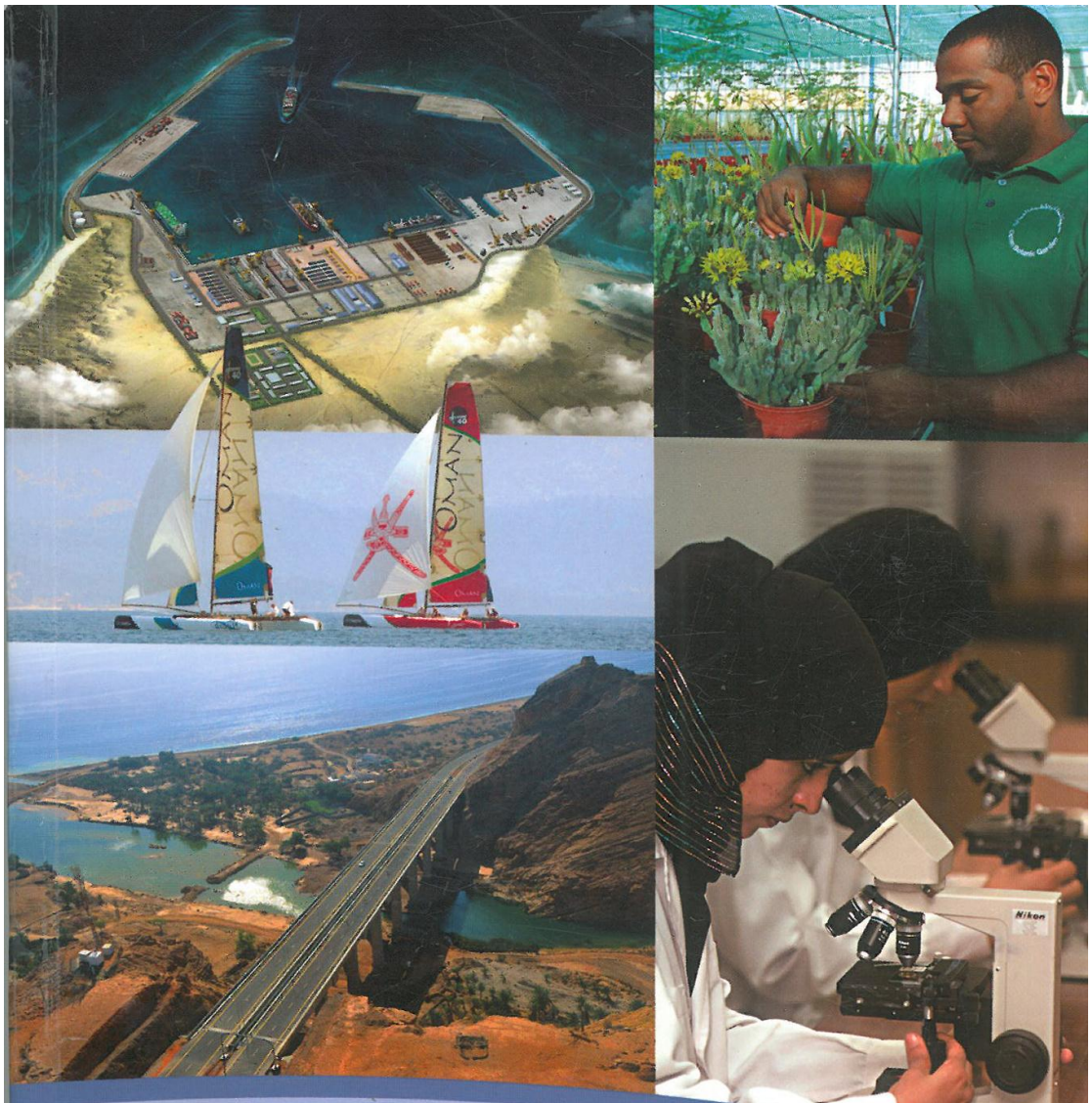
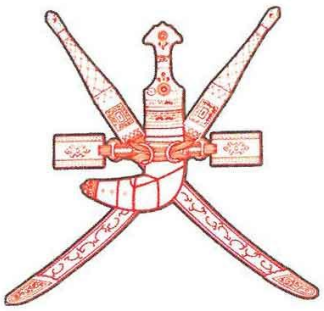


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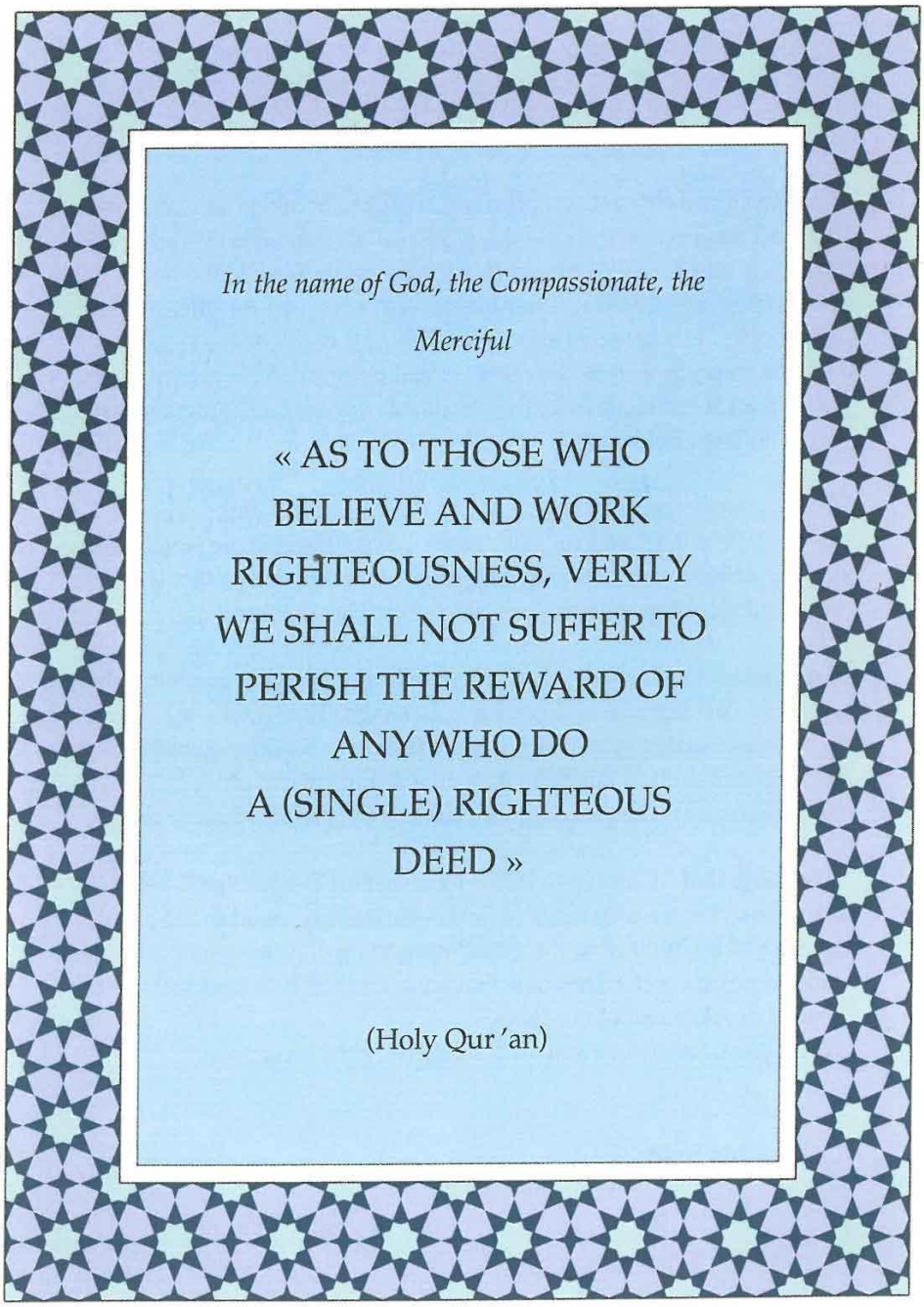
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Sultanate of Oman

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2009



In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

« AS TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE AND WORK RIGHTEOUSNESS, VERILY WE SHALL NOT SUFFER TO PERISH THE REWARD OF ANY WHO DO A (SINGLE) RIGHTEOUS DEED »

(Holy Qur'an)

EXCERPTS FROM THE SPEECHES OF HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN

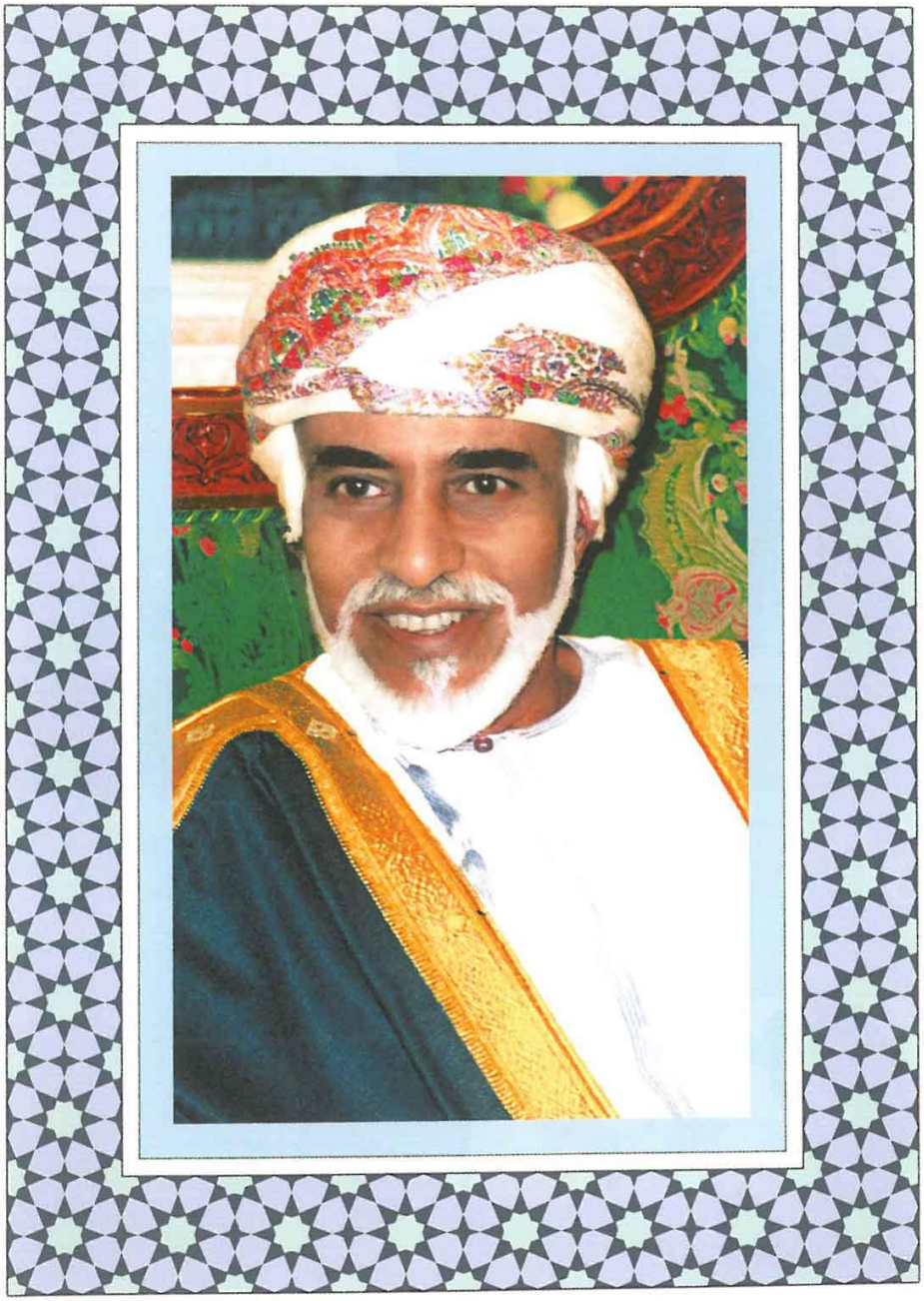
"It is the human element that produces civilizations and generates growth and progress. Therefore we are sparing no efforts – nor shall we spare any effort – to provide everything that can help create the conditions for the development and training of our human resources, and for offering them opportunities to acquire an education. This will enable them to gain useful knowledge, as well as the expertise and technical skills needed by the labour market and required by the sustainable development programmes in all the different fields."

"The implementation of justice is imperative and that there must be no deviation from it. Our surveillance services are diligent in the performance of their duties and in carrying out their responsibilities so that they can safeguard the nation's destiny and defend its achievements."

"Information technology and telecommunications have become the main engine of development in this third millennium. That is why we have attached importance to producing a national strategy for developing people's potential and skills in this field, as well as e-government services."
(Speech before the Opening Session of the Council of Oman on llth November 2008)

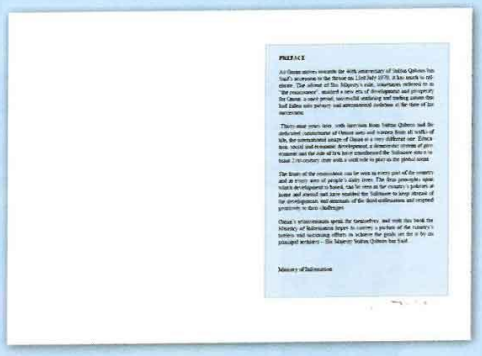
"We praise God – Glory be to Him – for what the Co-operation Council has achieved so far in a wide range of fields - the security, stability and prosperity enjoyed by its citizens, the virtual integration of its economic activities and the private sector freedoms that have enabled it to contribute to the general development of our states."
(Speech given at the opening of the GCC Summit on 29th December 2008).

