality alone oversees 4,300 km of roads.

Local roadworks are undertaken by the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources, which paved a total of 196 kms in 2016, bringing the roadworks implemented by the Ministry between 2001 and 2016 to some 9,931 km in total.

The transport sector was witness to many successes in 2016. The Mahda-Al-Rawdah dual carriageway in Al-Buraymi Governorate was opened, as were portions of the Bidbid-Sur route, the Al-Batinah expressway and the Nizwa-Ibri road link. These are vital projects that open up the Sultanate›s provinces and mobilise economic activity across the country.

The Municipality of Muscat completed 406 kilometres of road extension in 2016. Over the past two years, the Municipality has completed and opened several vital routes, including the new Muscat International Airport expressway link and the development and expansion of 18 November Street in each direction to decongest traffic between Muscat International Airport and Al-Azaiba and Al-Mawaleh North respectively.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications implements the strategic plan for the development of public transport. The plan envisions an integrated public transport system that will serve all segments of society and meet the highest quality standards.

Other, more minor roads have been added to the network surrounding the capital, while new bridges and intersections ease traffic jams on the airport route.

In Dhofar, the Municipality also completed several road projects in 2016 and 2017, easing traffic congestion in particular in the autumn season, when upwards of half a million local and overseas tourists flock to the region to cool off.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications oversees the Sultanate's overall development planning for the sector. The focus of the current long term plan is to create a nationwide integrated public transport system that will serve all communities well without compromising on standards. To function optimally, the system will be expected to decongest traffic bottlenecks and minimise environmental impact. The national transport company, Mwasalat, has rebranded itself in anticipation of its expanded role, launching a new logo in November 2015, followed by the inauguration of several new transport links inside the boundaries of Muscat Governorate. Last year it carried 4 million passengers, both within Muscat Governorate and between Muscat and other governorates. In the first half of 2017, Mwasalat ferried 2.2 million passengers, as compared with 1.4 million for the same period in 2016. The company has also expanded its timetable on the Muscat-Salalah route during the autumn season to stimulate domestic tourism and encourage visitors and residents to visit Dhofar Governorate.

The Ministry of Transport and Communications, meanwhile, is working to put in place legislation regulating road transport activities so as to strengthen the national economy. The Road Transport Bill, which passed into law in 2016, was one of its important successes in this domain. The law regulates aspects of road transport activity in Oman with a view to ensuring optimum service in the transport of both passengers and goods in a manner that best serves the goals of economic development.

New road projects in Dhofar Governorate are easing traffic bottlenecks, especially during the busy autumn holiday season.

Air Transport

It is hard to overstate the extent to which air transport has opened up economic and social development opportunities for the Sultanate. Today it is facilitating a sudden massive expansion of tourism as the country gears up for the next phase of development, a phase trending away from dependence on fossil fuels and manufacturing and towards service industries. The new Muscat International Airport is an architectural masterpiece that is well suited to its new role, welcoming thousands of visitors from abroad visiting Oman for the first time. Passenger and air cargo growth figures are exploding.

The airport in its initial phase will be capable of servicing up to 12 million passengers annually. By Phase Three, it will be capable of handling annual passenger throughput of 48 million.

Muscat International Airport in fact handled 12 million passengers in 2016, up from 10.3 million in 2015. Flights were up to 103,000 for the year, as against 95,000 in 2015.

Salalah's recently added airport saw 17 % growth in passenger numbers in 2016, up to 1.2 million passengers from 1.021 million in 2015, with 10,071 domestic and international flights landing and taking off over the year. The airport, which opened in 2015, has a capacity of 2 million passengers annually.

The new Muscat International Airport is an architectural masterpiece that is comfortably keeping pace with growing passenger numbers and air cargo volumes. The airport has a current capacity of 12 million passengers annually.

There were positive developments also in 2017 at Sohar Airport in the Governorate of Al Batinah North. As of 28 June 2017, Al Salam Air began operating 3 flights a week between Sohar and Salalah airports. Air Arabia launched in July, with direct flights between Sohar and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. And in August 2017, Qatar Airways launched direct flights between Sohar and Doha.

Duqm Airport is also expanding. Oman Air increased its flights on the Muscat-Duqm route in 2017 to five flights a week, up from the previous four.

The Public Authority for Civil Aviation (PACA) is working to increase the efficiency of air transport in the Sultanate. With the enormous growth in air traffic in recent years, particularly over the eastern territory, the Authority in 2016 announced the launch of a sixth sector of Omani airspace, which will ease the management of busier skies. PACA also signed a number of open skies agreements and MOUs with overseas counterparts with a view to adding new routes or increasing flight schedules.

Budget air travel came to Oman in 2017 with SalamAir's launch on 30 January 2017. Its initial flight run between Salalah and Muscat was soon joined by the three weekly flights between Salalah and Sohar and now by a regular overseas flight schedule to Dubai, Jeddah, Medina, Taif and three cities in Pakistan.

Oman Air passenger figures for 2016 were also up, by 21% to 7.7 million passengers from 6.4 million the previous year. Its current fleet of 47 Boeing and Airbus planes handled 31,000 scheduled flights for the year, up from 28,000 in 2015. In 2016 also, Oman Air added a second daily flight to London Heathrow and increased its flight schedule to Paris from five a week to one flight daily. Also inaugurated were its first flights to Guangzhou in the People›s Republic of China and to Najaf in Iraq. A second UK destination was also introduced in 2017 with the inauguration of the Muscat-Manchester flight route.

الطيران العماني
OMAN AIR

The Telecommunications Sector

The national broadband strategy is a major initiative in the development of the telecommunications sector.

No part of the economy could function today without a state of the art telecommunications sector, and that includes tourism. Social media alone contribute qualitatively and at lightning speed to creating consciousness of tourist destinations and of the level of services available. However, all forms of communication are crucial to the process, from marketing through reservation and arrival, along with the holiday experience itself. Despite the difficult terrain that is characteristic of large, often remote, parts of the Sultanate, all are served well by the country's telecommunication services, a ratio of 86% of all populated areas, as compared with a global average figure of 84%, according to figures published by the International Mobile Telecommunications Association.

The national broadband strategy was a key consideration in developing the telecommunications infrastructure. The strategy had several prime national, social and economic goals to achieve, among them delivery of high speed broadband to the entire population at affordable prices, with particular emphasis on indigenous companies and businesses so as to support their competitiveness in global markets. Rural communities vulnerable to the digital divide needed to be properly serviced. Under the present rollout, 80% of the Governorate of Muscat is expected to be connected fibre-optically by 2020, taking into account both population and economic growth factors.

The Omani Broadband Company, a state-owned company established in 2014, provides high-speed broadband services to individuals and institutions in the Sultanate through existing telecom service providers, viz. the Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) and the Oman-Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo). Awaser Oman, which officially launched in March 2016, is the country's third provider of broadband services.

The National Broadband Strategy is a key initiative in the development of the telecommunications sector and balances interlocking objectives of national, social and economic consequence.

The year 2016 witnessed growth of 3.3% in the number of mobile subscribers, to a total of 6.8 million subscribers by year end. Of these, 6.2 million were using prepaid cards. Fixed line subscriptions grew by 7.1% to 465,000, up from 434,000 lines at the end of 2015.

The total number of fixed-line internet subscribers (including both fixed phone line and fixed line broadband subscribers) at the end of December 2016 stood at 285,000, up from 236,000 at the end of 2015. There were, in addition 3.9 million mobile broadband users, up 21% over the 3.2 million recorded at the end of 2015.

The year 2016 saw several positive developments in the telecommunications sector, which combined to enhance overall the services available to residents and visitors. Awaser's entry into the market as the country's third fixed telecommunications operator in Muscat Governorate was a major positive, thanks to its having access to the infrastructure of the Oman Broadband Company. In addition, the launch of IPTV services brought lower prices for home broadband internet packages.