Qaboos bin Said



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

Contents



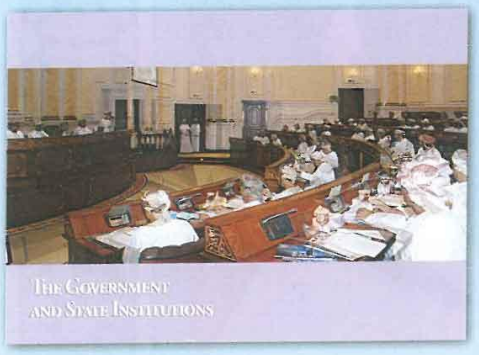
9 Preface

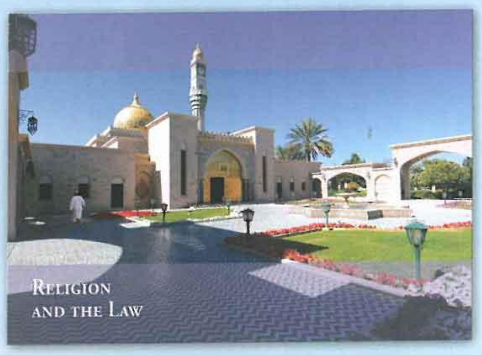
60 The Government and State Institutions

84 Religion and the Law

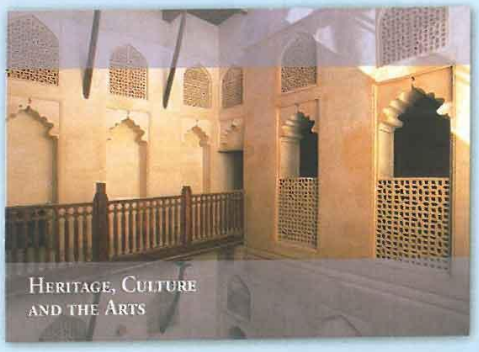
134 Human Resources

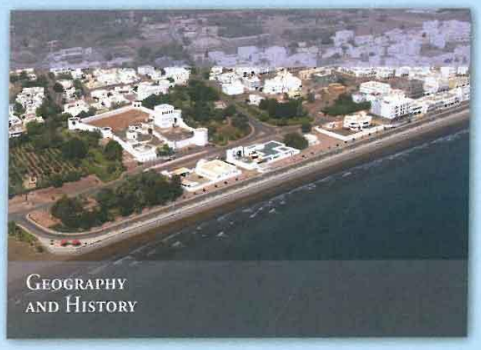
166 Heritage, Culture and the Arts



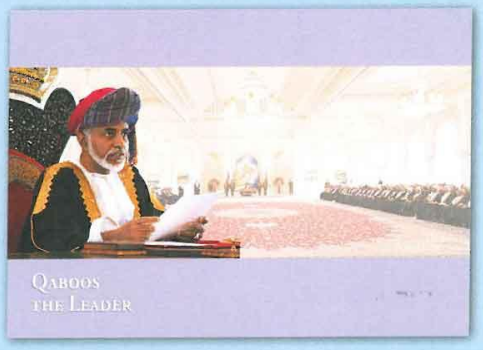








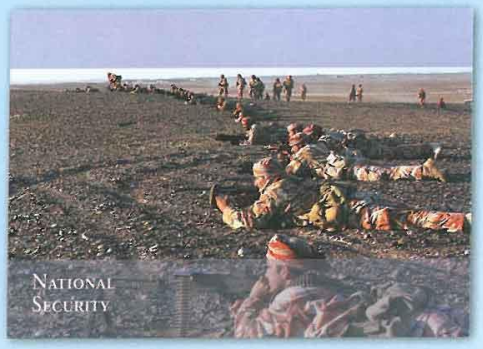
10 Geography and History



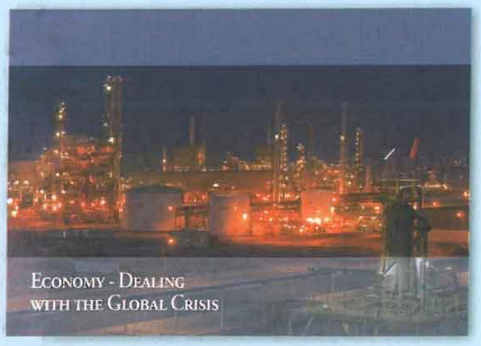
42 Qaboos the Leader



94 Foreign Affairs and Media



116 National Security



192 Economy-Dealing with the Global Crisis



232 Environment and Services

PREFACE

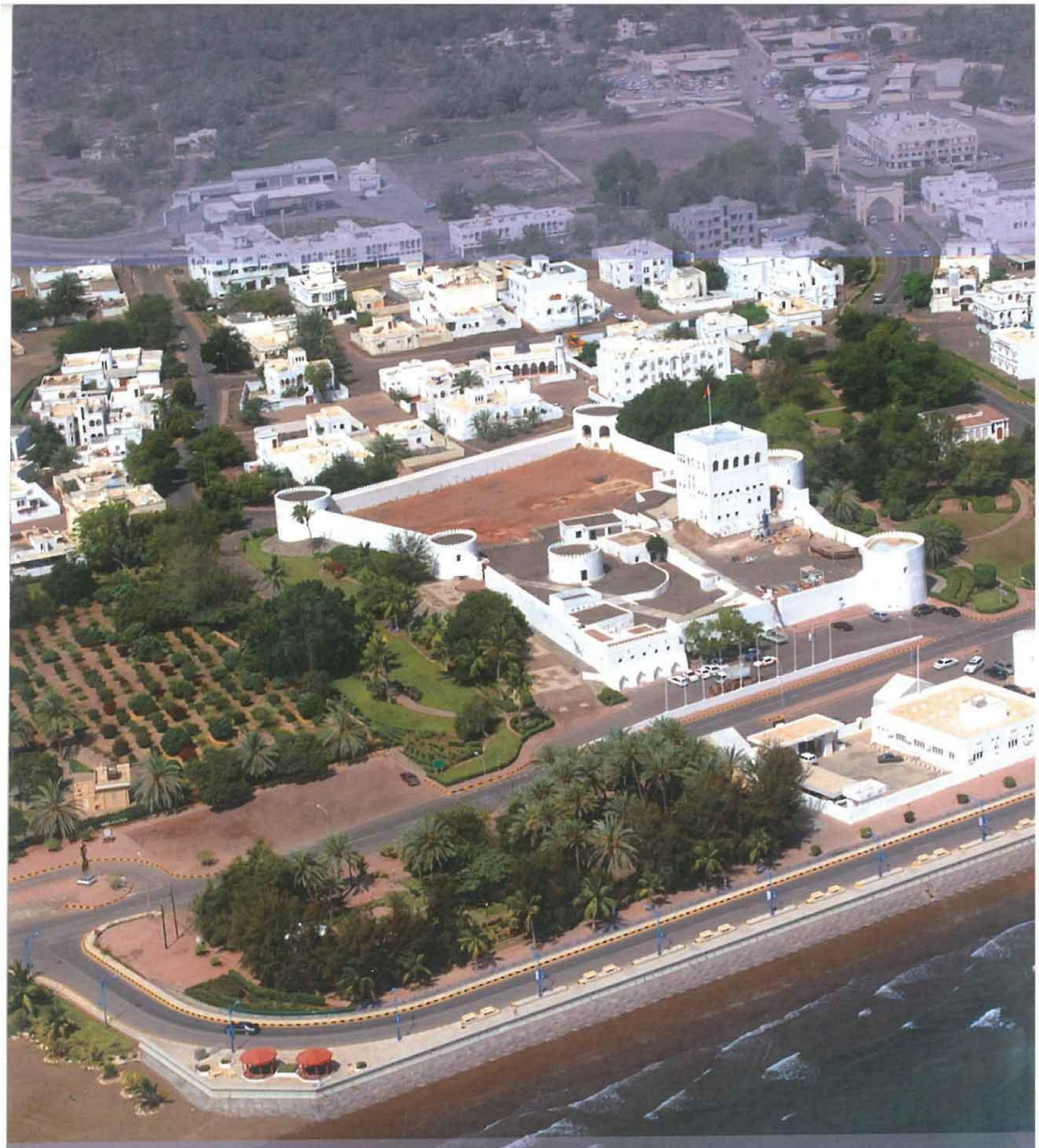
As Oman moves towards the 40th anniversary of Sultan Qaboos bin Said's accession to the throne on 23rd July 1970, it has much to celebrate. The advent of His Majesty's rule, sometimes referred to as "the Renaissance", marked a new era of development and prosperity for Oman, which had over centuries, built an enviable reputation as a proud, successful seafaring and trading nation.

Thirty-nine years later, with direction from Sultan Qaboos and the dedicated commitment of Omani men and women from all walks of life, the international image of Oman is a very different one. Education, social and economic development, a democratic system of government and the rule of law have transformed the Sultanate into a vibrant 21st century state with a vital role to play in the global arena.

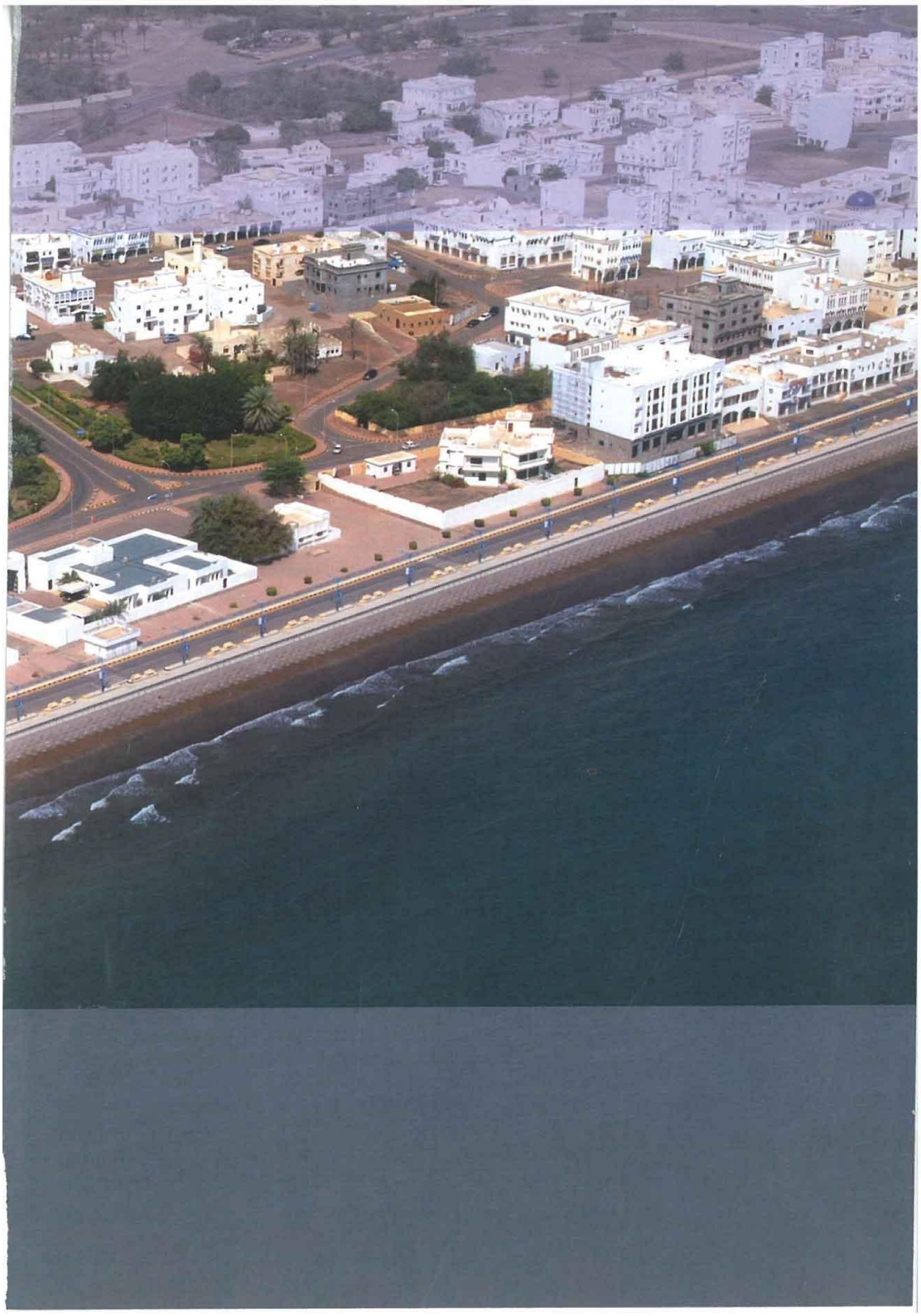
The fruits of the Renaissance can be seen in every part of the country and in every area of people's daily lives. The firm principles upon which development is based, can be seen in the country's policies at home and abroad and have enabled the Sultanate to keep abreast of the developments and demands of the third millennium and respond positively to their challenges.

Oman's achievements speak for themselves, and with this book the Ministry of Information hopes to convey a picture of the country's tireless and unceasing efforts to achieve the goals set for it by its principal architect – His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Ministry of Information



Geography and History



GEOGRAPHY

The Sultanate of Oman's vital geographical location has been an important factor in its political and economic development. Situated in the extreme south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, extending from latitude 16.40 to 26.20 degrees north and longitude 51.50 to 59.40 degrees east, its 3,165 kilometre-long coastline runs from the Arabian Sea and the entrance to the Indian Ocean in the far south-west, to the Oman Sea and Musandam in the north, where it overlooks the strategic Strait of Hormuz and 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 Oman Sea and the Strait of Hormuz such as Salamah and Her Daughters, as well as Masirah and the Hallaniyat Islands in the Arabian Sea.

Lying on the Tropic of Cancer, the Sultanate is generally in a hot, arid region. However, the south of the country has a tropical climate.

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

A country of considerable geographical diversity, Oman's outstanding feature is the Hajar mountain range, that runs in a huge arc from the north-west of the country to the south-east - from Ru'us al Jibal in the Governorate of Musandam (by the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway to the Gulf) to Ras al Hadd in the south-eastern extremity of the Arabian Peninsula, which overlooks the Indian Ocean. Its highest point - in the Jabal al Akhdhar -reaches a height of 3,000 metres.

The mountains soar to heights of some 1,800 metres above sea level in the Governorate of Musandam, where the Strait of Hormuz lies between the Omani and the Iranian coast. The Strait's navigable international shipping lanes lie on the Omani side.

Omanis compare the Hajar mountain range to a human backbone. The region lying on the Oman Sea is known as the Batinah, while the area to the west of the mountains is the Dhahirah. The Batinah is the coastal strip formed by the wadis that flow from the mountains and is between 15 and 80 kms wide and over 300 kms long. It is the Sultanate's main agricultural area with farms and orchards fed by groundwater.

The Batinah, which extends northwards from Muscat to the borders of the United Arab Emirates, is the Sultanate's most populous region. Its wilayats include – among others - Barka, al Musana'ah, Suwaiq, Khabourah, Saham, Sohar and Shinas.

Several wadis cut through this range of mountains; the largest - Wadi Sumail - links the city of Muscat on the coast with the wilayats

of Izki and Nizwa in the interior. Omanis call the mountain area to the west of the Wadi the Hajar al Gharbi (Western Hajar); this region includes the Jabal al Akhdhar and the wilayats of Rustaq, Nakhal, al Awabi and several others. The mountain area to the east of Wadi Sumail is called the Hajar al Sharqi (Eastern Hajar). Sumail and Bidbid are two of its wilayats.