In 2016 also, the Oman Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) initiated procedures to introduce a third operator providing public mobile telecommunications services under the government's deregulation strategy to increase market competition and promote the availability and uptake of mobile broadband services.

In October 2017, the government reached a decision on the third operator project, awarding a consortium composed of the local investment funds operating in partnership with a strategic overseas supplier having the necessary relevant capacities. The decision was in part intended to provide opportunities for investment funds to enlarge their contribution to the national economy.

Accordingly the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOT) directed the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority to cancel tenders for the third operator, in order to proceed with the revised plan.

Muscat Festival has made a unique contribution to tourism growth in Muscat Governorate, introducing the public and overseas visitors to the heritage and authenticity of Omani society through the many events and activities on offer.

Muscat Festival

Muscat Festival was influential in revitalising the local tourist industry and has done much to deliver an authentic perspective on the heritage and culture of Oman, past and present.

Muscat Festival has become an annual occasion of mass appeal and a keystone event in the tourist calendar, bringing visitors from home and abroad to partake of a truly authentic heritage experience. An ever more ambitious programme of activities and performances keeps interest alive and provides opportunities to showcase local talent and engage the community.

The 17th Festival ran from 19 January to 11 February 2017 under the slogan "Celebrate Oman" and offered activities of tourist, culture, art, awareness, sport and general entertainment interest. As always, the event is heavily orientated towards family participation, with generous space allocated to fun activities, as well as to small and medium enterprises displaying their wares to visitors in the relaxed and festive atmosphere.

The Omani Heritage Village is one of the main focuses of visitor attention every year. The village recreates traditional Omani life, past and present, and visitors are captivated by the array of implements, household wares and decorative furnishings on display, belonging to a time often still within the memory of middle aged adults, yet so distant in the context of post-Renaissance Oman. Samples of handicrafts are displayed, along with toys and games, accompanied by folk narratives of a legendary past.

The 2017 Festival incorporated exhibits of local and Arab products. Stage performances included concerts featuring Omani singers and musicians and interactive comedy shows. The children's theatre staged educational dramas, activities and competitions, while the amusement park featured more recreational fare in the form of electronic games for the different age groups. Folklore and folk performances are a key component of the festival, with songs from the various regions represented. For adults, the festival offers literary and poetry evenings, cultural symposia, theatre performances and sports events.

The Tour of Oman combines sport and tourism and garners significant international attention. The 2017 Tour covered a 900 km route, over six stages.

Tour of Oman

The Tour of Oman combines sport & tourism and has a large international viewing audience.

The Tour of Oman is a highlight of the cycling and indeed overall sports calendar. It attracts an eclectic spectator attendance that brings together visiting tourists, sports fans and cycling enthusiasts, while garnering substantial attention from the international media. The 2017 Tour took place between 14 and 19 February and was a six stage event covering a total distance of some 900 km. As a medium for introducing Oman to the international travel market, it is without peer, given the stunning range of scenery on display throughout the 6-day event, from virgin beaches overlooking the Sea of Oman to steep inclines and rugged mountainscapes.

The Tour brought 144 of the world's finest cyclists to Oman for this prestigious event, represented in the 18 participating teams from around the world. Media coverage was extensive, with press in attendance from 110 countries. A specialised television team broadcast the event from the advantaged perspective of a helicopter equipped with high performance digital camera equipment, as well as from four motorcycles with mounted cameras to film the race.

Salalah Tourism Festival

Every year the Salalah Tourism Festival adds new events to fulfil the holiday preferences of an exploding tourist trade.

Dhofar Governorate hosts the annual Salalah Tourism Festival, which has been consolidating a position among visitors from the GCC, Arab and foreign countries, as well as from the Sultanate itself, over the past few years. It is a unique event that combines business, tourism and leisure and takes place during the autumn season that runs between 21 June and 21 September each year. This is the time when cool air, pleasant rains and moderate temperatures call out to residents of the overheated urban centres of the north to come south and join in the fun.