Jabal Shams in the Dakhiliyah region - the highest peak in the Hajar range - rises to a height of 3,000 metres above sea level.

At al 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 the shore of Masirah Bay in the Sharqiyah region, the Sharqiyah Sands extend over a band of terrain some 160 kms long by 8 kms wide. To the south-west of Masirah Island lies a vast flat, stony area known as the Jiddat al Harasis. To the west of the Sharqiyah Sands is a stretch of low-lying rocky terrain around 250 kms wide and crossed by wadis running from north to south; these include Wadi Halfain and Wadi Andam.

To the west of Masirah Island is the peninsula of Barr al Hikman, which is separated from Masirah by a channel 14 kms wide. The Barr al Hikman consists of salt flats which, at some times of the year are covered by the sea, frequently reaching as far as five kilometres inland. The population of this area earns a living from fishing.

The Sultanate of Oman extends along the shore of the Arabian Sea for 560 kms, some 130 kms of which are exposed to the monsoon rains. This stretch consists of a coastal plain between 8-10 kms wide which includes the city of Salalah and several wilayats such as Mirbat, Taqah, Sadah, Rakhyut and Dhalkut.

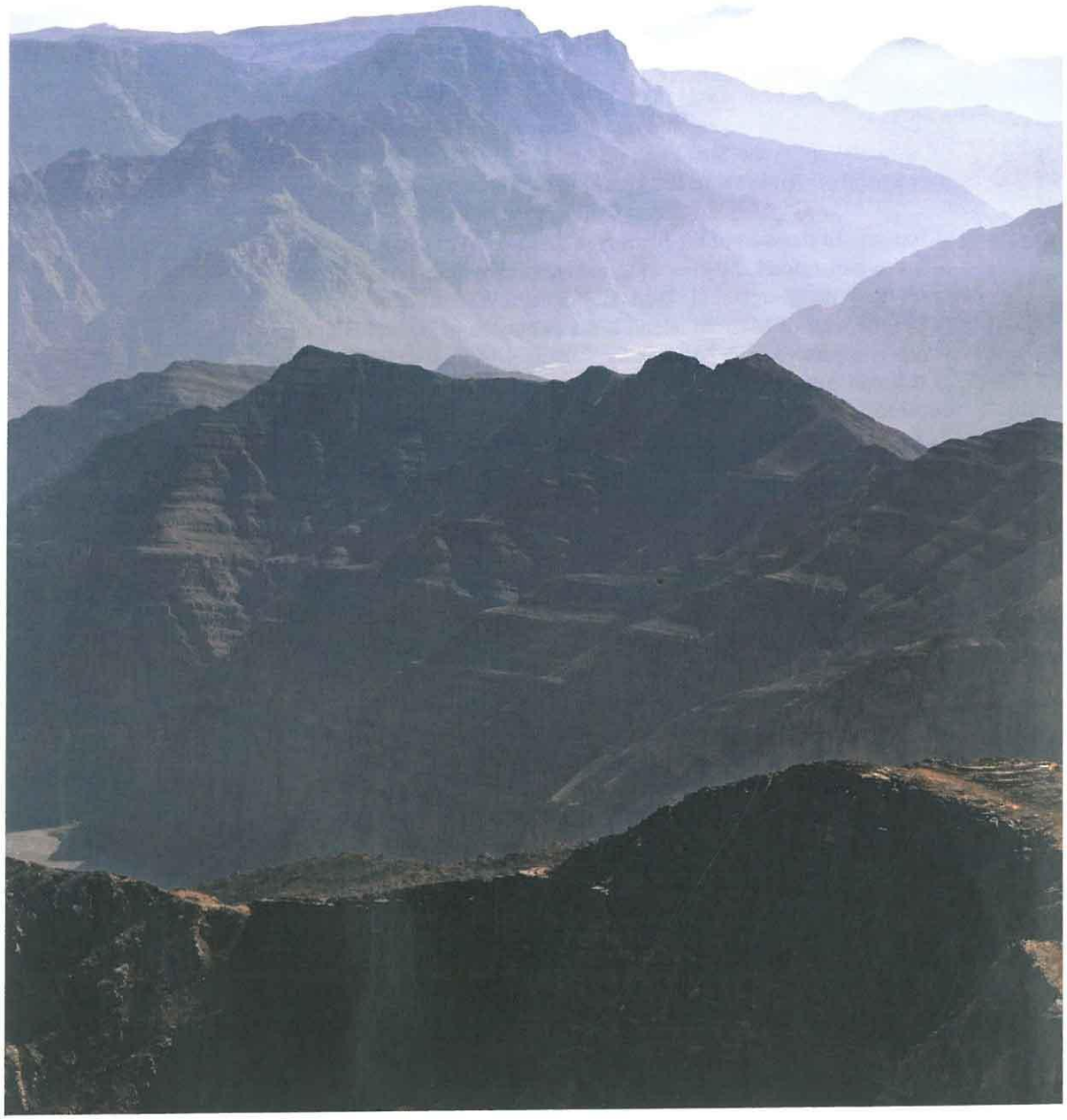
The coastal waters of the Governorate of Dhofar are rich in fish, particularly sardines; the surplus sardine catches are frequently utilised as animal fodder and fertiliser.

The mountain region of Dhofar runs from east to west for a distance of around 400 kms, from opposite the Hallaniyat Islands to the borders of Yemen. It forms a continuous chain which includes the Jabal Samhan mountains in the East and the Jabal Qamar in the West. At no point is this range more than 23 kms wide or higher than 2,500 metres.

A 75 kms swathe of these mountains is cloaked in greenery from June to September annually during the khareef (monsoon) season, when the south-west monsoon winds give the region a very different character from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula as the tropical rains transform it into a delightful summer resort with lush pastures.

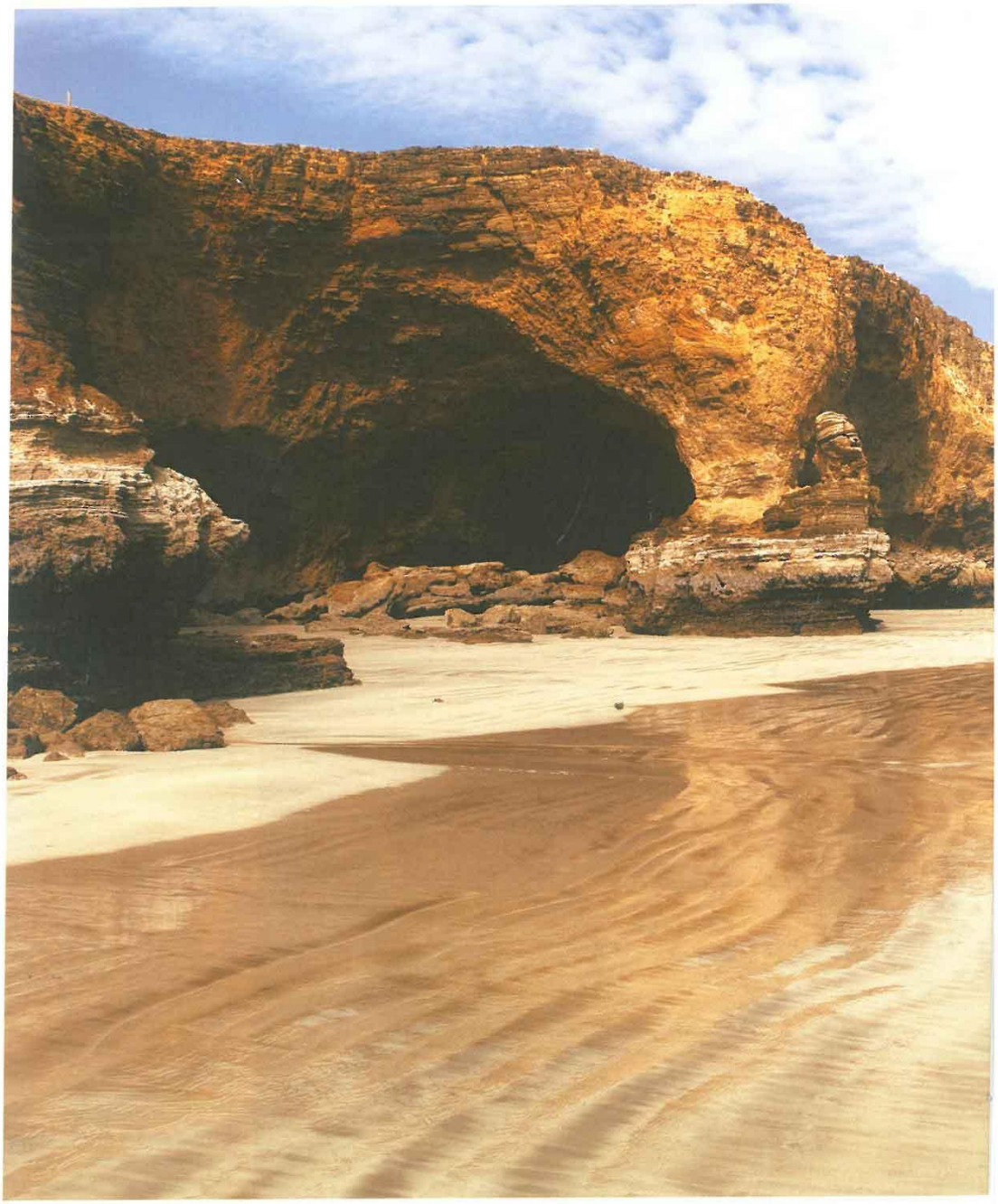
Frankincense trees grow in some areas – a reminder that Dhofar was once renowned for its trade in this substance, which was the main source of its wealth in ancient times.

Fresh water springs flow in this region throughout the year.



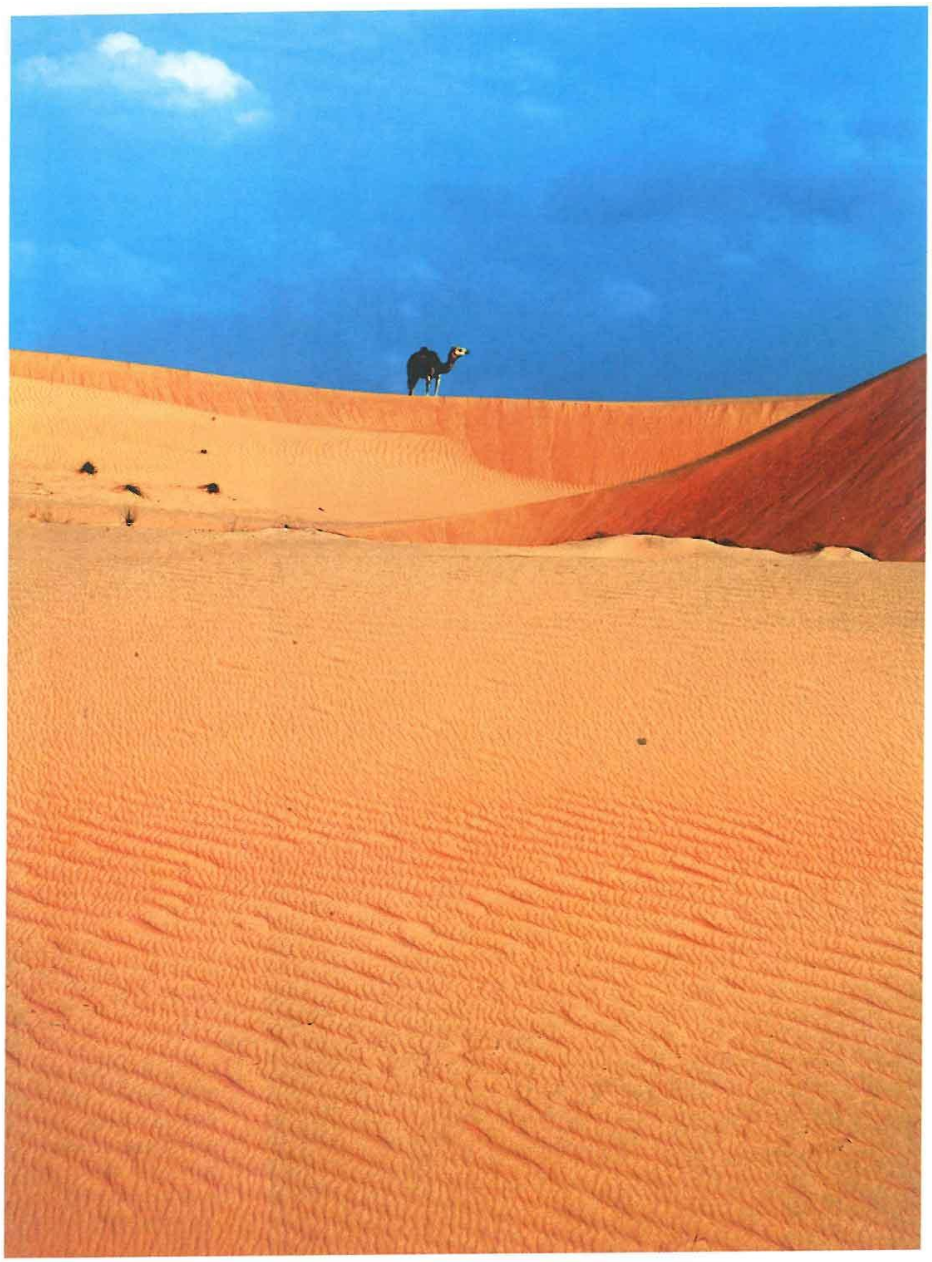


The Musandam is dominated by its rugged mountains which soar to some 1,800 metres





The natural beauty of Khaluf beach, near the Barr al Hikman in the Sharqiyah region where one can see a variety of seabirds and dolphins enjoying the tranquil waters



The Sultanate's strikingly varied and spectacular landscapes are a blend of its geological history and climate over the past few million years. Superb rock outcrops in the Al Hajar Mountains, the Huqf and Dhofar are a paradise for geologists from around the world. The country's rock record spans around 825 million years and includes at least three periods when the country was covered by ice; somewhat surprising given its present latitude and climate.

Located at the southeast corner of the Arabian plate, Oman is being pushed slowly northward, as the Red Sea grows wider. The lofty Al Hajar Mountains and the now drowned valleys of the Musandam are dramatic reminders of this. Even to a lay person the sight of fossils of starfish and other sea creatures deeply embedded in the rocks that soar hundreds of feet above the deep, blue waters of the Strait of Hormuz, is a remarkable one and conclusive proof of the awesome geological changes this country has witnessed over the centuries. The discovery of dark coloured Semail ophiolites, or volcanic rocks from beneath the sea, locally rich in copper and chrome, confirm that in its geologically recent past, as today, Oman also lay at the margin of an ocean.

The Interior plains of the Sultanate are made up of young sedimentary rocks, wadi gravels, dune sands and salt flats. Beneath them is a several kilometre thick stack of older sedimentary rocks that host the country's hydrocarbon resources. Ancient salt, which comes to the surface in several salts hills, such as Qarat Kibrit, play an important role in forming many oil and gas accumulations.

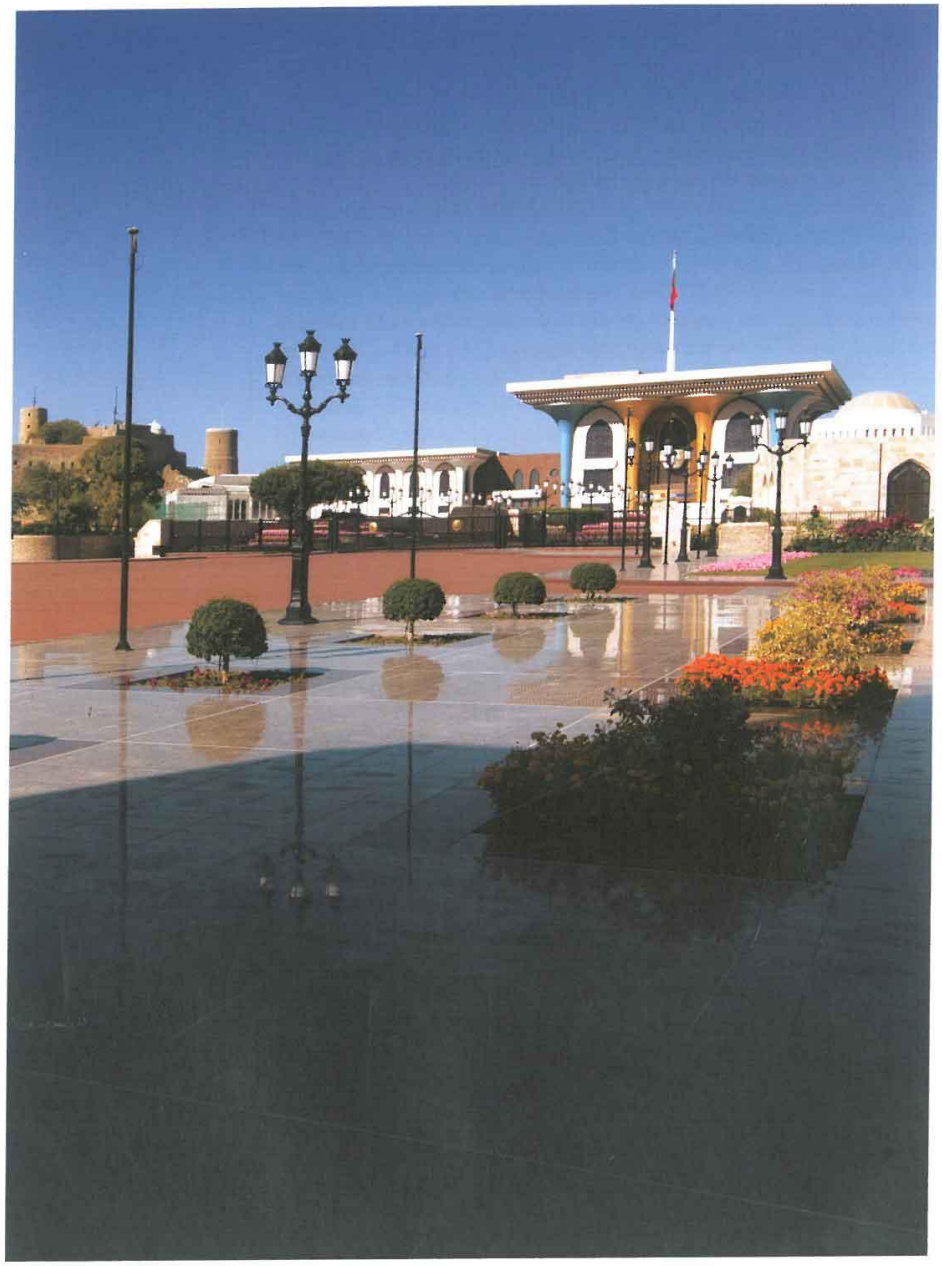
THE GOVERNORATES, REGIONS AND WILAYATS

The Sultanate of Oman has four governorates - Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam and Buraimi - and five regions - Batinah, Dhahirah, Dakhiliyah, Sharqiyah and the Wusta.

The governorates and regions are divided into a total of 61 wilayats. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for overseeing the governorates of Musandam, Buraimi and the regions. Meanwhile, the governors of Musandam and Buraimi, as well as the walis (chief administrators) of the wilayats – one wali per wilayat –oversee local administration and act as a link between the government, its institutions and the public.

Over a series of successive Five Year Development Plans, Oman has been able to ensure that development efforts take place in a balanced and integrated manner across its different regions. Major projects and industrial estates have been set up from Muscat to Salalah, from Sur to Sohar, from Nizwa to Musandam and from Ibri to Haima within the framework of a scheme that balances the priorities and needs of every region. Different regions take turns at hosting the country's major national and religious events, including its National Day celebrations, held annually in November.

The Sharqiyah Sands – an unspoilt area with the Arabian Sea lying on its Eastern flank



The Governorate of Muscat

The Governorate of Muscat is the country's political, economic and administrative heartland, the location of the capital city – Muscat – as well as 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.

The Governorate of Muscat is situated on the Oman Sea at the southern end of the Batinah coast. It borders on the Eastern Hajar mountains and the Sharqiyah region to the east, the Batinah region to the west and the Dakhiliyah region to the south. According to 2007 estimates, it has a population of 785,515.

Muscat Governorate has six wilayats – Muscat, Mutrah, Bausher, Seeb, al Amerat and Quriyat. Each of these is administered by a wali appointed by the Governor of Muscat. The governorate is responsible for providing essential public services within its administrative borders.

The governorate's affairs are administered by the Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, who is appointed by His Majesty the Sultan. Muscat Municipality's Municipal Council also plays a vital role in this connection.

The Governorate of Dhofar

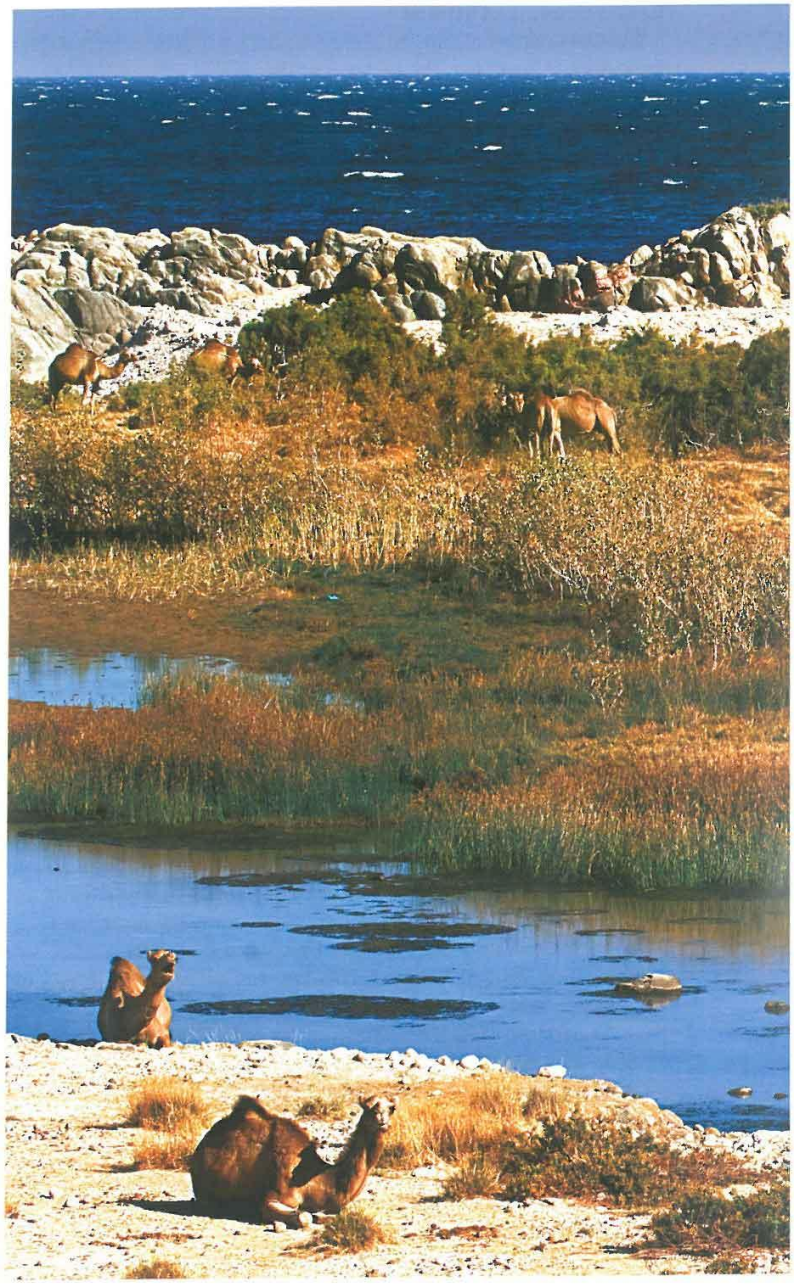
The Governorate of Dhofar played an important role in Oman's history. In ancient times it was known as the Arabian Peninsula's 'Land of Frankincense' and the gateway to the Indian Ocean and the crossroads of southern Arabia's caravan routes. Its main city, Salalah was the birthplace of Oman's modern development strategy, sometimes referred to as the Renaissance, masterminded by Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Today, it remains an important portal to Oman's progress and prosperity.

Dhofar lies at the southern end of the Sultanate of Oman, with Salalah some 1,000 kms distant from Muscat. The governorate borders on the Wusta region to the north-east, the Arabian Sea to the south-east and south, the Republic of Yemen to the west and south-west and the desert of the Rub al Khali, or Empty Quarter, to the north and north-west.

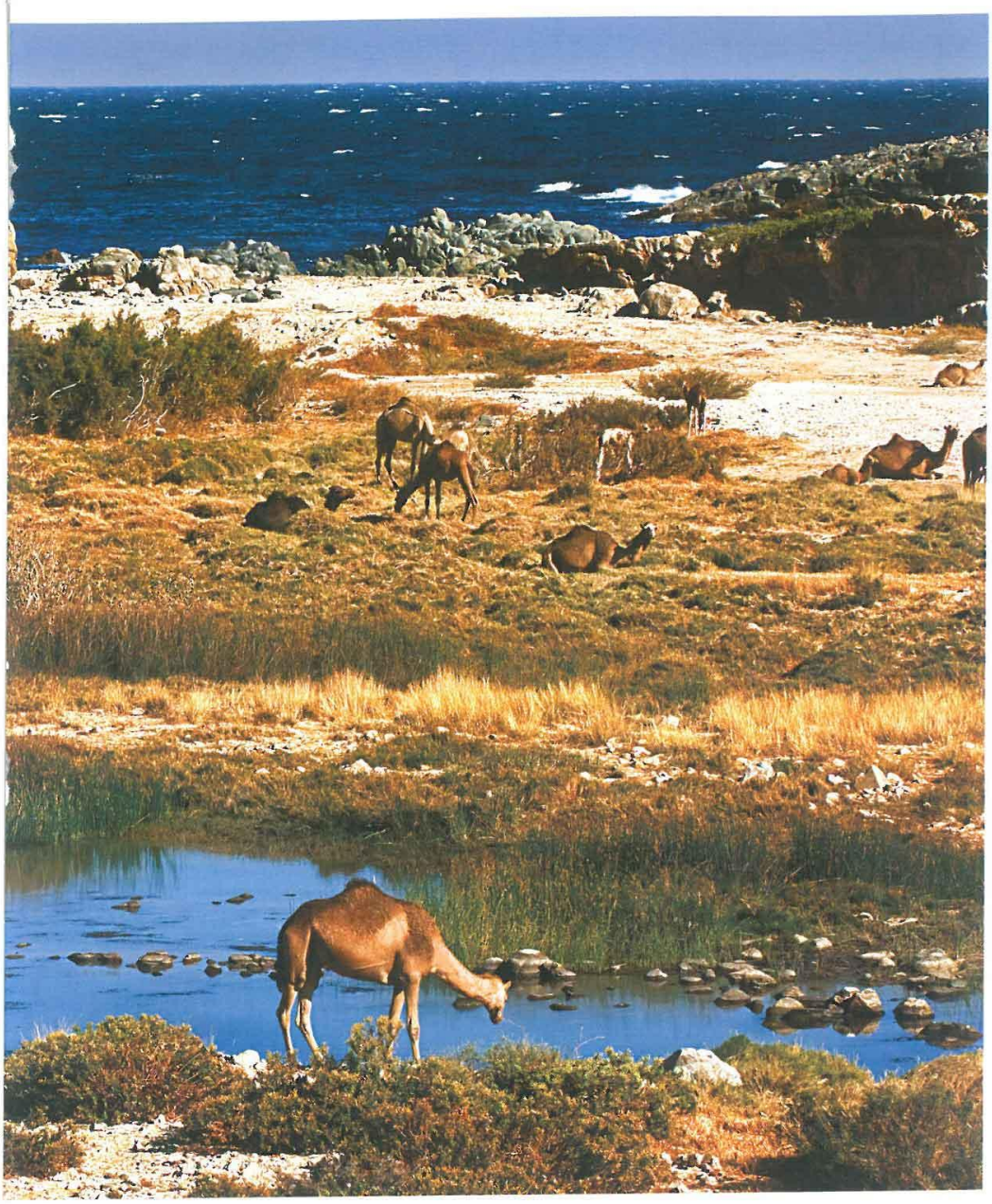
The Governorate of Dhofar has 10 wilayats – Salalah, Thumrait, Taqah, Mirbat, Sadah, Rakhyut, Dhalkut, Muqshin, Shaleem and the Hallaniyat Islands, and al Mazyounah, which was established under Royal Decree No. 13/2006, issued on 6th March 2006. According to the 2007 estimates, the governorate has a population of 260,115. Development projects have been implemented in all its wilayats and its populated areas in the mountain and desert areas have been provided with a full range of essential services including social development centres. Modern utilities and a free trade zone have been installed in the al Mazyounah border area and a modern highway runs between al Mazyounah and al Ghaidha, linking Oman with the Republic of Yemen.