The 2017 Festival, which ran from 30 June to 31 August, was organised under the banner "Oman - Prosperity and Development". An extended programme of events on the theme of brotherhood, love and abundance was rolled out, running sequentially throughout the festival season. These powerful sentiments reflect the spirit of Dhofar at its best, and the marketing of Dhofar as a tourist destination was as always high on the agenda.

There was a qualitative shift in the nature of the services and events on offer at Festival 2017. There were additional spaces allocated to play and recreation, as well as to artistic and heritage features, to open air recreation and dining, to cultural events, scientific and literary seminars and art and craft exhibitions. There were the usual ever-popular sporting events, competitions and feat of memory performances.

In the summer months, temperatures rise to uncomfortable levels in the northern Sultanate, while refreshing rains transform the landscape of Dhofar into a blanket of green as far as the eye can see. The hills are awash with gushing streams and waterfalls that pour down into the valleys and plains, balm to the overheated souls who descend on the governorate from the northern cities of the Gulf. Here they can soak up such vistas as the natural fountains of Mughsayl, or picnic after cooling rains, before joining any of the many festival activities.

In 2017, the Salalah Tourism Festival exceeded all of its predecessors in the scale of services and events on offer, with sporting, cultural, artistic and religious options to suit all tastes and age groups.

No of Autumn Season Visitors to Salalah, Broken Down By Region of Origin

REGION	2016	2017
Gulf	574,452	574,006
Asia	55,904	44,801
Other Arab	17,333	16,606
Europe	3,499	4,992
Other	1,798	2,516
TOTAL	652,986	644,931

No of Autumn Season Visitors to Salalah, Broken Down By Means of Entry

MEANS OF ENTRY	2016	2017
Air	139,018	166,059
Domestic Tours	87,855	121,218
Overseas Tours	51,163	44,841
Overland	513,968	478,872
TOTAL	792,004	810.990

No of Autumn Season Visitors to Salalah, Broken Down By Country of Residence

MEANS OF ENTRY	2016	2017	Change %
Oman	510,589	500,112	-2,1
Other Country	142,397	144,819	1,7
TOTAL	652,986	644,931	-1,2

Source:

The National Centre for Statistics and Information

Total tourist numbers Salalah autumn season 2017

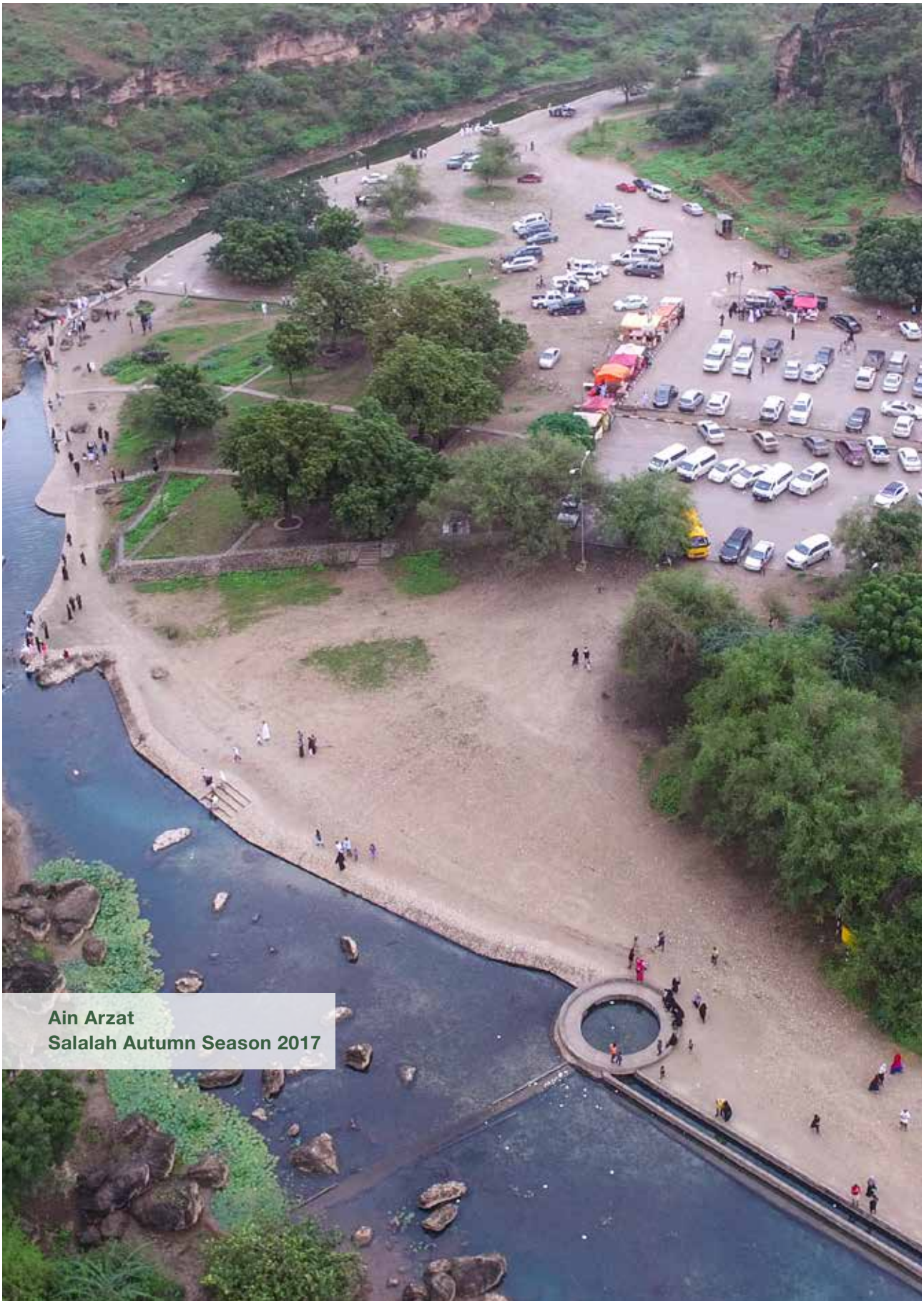
644,931 Visitor

Percentage of tourist total from Gulf region, including Omanis, autumn season 2017