Port Salalah is a major economic enterprise with amenities that in-

Muscat, with the Al Alam Palace on the right



A tranquil scene on the coast of the Dhofar governorate, looking out to the Arabian Sea





The Musandam governorate, in the north of the country, has 4 districts – Khasab, Bukha, Daba al Bay'ah and Madha

clude tourist development projects, a free trade zone and an industrial estate. Its coastal plain produces vegetables, bananas and coconut palms and its exceptional summer climate has made it a big hit with tourists from at home and abroad.

The Governorate of Musandam

The Governorate of Musandam is of immense strategic importance because of its position overlooking the Strait of Hormuz – the most important international shipping lane for oil exports and trade between the Gulf region and the outside world. Around 90% of the Gulf's total oil exports pass through the Strait, which also forms the eastern gateway for shipping to and from the Gulf littoral states.

The Governorate of Musandam is situated at the northern end of the country, where the Strait of Hormuz links the Gulf with the open seas of the Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean. It has 4 wilayats – Khasab, Bukha, Daba al Bay'ah and Madha - and a population of 33,860, according to 2007 estimates.

Musandam has benefitted from several development projects, in recent years, particularly in the fields of health, education, water, electricity, roads, sewerage and ports. Current economic and investment projects include plans to build an industrial estate which will make use of locally available resources.



Khandaq Fort, Buraimi governorate. Sometimes known as the Trench Fort because a 3-metre deep ditch once surrounded it

The Governorate of Buraimi

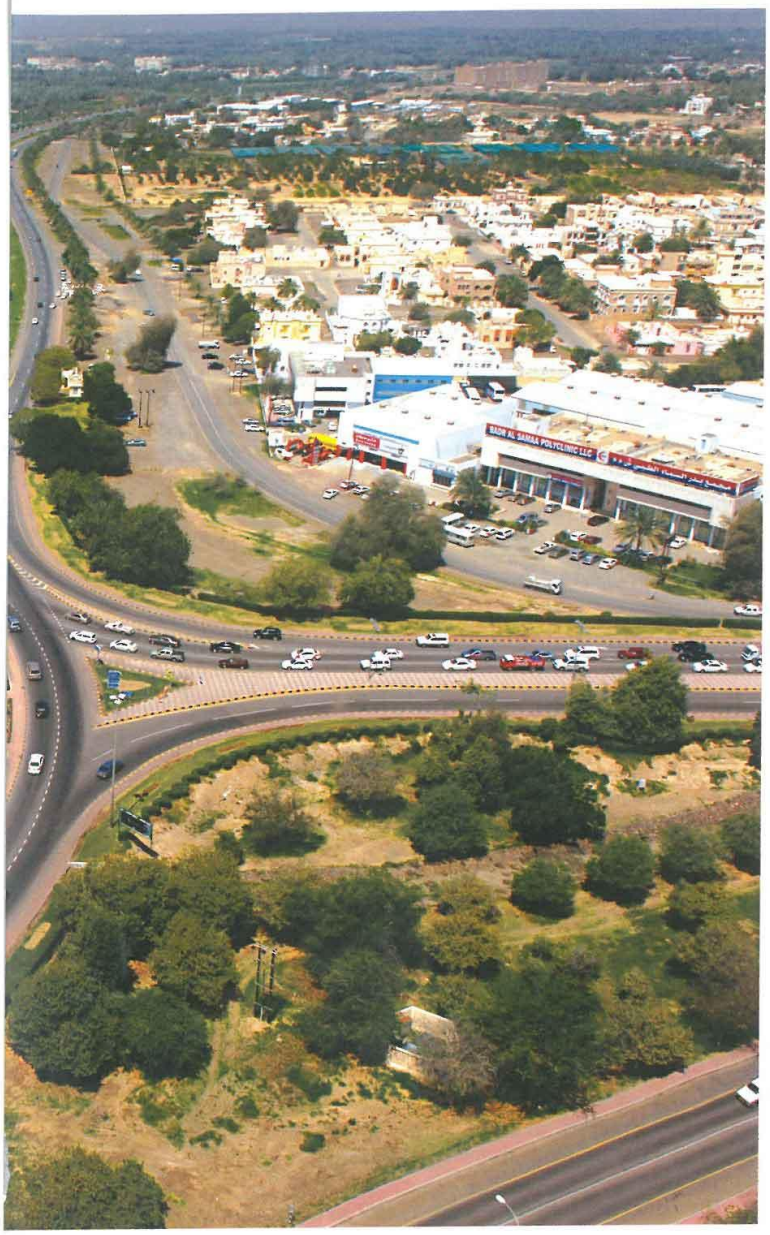
The Governorate of Buraimi was established under Royal Decree No. 108/2006, issued on 15th October 2006. It has been accorded priority status under the Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010) for development programmes in a range of fields, including roads, electricity and other services, as well as a project to upgrade its existing industrial estate.

Buraimi's importance stems from its strategic location in the north-west of the Sultanate. Historically, because of its height above sea level and its abundant water supplies from wadis and aflaj (irrigation channels), it became an important station on a major trade route as well as a significant producer of wheat, dates and other fruit. It remains an important trading centre.

There are several forts and castles in Buraimi, including al Khandaq, al Hillah, Bait al Nadd and al Khabib. It has 3 wilayats – Buraimi, Mahdha and al Sinainah. The latter, previously a niyabat (sub-wilayat) became a wilayat under Royal Decree No. 107/2006, issued on 15th October 2006.

According to 2007 estimates, the Governorate of Buraimi has a population of 97,974.





Sohar in the Batinah region is economically prosperous today, and described as being "… rich and beautiful" by Istakhri in the 2nd half of the 10th century

The Batinah region

The Batinah region, also known as the Batinah Coast, is a strip of land between the sea and the mountains that has played a highly influential role in the Sultanate's history. One of the country's most important geographic and economic regions and situated along the southern shore of the Gulf of Oman, it has more wilayats - a total of 12 - than any other region.

The Batinah has long been Oman's main sea and maritime trading link with the other countries of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Its extensive economic resources include the country's largest agricultural plain – the Batinah Plain – and its numerous mineral deposits are currently being exploited as the basis for a series of major heavy industry projects.

Port Sohar, which is now nearing completion, is an economic mega-project and the surrounding Sohar industrial estate has succeeded in attracting a large number of huge industrial and manufacturing enterprises, including projects related to the petrochemical, aluminium and fertiliser industries. The opening of Sohar Airport, on which construction is scheduled to begin, will give a further boost to the area.

With 735,669 inhabitants according to 2007 estimates, the Batinah has the largest population of Oman's five regions.

With its 12 wilayats - Sohar, Rustaq, Shinas, Saham, Liwa, al Khabourah, al Suwaiq, Nakhal, Wadi al Ma'awil, al Awabi, al Musana'ah and Barka – the Batinah region extends along the coast of the Oman Sea from Khatmat Malaha in the north, to the wilayat of Barka in the south. It is enclosed between the Oman Sea to the east and the slopes of the Western Hajar mountain range to the west.

Along with general advances in the Batinah region's economic and social life, particular attention has been focused not only on the roads, telecommunications, construction and services sectors, but also on areas such as urban landscaping, town planning, public parks and the development of tourist sites. These include two of the Sultanate's most famous natural hot springs – Ain al Kasfah in Rustaq and Ain al Thuwwarah in the wilayat of Nakhal.

The Dhahirah region

The Dhahirah region, with its rich history, enviable agricultural resources and tourist potential, has made tremendous progress in recent years. It consists of a semi-desert plain which descends from the southern slopes of the Western Hajar range towards the Empty Quarter desert. The mountain of Jabal Kawr marks its eastern boundary with the Dakhiliyah region, while the Empty Quarter lies to the west and the Wusta region to the south. In ancient times the Dhahirah was known as Tawam and also Al Jaw.

The region has 3 wilayats – Ibri, Yanqul and Dhank – and, accord-



The Dhahirah region, formerly at the crossroads of the centuries-old Arabian caravan routes

ing to 2007 estimates, has a population of 148,520. Its most distinctive features are its fertile areas of agricultural production and its location at the crossroads of the centuries-old Arabian caravan routes.

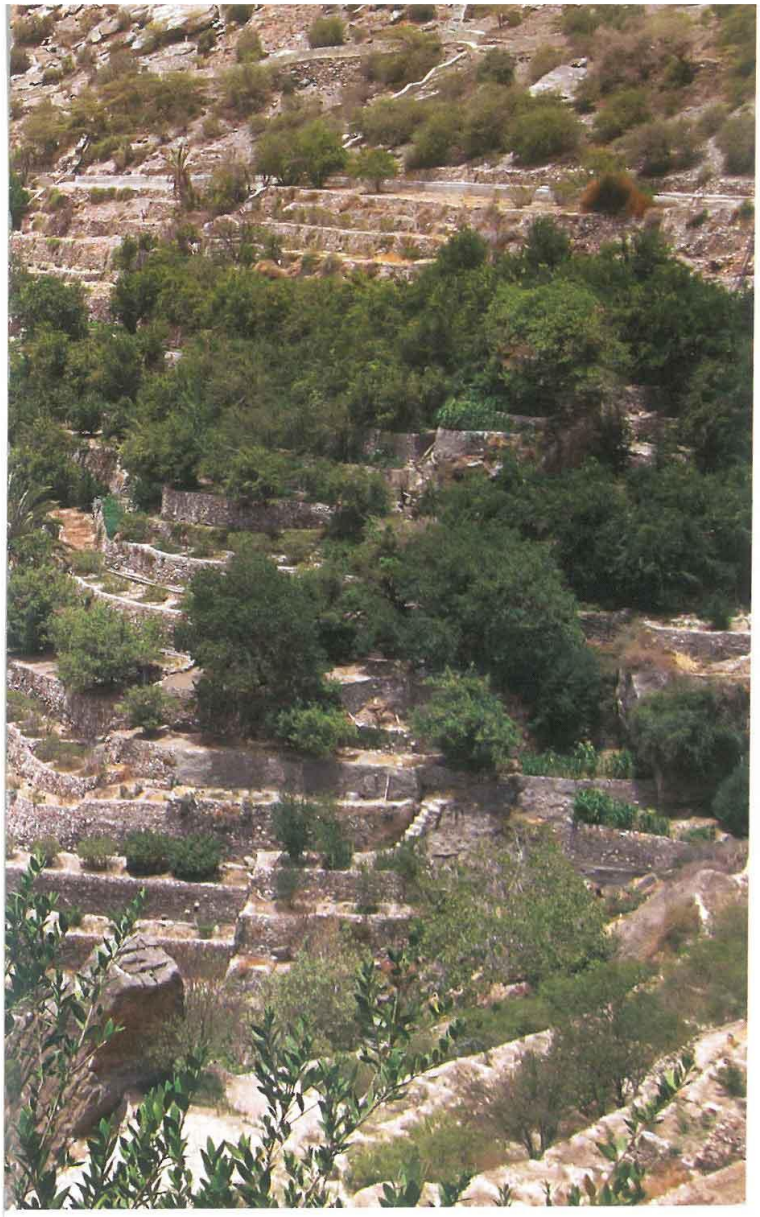
The Dhahirah region has several oil and gas fields and has benefited from a generous share of Oman's development projects.

The Dakhiliyah region

With its rich history, cultural heritage, strategic location and topographical features, the Dakhiliyah region is Oman's strategic hinterland. It comprises the large upland in the centre of the country, which includes the Jabal al Akhdhar mountain range and slopes down in a southerly direction from the mountains towards the desert. Bordering on the Sharqiyah region to the east, the Dhahirah to the west, the Wusta region to the south and the Governorate of Muscat and the Batinah region to the north, it forms a link between the Sultanate's different regions.

As well as being one of the Sultanate's foremost agricultural regions, the Dakhiliyah has also played a prominent role in the country's history. It has 8 wilayats – Nizwa, Sumail, Bahla, Adam, al Hamra, Manah, Izki and Bidbid – and a population of 299,126, according to 2007 estimates.





The fertile terraces of the Jebel al Akdhar in the Dakhiliya region, famed for their cold climate fruit trees of pomegranate, walnut, almond, and apricot as well as seasonal roses



Duqm, around 550 kms from Muscat, in the Wusta region. The dry dock scheme is due for completion end-2010, and the whole port project by 2012.

The Dakhiliyah region has made huge advances not only in health, education and urban construction, but also in roads, industrial development, telecommunications and numerous other fields. In addition to the opening of its referral hospital, the city of Nizwa and its services and utilities have been extensively streamlined. The main highways have been upgraded; work has begun on the further development of the industrial estate and the construction of Phase One of Nizwa's non-government university, which is already in operation. The capacity of its Manah power station has also been expanded.

The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences is located in Nizwa and the Higher Institute of Jurisprudence is being built there. The Institute, along with Sultan Qaboos University's College of Law, will produce graduates in jurisprudence and specialist legal fields.

The Wusta region

The Wusta region lies to the south of the Dakhiliyah and Dhahirah regions and enjoys a temperate climate throughout the year. Bordering the Arabian Sea to the east, the Empty Quarter desert to the west and the Governorate of Dhofar to the south, it has a large number of oil and gas producing fields. It is comprised of 4 wilayats. Three of these – Mahawt, al Duqm and al Jazer – are on the Arabian Sea while the fourth – Haima – is inland.

According to 2007 estimates, the Wusta region has a population of 27,338.

The government attaches great importance to the development of the Wusta region, which is a favourite with conservationists. Whales, dolphins and turtles are frequent visitors to the Wusta's waters and its lagoons are resting areas for many thousands of migratory birds.

Work is currently in progress on the construction of a port and ship repair dry dock at al Duqm. As the population is sparse and spread over small, far-flung population centres, the region obtains its clean drinking water supplies from purpose-built desalination plants. The road system is being upgraded, particularly the main highways

In terms of per capita spending, the Wusta region has ranked second only to the Governorate of Musandam in expenditure on development projects over the course of more than one Five-year Plan.

Recent initiatives include a number of water, electricity, road, fishing harbour, health and education projects. Life is changing fast in this once sleepy region and, like the rest of the country, the Wusta is steadily moving ahead towards increased progress and prosperity.

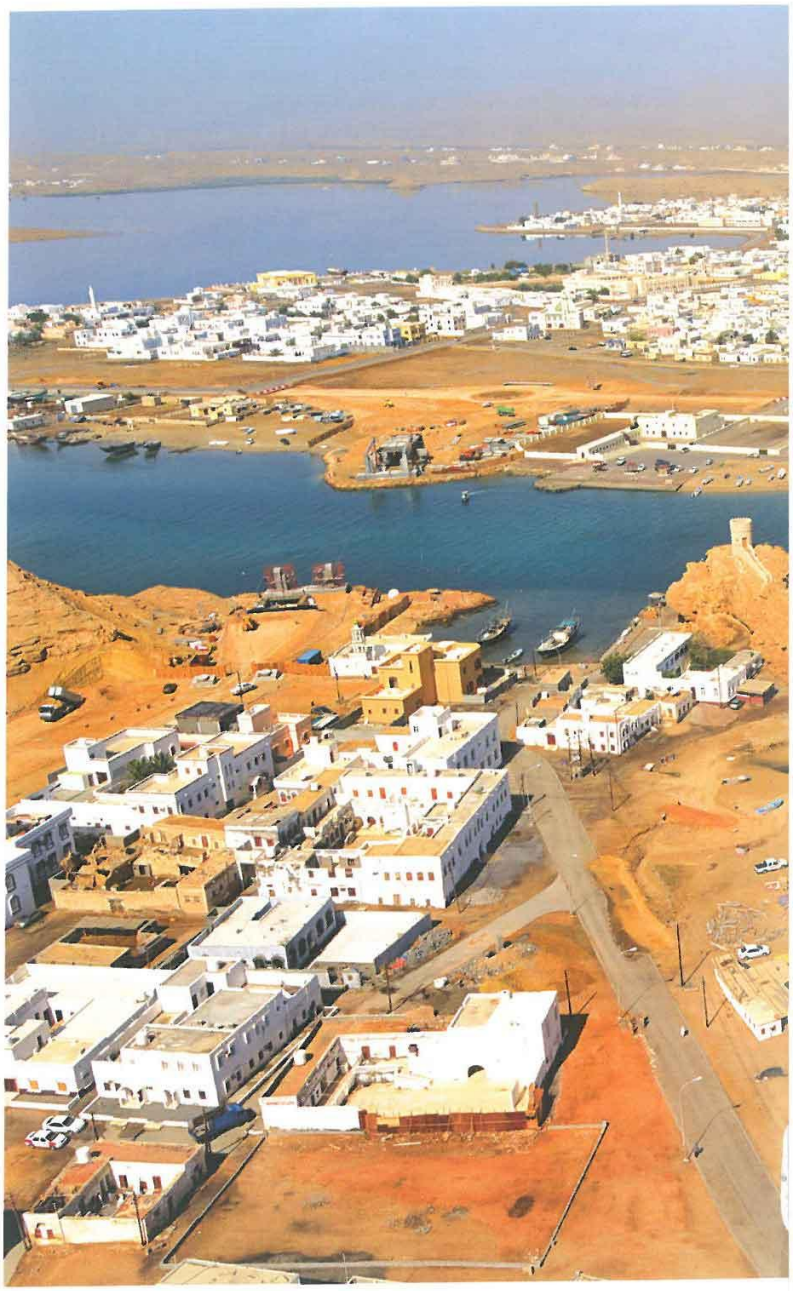
The Sharqiyah region

The Sharqiyah region, in the north-eastern corner of Oman with the Arabian Sea lying along its eastern flank, includes part of the Eastern Hajar range within its area and borders on the Sharqiyah Sands to the south and the Dakhiliyah region to the west. Its 11 wilayats are:- Sur, Ibra, al Mudhaibi, Bidiyah, al Qabil, Dima wa'l Ta'een, al Kamil wa'l Wafi, Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali, Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan, Wadi Bani Khalid and Masirah Island.

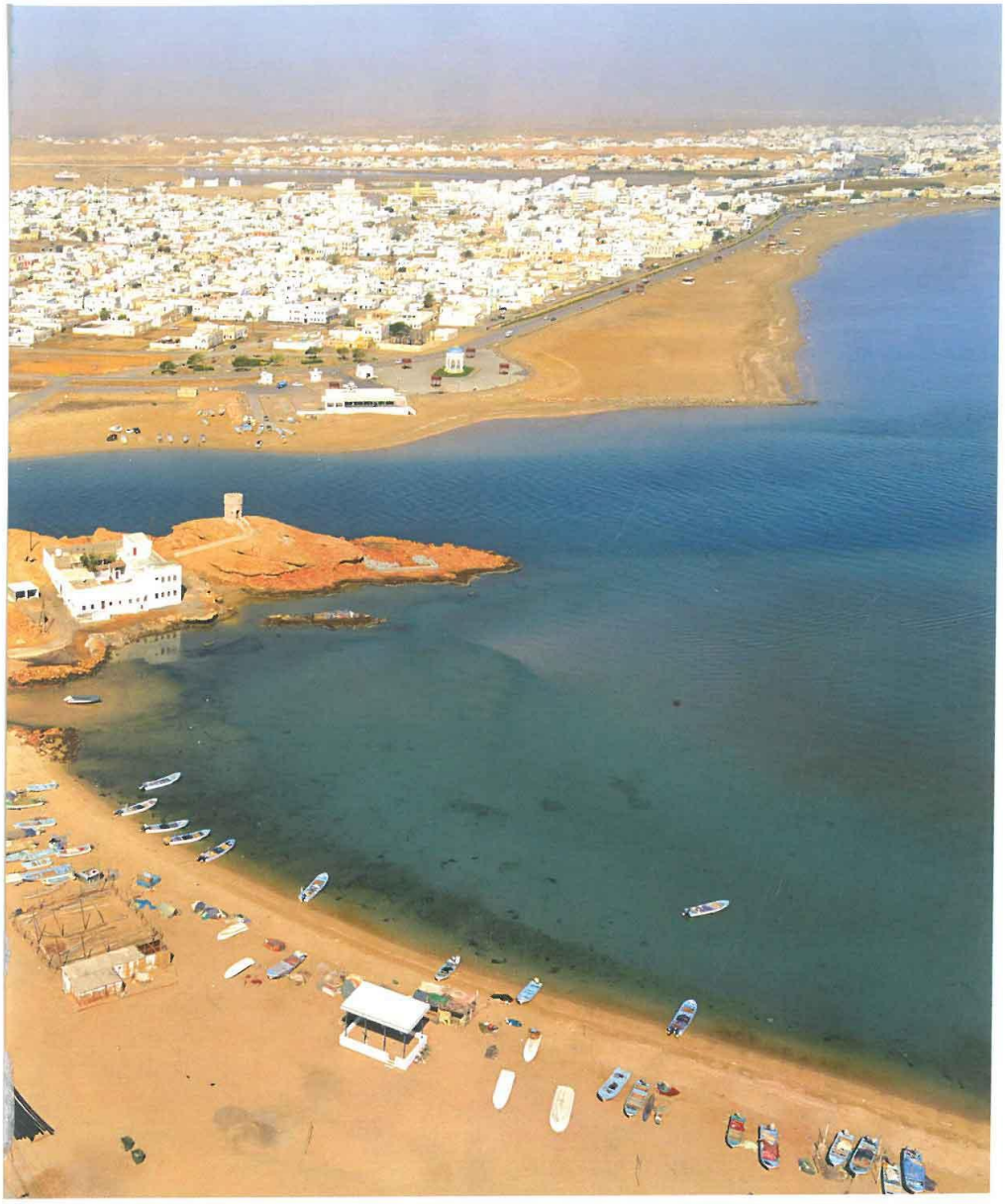
The region has a population of 355,382, according to 2007 estimates.

In 2000 Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (OLNG) project was formally inaugurated by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and began exporting its output. A third train, owned by Qalhat LNG and operated by Oman LNG, was inaugurated by Sayyid Shabib bin Taimur at the beginning of 2006. Fertiliser is exported to India from the region's urea and ammonia fertiliser factory. Work is ongoing on the construction of an industrial estate in Sur for small and medium industries. The vital port and seafaring town of Sur played a vital role in the development of trade between Oman, East Africa and India. For centuries it was one of the major shipbuilding centres of the region and remains so to the present day. Dhows are constructed directly on the beach and although construction can take as long as a year to complete, the finished vessel might be expected to be sailing the oceans for approaching a hundred years.

A 170-metre long, 10-metre wide suspension bridge is currently being built over the creek in the wilayat of Sur. This bridge, the first of its kind in Oman, will cut short by 10kms the distance between Al Aijah and Khor al Batah.

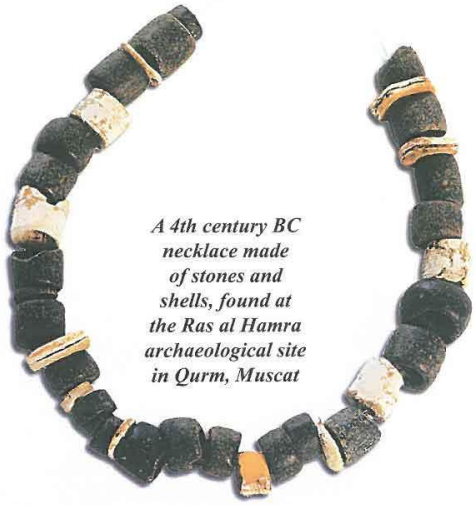


Sur, a seafaring town in the Sharqiyah region



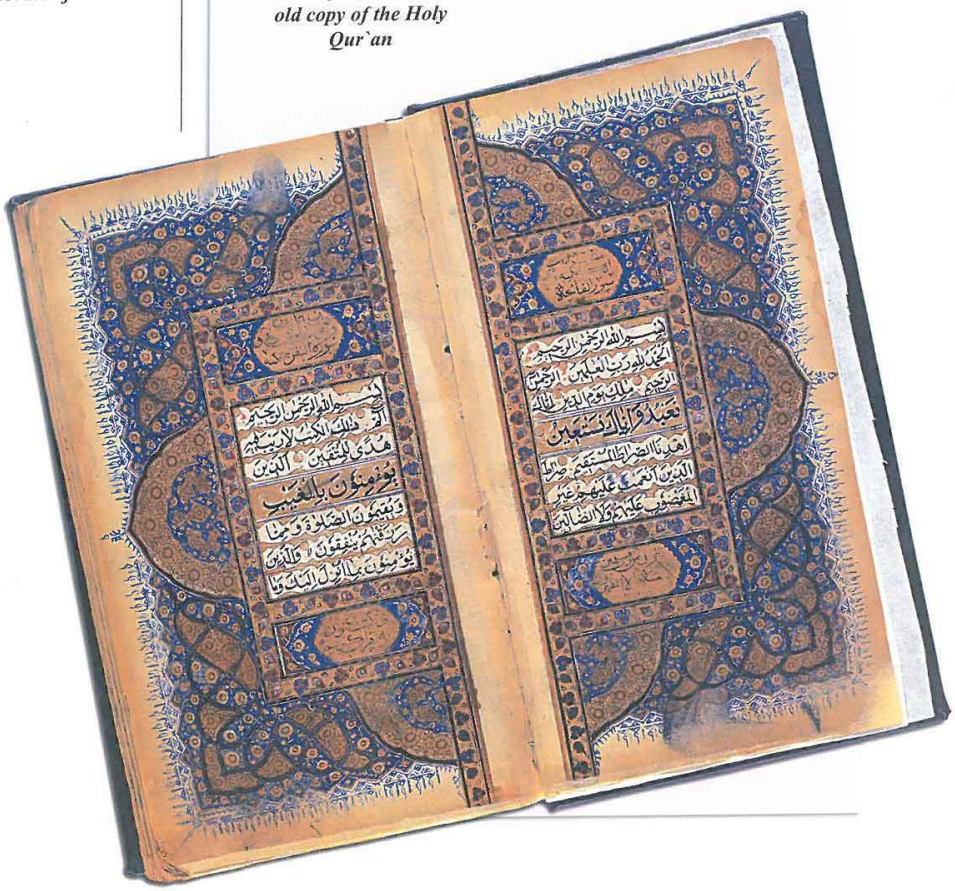


A 2nd century BC stone pot, found in the governorate of Buraimi



A 4th century BC necklace made of stones and shells, found at the Ras al Hamra archaeological site in Qurm, Muscat

A beautifully illustrated old copy of the Holy Qur`an



HISTORY AND CONTACTS WITH OTHER CULTURES

From ancient times, Oman has maintained strong ties with other civilizations. An important station on the old East-West Silk Route, it was a flourishing Indian Ocean commercial and maritime centre right up until the end of the 19th century. Throughout history, it enjoyed cordial relations with several major world powers and – through its pivotal role in promoting links with other peoples and civilizations- has been an active player in the Gulf, the Arab region and the wider world.

When Oman embarked upon its modern Renaissance in 1970, history had equipped it with all the essential background and elements for a prosperous future. Its leadership had a knowledge and understanding of the world around it, a people who were willing and able to shape their destiny by their own hand, and a vital geographical location that ensured it was able to make a significant and enduring impact on the international scene.

A country as old as history itself, over the ages Oman has made significant contributions to human civilization. It has been an influential maritime and political power, enjoying relations with countries as far-flung as China, the United States, Britain and France; its ambassadors were received with respect in the capitals of those countries centuries ago.

The common thread running through the different eras of Oman's history, and linking its modern Renaissance with its prosperity in former times, is the ability of its leadership to establish national unity and cohesiveness and build a robust economy based on security, stability and competent, sophisticated political administration.

Historical studies have revealed extensive ties between Oman and the civilizations of the ancient East including China, India and Mesopotamia, as well as the Eastern Mediterranean, the Nile Valley and North Africa.

Like other nations and peoples with distinctive histories and civilizations, Oman has passed through a succession of different historical periods. By the Middle Ages, the country had established itself as a prosperous seafaring nation sending dhows from its great port at Sohar to trade with merchants in far-flung destinations. However, this success attracted unwelcome attention from the outside world. This 'attention' coincided with a period of tribal turbulence in Oman when, from 1154 for a period of more than four and a half centuries, the Bani Nabhan ruled the central area of the country intermittently.

Over the past two hundred and fifty-plus years, the Al Busaid state founded by Imam Ahmed bin Said in 1744, of which Sultan Qaboos bin Said is a descendant, has succeeded in making Oman the powerful and influential state we know today. However, the path to prosperity has not always run smoothly. There have been some periods of weakness, isolation and internal conflict which, for various domestic, regional and international reasons, led the country to turn in on itself and become cut off from the



A UNESCO World Cultural and Heritage listed archaeological site, Al Baleed was a settlement during the Iron Age. The Land of Frankincense Museum can be seen on the right

outside world. Thankfully, this situation came to an end in 1970 when the foundation stones of contemporary 21st century Oman were laid.