89,3 %

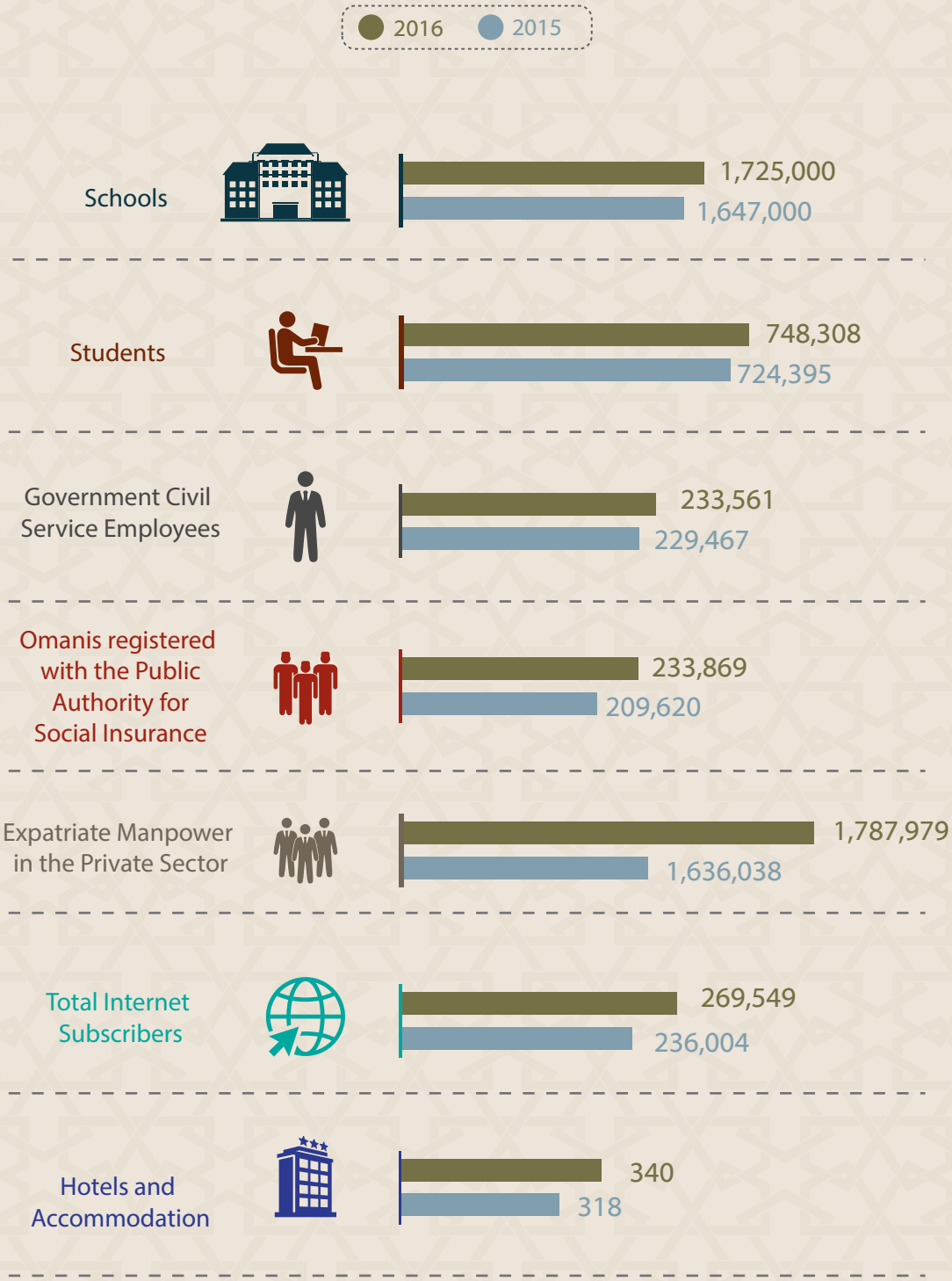
Percentage of Omanis out of total Salalah autumn season visitors 2017