Oman's names

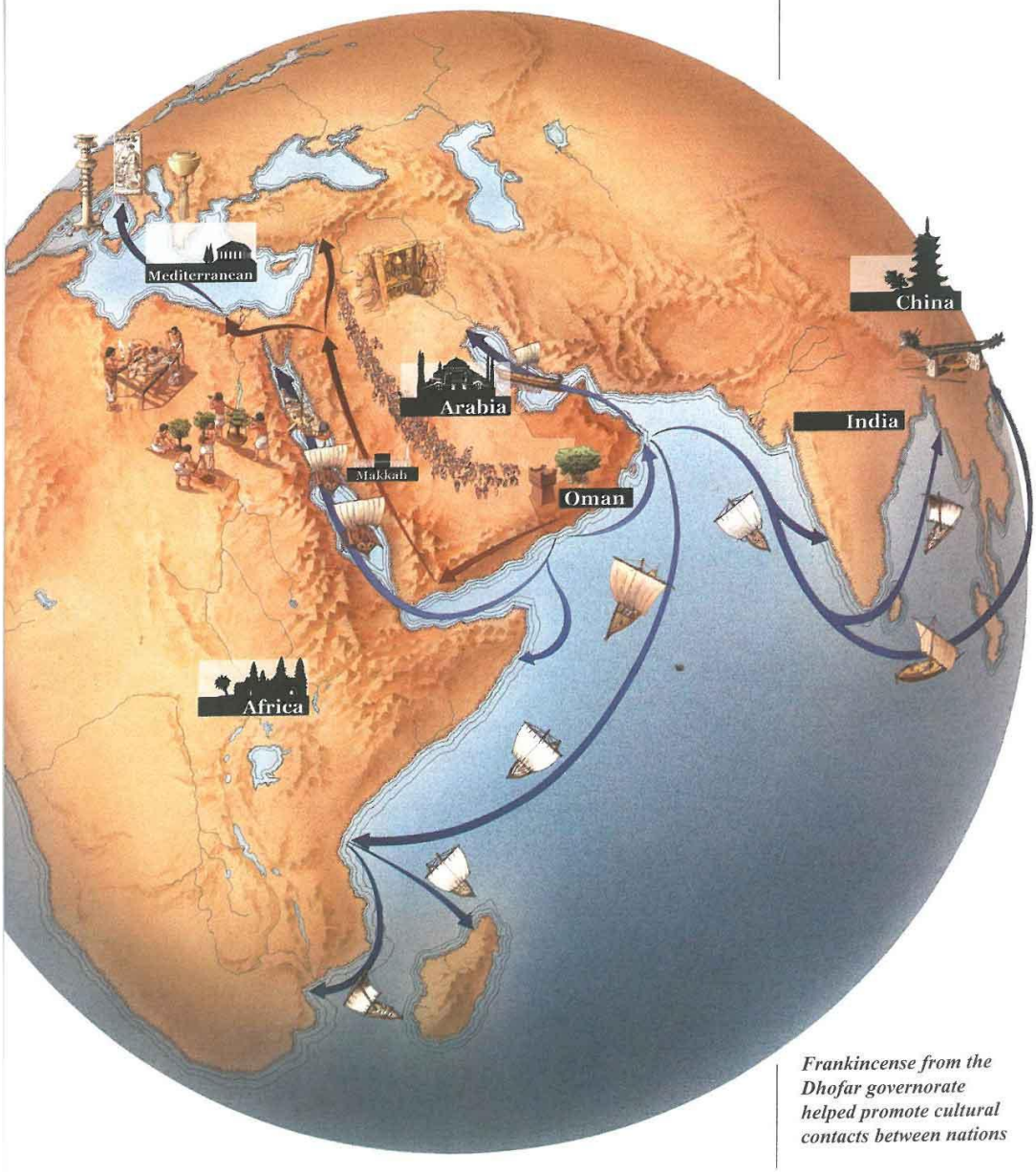
Oman has been known by several names over the course of its history. The best known are Magan, Mezoun and Oman, each of which has a specific cultural or historical connotation.

The Sumerians had extensive commercial and maritime ties with Oman and in their language the word Magan was associated with ship-building and copper smelting; various Sumerian tablets refer to present day Oman as "The Land of Magan."

Mezoun is derived from the word *muzn*, which means clouds and abundant flowing water, an indication that historically water was plentiful in Oman in comparison with neighbouring Arab countries. This could account for Oman's agricultural prosperity and stability from earlier times, as well as the development of its civilization.

The name Oman has also been linked to the migration of Arab tribes from a place inYemen called 'Uman'. Some of these tribes lived on the plains and earned their livelihood from agriculture and fishing. Others settled in the interior and desert regions working as herdsmen and shepherds.

It has also been suggested that Oman may have been named after Uman the son of Abraham or Uman bin Saba, the son of Abraham's son Joktan.



Frankincense from the Dhofar governorate helped promote cultural contacts between nations

Helping to spread the message of Islam

Oman was among the first countries to embrace Islam voluntarily. The Prophet Muhammad sent 'Amr bin al 'Aas to the joint rulers of Oman at that time – Jaifar and 'Abd – the sons of Julanda bin al Mustakbir – inviting them to accept the faith. The invitation was accepted and from that day forward Oman became a bastion of Islam, helping to spread the message to many parts of the world.

During the early years of the Islamic mission Oman played a prominent role in the Wars of Apostasy which broke out after the death of the Prophet. It also took part in the great Islamic conquests by land and sea, particularly in Iraq, Persia and Sind, as well as several other countries in the region and beyond.

However, Oman's most notable achievements in this regard were through its extensive trading and seafaring activities in East Africa, especially during the 19th century, when it introduced and propagated Islam along much of the East African coast and in Central Africa. Omani seafarers also carried Islam with them as far as China and ports around south and East Asia.

At home, Islam and Islamic values remain an integral part of Omani society, creating a strong bond between its citizens.

The Ya'ruba era and the expulsion of the Portuguese

Although they faced strong resistance from the Omanis, in the year 1507, the Portuguese managed to seize control of large stretches of the coast. However, despite the unsettled political situation in the country at that time, neither Portugal nor any other power was able to extend its rule beyond these limited coastal regions, and the interior of the country – as well as some coastal areas such as Sohar - continued to provide Oman's national resistance with the strategic hinterland it needed until it succeeded in ridding itself of the Portuguese after around a century and a half of occupation.

The accession of Imam Nasser bin Murshid as Imam of Oman in 1624 marked the start of Ya'ruba rule. Imam Nasser succeeded in uniting the country under his leadership for the first time in many years and, after equipping a powerful naval fleet, he was able to reduce Portuguese influence and free some of the coastal towns and cities from their control.

Imam Sultan bin Saif continued the offensive against the Portuguese and in 1650 his forces liberated Muscat. This heralded the decline of Portuguese power in the Gulf as whole, as Omani forces drove the Portuguese out of the region to the coasts of India and East Africa.

Al Busaid....restoring the nation's glory and rebuilding a modern state

In 1744, the appointment of Imam Ahmed bin Said, Wali of Sohar and the surrounding areas, marked the start of a new era in Oman's history that



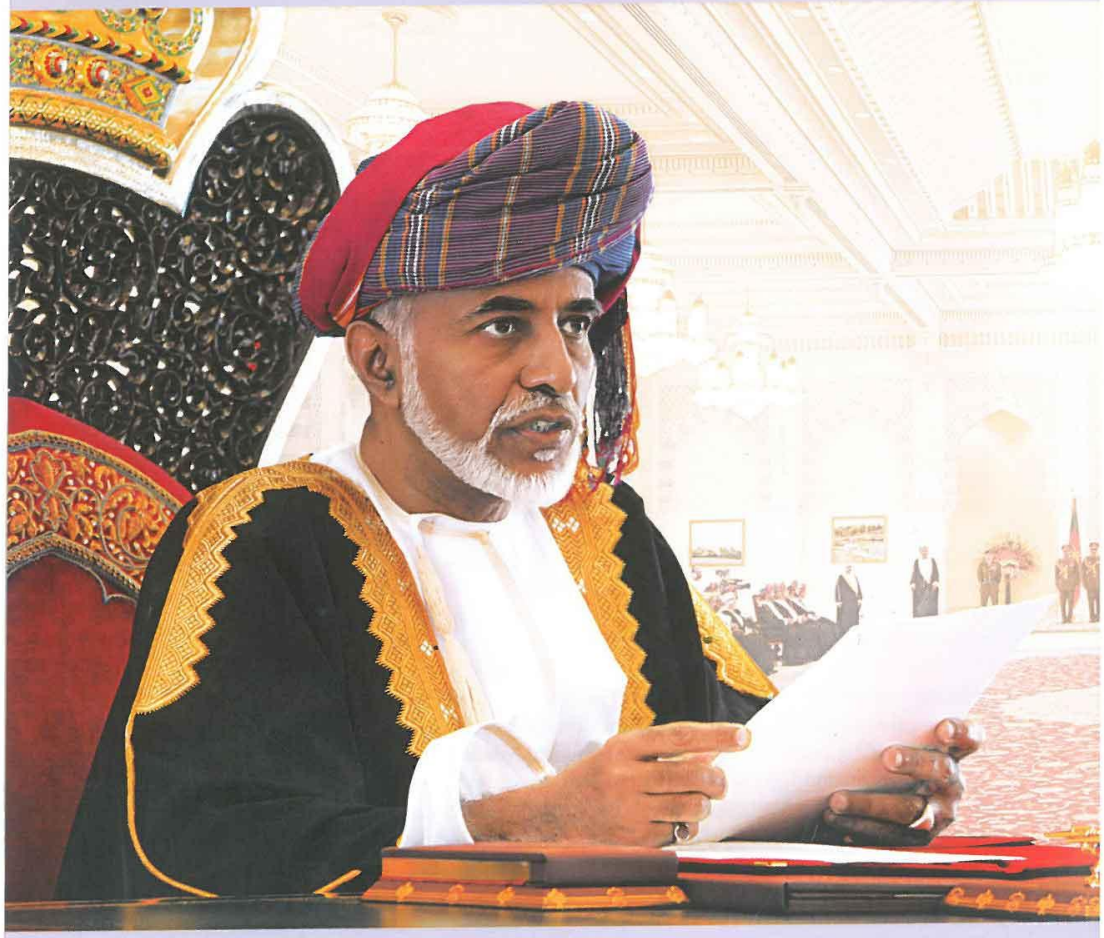
Fort Mirani in the foreground and Fort Jelali in the background, built in 1587 and 1588 respectively

was to continue for over two hundred and fifty years to the present day. Imam Ahmed bin Said's accession to the imamate of Oman was in response to the wishes of the influential people at that time, who acknowledged his courage, particularly in freeing the country from the Persian invaders.

Imam Ahmed bin Said, the founder of the Al Busaid state, went on to reunite the country, quench the fires of internal dissent and build up a large naval force as well as a huge merchant fleet, thereby reviving Oman's maritime trading credentials as well as its political role in the region. In 1775, he sent around 100 vessels led by the great cruiser Al Rahmani to the northern Gulf, where they broke the Persian siege of Basra after appeals for assistance from the Wali of Baghdad.

On the death of Imam Ahmed bin Said in his capital, Rustaq, in 1198 AH/1783 AD, he was succeeded by several distinguished imams and sultans who continued the Al Busaid rule. During the reign of his grandson Hamad (1199AH/1784 AD-1206 AH/1792 AD) the capital was moved from Rustaq to Muscat, where it remains to this day.

Throughout their history a strong sense of belonging to a single nation has united Omanis in the face of external threats and challenges. The continuation of Al Busaid rule since the middle of the 18th century to the present is another unifying factor; this has been particularly true during certain specific periods such as the reigns of Sayyid Said bin Sultan (1804-1856) and Sultan Qaboos, the architect of Oman's contemporary development.



QABOOS
THE LEADER



QABOOS THE LEADER

Over a period fast approaching four decades, Oman has witnessed a period of transformation unparalleled in its history, taking it from international obscurity to the frontline of regional politics, and international recognition as a measured exponent of stability, peace and diplomacy.

The intelligent exploitation of oil and the financial rewards accrued from this valuable resource have funded a social and economic development programme that is the envy of countries around the world. However, while there is no question that petro-dollars helped forge the modern day miracle that is 21st century Oman, the power house behind such radical change is its leader Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The only son of the late Sultan Said bin Taimur and the eighth direct descendant of the Al Busaidi line founded in 1744 by Imam Ahmad bin Said, Sultan Qaboos was born in Salalah in the Dhofar governorate on 18th November 1940.

The young Qaboos spent the first 16 years of his life in Salalah, later travelling to England where he received a private education before entering Britain's prestigious Royal Military Academy Sandhurst as a military cadet at the age of 20.

After passing out from Sandhurst, he spent a year with a British infantry battalion on tour duty in Germany and later held a staff appointment with the British Army.

Having completed his military service, His Majesty studied local government in England before embarking on a tour of the world. On his return to Oman, he spent six years studying Islam and Omani history in Salalah, eventually assuming the reins of power on 23rd July 1970 with a keen determination to implement his personal vision for the development of Oman and its people.

Like his famous ancestor Imam Ahmad bin Said,, an outstanding leader who ended a turbulent era of civil war, bringing peace and stability to Oman, Sultan Qaboos inherited a troubled, divided land.

In his first address to the nation, he declared that the country would henceforth be unified as the Sultanate of Oman, with a new flag and a new forward-looking ethos. He ended all previous restrictions on freedom of movement and called on Omanis who had left the country to return home, bringing their talents and skills to the challenges that lay ahead in rebuilding a powerful nation that had fallen into poverty and decline.

His Majesty's belief in the future of Oman and its people has never wavered and they, in turn, have not disappointed him with their commitment to working together in building a just and democratic society of which every citizen can be proud.

In addition to his role as leader, Sultan Qaboos is an enthusiastic horseman who enjoys many outdoor pursuits, including walking and

tennis. His military training has left him with a keen interest in all types of weaponry and military equipment. Possessed of a lively and active mind he has studied a variety of subjects, ranging from religion to astronomy and the environment, languages, world literature, history and music.

A royal mission

Sultan Qaboos' mission has been to build the nation – the state, its people and its society – and to work for security, prosperity, progress and the restoration of its international standing. His Majesty has devoted the greater part of his life so far to achieving this end.

Over the past 39 years Oman has grown to maturity and reinforced the foundations of the nation's future development. Despite the difficulties facing the country at the beginning of the 1970s, His Majesty resolved to include every citizen in the new Oman. He pardoned those who had made mistakes and forged the path to national unity, a vital prerequisite for development. And, although the region has witnessed various challenges over the years, Oman has remained an oasis of security, stability and peace.

The focus is on the individual citizen

"The development of the Omani individual, the formation of character, education and training are at the forefront of the noble goals that we constantly seek to achieve in order to provide everybody in this fine country of ours with a decent, prosperous life," His Majesty has stressed.

Human development has been a cornerstone in construction of the Omani state. General and Basic education are available for everybody of school age and there are also thousands of students in higher education at the country's colleges and universities.