71,1 %



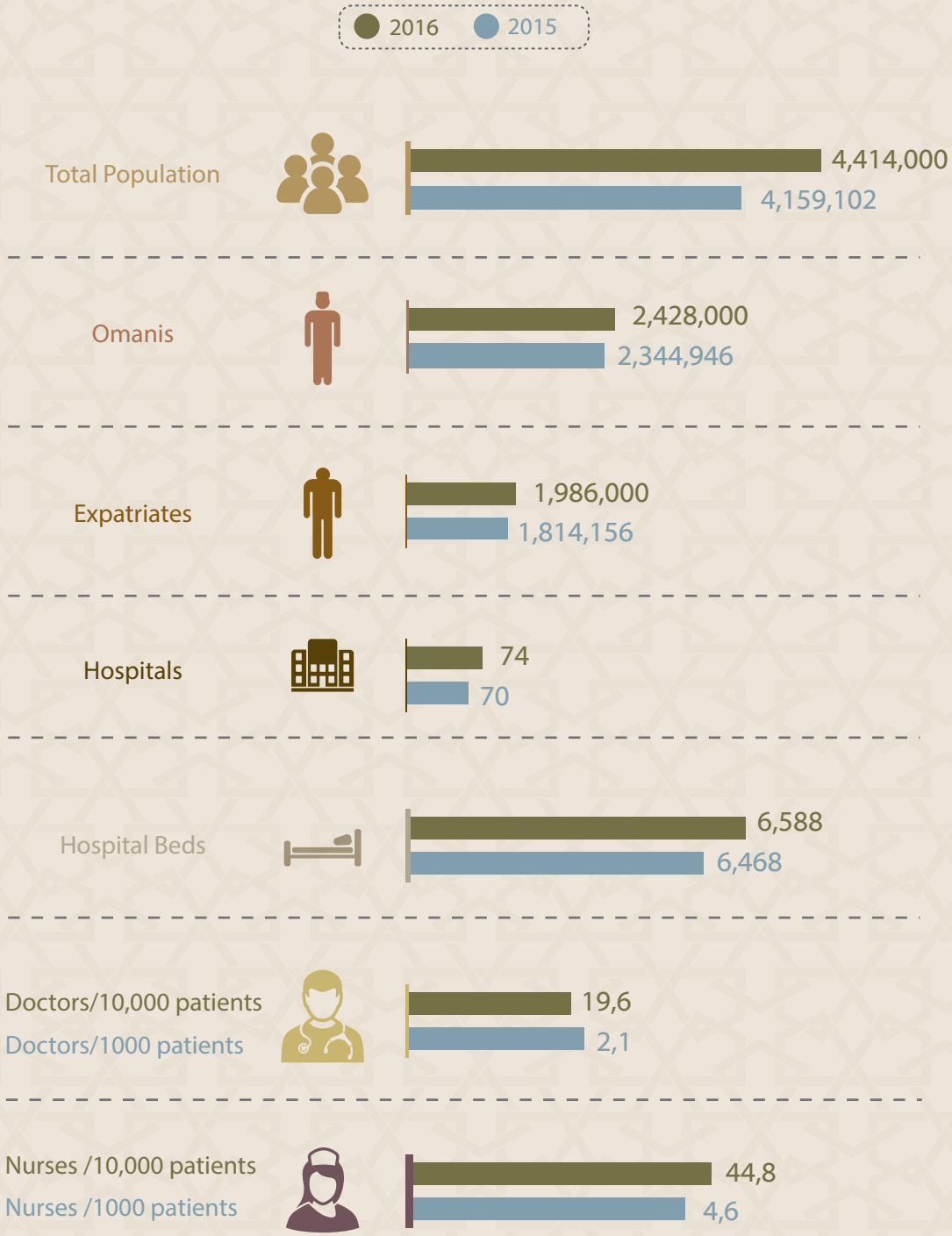
Ain Arzat
Salalah Autumn Season 2017

SOCIAL INDICATORS (Cont.)



SOURCE: The National Centre for Statistics and Information

SOCIAL INDICATORS



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ECONOMIC INDICATORS
From 2015 - 2016

	2015	2016	
GDP at Current Prices	26.494.0	25.694	RO Million
Total Government Revenues	9.067.500	7.608.200	RO Million
Total Government Expenditure	13.698.800	12.908.200	RO Million
Average Daily Oil Production	981.000	1.004.000	1.000 bbls
Including Non-Oil Exports of Omani Origin	3.003.900	2.398.700	RO Million
Total Commodity Exports	13.404.000	10.296.000	RO Million
Total Commodity Imports	11.153.300	8.900.200	RO Million
Total Electricity Production	32.758.000	34.196.0	Gigawatts/Hour
Net Electricity Production	32.082.000	33.600.000	Gigawatts/Hour
Water Production per Distillation Plants & Wells	338.800	378.000	Million cubic metres

SOURCE: The Nationa l Centre for Statistics and Information

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- Ahmed Al Awfi
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- Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs
- Public Authority for Civil Defence &Ambulance
- Public Authority for Radio and Television
- Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture & Science
- Public Authority for Civil Aviation
- National Centre for Statistics & Information
- Administrative Court
- Office for Conservation of the Environment
- Oman News Agency
- Cultural Club
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Higher Education
- Royal Oman Police
- Ministry of Social Development
- Ministry of Agriculture &Fisheries
- Ministry of Commerce &Industry
- Ministry of Regional Municipalities &Water Resources
- Sultan Qaboos University

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