High priority is attached to training young Omanis in the knowledge and technical skills required by the changing labour market and the country's sustainable development programmes. Moving with the times and remaining open to change will keep Oman and its people at the cutting edge of development.

In his speech at the annual inauguration of the Council of Oman on 11th November 2008, His Majesty stressed, with regard to the importance of science and knowledge, "We have always been open to new developments in the field of science and knowledge, and information technology and telecommunications have become the main engine of development in the third millennium. That is why we have attached importance to producing a national strategy for developing people's potential and skills in this field . . . We are keeping a close eye on the significant steps that are being taken in this respect as we aspire to push the Sultanate towards the boundaries of new knowledge."

Education and healthcare services come top of the list of government spending allocations in the General State Budget and the general, year-on-year policy, has been to increase them – a trend reflected in the 2009 Budget.

Culture and professionalism are two of the factors that have a positive effect on the citizen and society. In this connection, at His Majesty's instruction, the Royal Opera House currently being built in al Qurm will have an arts complex and numerous other arts-related facilities, in addition to the opera house itself. His Majesty has also ordered the formation of a committee to study and evaluate Omani theatre and the standard of drama production in the Sultanate. Meanwhile, for Omani journalists, professional training courses are ongoing at His Majesty's suggestion.

In order for the Sultanate's craftmaking history to be maintained, Sultan Qaboos issued directives in October 2008 for the provision of equipment and assistance in maintaining workshops. His Majesty also ordered that craft production and training centres should be set up in the Governorates of Musandam and Buraimi and the Dhahirah region to ensure age old crafts and skills are not lost to Omani society.

Sultan Qaboos, while encouraging ambition and achievement, attaches great importance to the weakest section of Omani society – those on limited incomes and social security - and has introduced a range of initiatives to enable them to attain a better standard of living.

In early 2008, payments and allowances for families on social security were increased. The minimum monthly pension for retired government employees was raised by 35%, while the figure for other allowance categories was increased by between 5–17%.

On His Majesty's instructions plots of housing and housing/commercial land have been distributed to families on social security across the country and they – as well as other eligible categories - were granted exemption from repayment of 50% of their outstanding loans from the Housing Bank. The government also provides thousands of study grants for the children of these families, up to university level. Sultan Qaboos has directed the government to "establish a suitable mechanism for providing assistance for this section of society to enable them to acquire a useful profession or vocation," wherever possible.

Women

Women, who make up half the population of Oman, have been playing an increasingly full role in the country's life and its economic and social development. They enjoy the right to vote and stand for membership of the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) and occupy around a fifth of the seats on the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla), whose members are appointed by His Majesty. Women hold a significant number of government offices, including top positions in the state's administrative



A 3-day Symposium on Omani Women, held at the Royal Camp in Sohar in October 2009, resulted in the 17th October each year assigned as Omani Women`s Day

apparatus, the diplomatic corps, the Public Prosecutor's Office and in several other fields.

A 3-day Symposium on Omani Women was held at the Royal Camp in Sohar from 17th to 19th October 2009. It addressed four major issues: Omani women in society, their involvement in the economy and business, participation in the Majlis A'Shura, and women and legislation. Following its conclusion two Royal grants were issued – the first for the construction of permanent Omani Women's Association headquarters for those who did not already have them, and the second granted 500 annual scholarships for girls to study at private higher education institutions within the Sultanate. During the Symposium it was announced that the 17th October would be assigned as the annual Omani Women's Day.

Human rights

A number of laws have been enacted in the Sultanate specifically to protect human rights, also enshrined in several of the principles and provisions of the Basic Law of the State, promulgated in 1996. Royal Decree No. 126/2008 on the Law on the Prevention of Human Trafficking, issued by Sultan Qaboos on 23rd November 2008, came into force with effect from December 2008.

Sultan Qaboos also issued Royal Decree No. 124/2008 in November 2008, setting up a National Committee for Human Rights to operate un-

der the jurisdiction of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla).

The Sultanate is signatory to international conventions on children's rights and the prevention of discrimination. It supports labour committees and unions in the Sultanate within the framework of the General Federation of Oman Trade Unions, represented in the Omani delegation at meetings of the International Labour Organisation.

Integration and coordination between institutions

Sultan Qaboos has sought to ensure that all citizens are effective partners in the decision-making process, whether at government or municipality level, or through the Sultanate's consultative institutions - the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) and the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura). Oman's consultative process is deeply rooted in its heritage and history. Over the years, mutual consultation, joint action and co-operation between the people and the state's administrative bodies have become firmly established principles.

Widespread admiration for Oman's performance

Oman's political and economic performance – including its response to the global financial crisis which has affected countries around the world to varying degrees since the middle of 2008 - has won it widespread admiration in the region and beyond; the same may be said of its achievements in the development field.

In May 2008 the Sultanate was the top country in the Middle East and the Maghreb region and 22nd worldwide in terms of peace and security, according to the 2008 Global Peace Index issued by Britain's *Economist* magazine's Intelligence Unit. This was the second successive year that the Sultanate came out top in the Arab world in this category.

The international agency Standard and Poor's credit rating service gave the Sultanate a long-term "A" rating in April 2009 and an "A1" short-term sovereign credit rating. The agency noted that the Omani government managed the windfall from the period of high oil prices prudently and transparently and estimated the country's general government surplus in 2008 at around 8.8% of GDP. It added that the Omani government was able to fund a wide range of projects out of its available assets.

Meanwhile, the warm feelings expressed towards the Sultanate by various Arab and international organisations reflect the esteem in which the country and its leadership are held around the world. The Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) joined the Inter Parliamentary Union on 13th October 2008 with the unanimous consent of the Union's 183 member states.

The Sultanate hosted the Arab Parliamentary Union's 15th conference in Muscat on 7th March 2009 and HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Moham-

med Al Isa'ee, the Chairman of the Consultation Council, was unanimously chosen to chair the Union's 16th session. In April 2009 the Sultanate was unanimously chosen as deputy chair of the Arab Transitional Parliament.

Several other steps were also taken to promote closer relations between the Sultanate and other countries in the 12 months under review. In February 2009 the foundation stone of the Lebanese-Omani Cultural Centre was laid in Beirut. The following month, a protocol was signed between the Sultanate and the Republic of Uzbekistan on the construction of an Oriental Studies Institute at the Al Biruni Library (Academy of Sciences) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Academic chairs have been established in several of the world's leading universities to promote the study of Arab and Islamic civilisation, as well as intercultural dialogue and a better understanding of this region. These universities include Melbourne in Australia, Harvard and Georgetown in the USA, Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, Utrecht in the Netherlands, Bahrain, Pakistan and Beijing University in China, as well as a Sultanate of Oman Corner at Moscow University Library.

Meanwhile, the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in Washington promotes intellectual and cultural contacts between Arab and American peoples through its activities, including a programme of cultural and art events which, in early 2009, included the Arab Folklore exhibition in which Oman took part.

In April 2009 the Oman Qaboos website won the prize for the best Arab leaders' website in a competition for the Arab region's top website held by Arab Web magazine. The website was launched in November 2008 in seven languages – Arabic, English, French, Korean, Portuguese, Persian and Hindi.

An influential role

With its candid, unambiguous policies, Oman's dealings with all countries in the region and the wider world are based on mutual respect, neighbourly relations and common interests. Thanks to its cordial, trouble-free relations with other states, the Sultanate is well-placed to offer assistance in matters of diplomacy. The Sultanate and its leadership enjoy the confidence and respect of Arab, regional and international players.

As His Majesty has noted, "We live in a world of overlapping and interconnected interests and policies, and our co-operation with this world is based on the Sultanate's higher interests and designed to help promote security and prosperity across the globe. These policies have earned our country the respect and admiration of the international community. It is vitally important that there should be co-operation and the pursuit of mutual interests between states within a framework of peace and harmony."

The 29th Summit of the AGCC Leaders took place in Muscat in December 2008











The Sultanate hosted the 29th AGCC Summit at the end of December 2008, marking a significant landmark in the AGCC's history, particularly where closer co-operation between Council states and the Republic of Yemen was concerned.

The Summit, at its close, issued the Muscat Declaration, which stressed the importance of developing the AGCC states' own individual potential - particularly human resources and scientific research - while focusing attention on the environment and environmental conservation. To underline Oman's appreciation of joint AGCC efforts made, and to encourage further positive action in this direction, Sultan Qaboos endowed a prize for the human and environmental affairs sector.

The Sultanate, which holds the presidency of the current AGCC session, continues to make strenuous efforts to promote the Council's progress.

Reflecting continuing strong, cordial relations with other nations, Sultan Qaboos visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in May 2008 and the Arab Republic of Egypt in both May and August. His Majesty also made an historic visit to the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in August 2008, as well as to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Qatar. HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, attended the Kuwait Economic Summit on behalf of Sultan Qaboos in January 2009

His Majesty discusses matters of mutual interest with the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy

His Majesty receives the President of the Republic of Singapore, Sellapan Ramanathan, during a visit to Muscat

His Majesty has cordial talks with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei, Darussalam in April 2009



His Majesty discusses matters of mutual interest with His Highness Sheikh Sabah al Ahmed al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait

During a visit to Tehran in August 2009 His Majesty discusses matters of mutual concern with Dr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

His Majesty exchanges views with Islam Karimov, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in October 2009

and the 21st Arab Summit in Doha, in addition to the Arab-Latin American Summit in Doha in March 2009, the Emergency AGCC Summit in Riyadh in January 2009 and the AGCC consultative summit in Riyadh in May. His Majesty and a high delegation also visited the Republic of Iran in August 2009.

Visitors to the Sultanate in 2008 included British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Sergei Mironov, Chairman of the Federal Council of the Russian Federation. Hans Gert Pottering, Speaker of the European Parliament, visited the Sultanate in December 2008. Other visitors included Prince William Alexander of Orange, heir to the Dutch throne; Hungarian Prime Minister Ference Gyurcsany and Qatari Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani in Januuary 2009. They were followed in February/March 2009 by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Lebanese President General Michel Suleiman and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the President of the Republic of Singapore Sellapan Ramanathan, and President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of the Arab Republic of Egypt. In April the Sultanate received Dr. Bashar Al Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei, Darussalam, followed in May by Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, Dr. Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, and Khalid Mish'al, Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas. Visi-





tors in June 2009 included Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi, Ruler of Fujairah and member of the UAE Supreme Council, Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi, Heir Apparent and Deputy Ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, Richard Holbrooke, US Special Envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to Lt.Gen Abd-Rabouh Mansour Hadi, Vice-President of Yemen. And at the beginning of October President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan was given an audience by His Majesty, as was Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund during their visits to Muscat.

Visits by ministers, military commanders and senior officials to and from Oman, were ongoing throughout the 12 months under review.

Oman is a committed proponent of peace in the region and the world. It continues to support all endeavours to relieve the sufferings of the Palestinian people and help them regain their legitimate rights, including their own independent state, as well as efforts to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It is committed to the principles of good neighbourly relations and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and it strives to reconcile differences and problems between its fellow Arab states through peaceful means and constructive dialogue. The Sultanate's clear policies and stances in this regard have earned it the appreciation of countries across the globe.

His Majesty's annual Royal Tours

The relationship between His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Oman can be summed up in three words: simplicity, spontaneity and directness. This is also the aim for relations between government officials – whatever their level – and individual private citizens. In building a better and stronger Oman all citizens are on the same side, and this directive comes right from the top.

During the course of the year, His Majesty goes on several tours of the country for the purpose of inspecting projects, monitoring work in progress or simply to meet members of the public. However, the annual Royal Tour, which covers several governorates and regions and lasts for several weeks, is of far greater significance for the country's economy, social policies and development than merely bolstering the relationship between Sultan Qaboos and his subjects.

The Royal Tours began in the 1970s, following His Majesty's accession to power. These ongoing annual meetings and discussions with ordinary citizens allow Sultan Qaboos to hear their views and observe their daily lives first hand - whether they live in the mountains, the deserts, the plains or the wadis.

During the Royal Tours, His Majesty holds face-to-face meetings with the local sheikhs, dignitaries, members of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) and Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) as well as members of the public, all of whom are able to put their ideas and views



During his annual tours of the Sultanate His Majesty meets his people and discusses issues of concern to Oman and its citizens

directly. These meetings, which are a sort of open parliament, highlight Sultan Qaboos's strong relationship with the Omani people and the importance he attaches to their personal experiences and opinions.

Oman's guiding policy is to ensure that the fruits of progress are evenly spread across the regions, and Royal Tour discussions frequently highlight an area of local concern that benefits from his personal intervention. As well as development projects originally covered by the General State Budget, additional projects in the roads, electricity, health, education, municipal and other sectors are implemented on orders given directly by His Majesty, as a result of information gathered during his annual tours.

Seminars held in the Royal Camp during the Royal Tours have covered a variety of topics, including the employment of national manpower and the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and the regulation of its labour market. The recommendations put forward as a result of these seminars – held at the request of Sultan Qaboos – have proved successful in providing greater job opportunities for nationals and their implementation, particularly by the Omani private sector, is ongoing.

Such factors make the annual Royal Tours a unique multi-dimensional forum for His Majesty to exchange views with his people on any matter of concern to the nation and its citizens.







The Government and State Institutions



THE GOVERNMENT AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

The Basic Law and the State's Organisational Structure

The creation of a modern state with established institutions has been one of the four cornerstones of the country's development efforts over the past 39 years.

Creating the institutions of a modern state is an ongoing process. To function effectively each individual institution must develop in a series of stages which are in tune with the economic and social progress taking place in Omani society; at the same time each must satisfy the aspirations of the general public, create the conditions that will enable the country's citizens to make their own positive contributions, and ensure the integration of the state's executive and parliamentary institutions and the independence of the judiciary.

The Basic Law of the State

November 6th 2009, marks the 13th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law of the State. Instituted by Royal Decree No. 101/96, this law affirms the principles guiding state policy since Sultan Qaboos' accession in 1970 and reflects the country's determination to continue building the foundations for an ever improving future. It also reinforces Oman's international status and its role in helping to consolidate peace, security and co-operation between peoples.

As well as forming the legal frame of reference governing the functions of the different authorities and the separation of their powers, the Basic Law of the State is also the source from which the state authorities derive the principles and scope of their operations and activities. At the same time, it protects and guarantees the freedom, dignity and rights of the individual in accordance with the highest international standards.

The Basic Law of the State comprises 81 Articles, laid out in seven chapters. This document, unprecedented in Oman's history before 1996, sets out the state's system of government and the guiding principles of its policies in various spheres. It details the public rights and duties of Oman's citizens, contains provisions covering the Head of State, the Council of Ministers and the judiciary, as well as a number of specialised councils, including the Council of Oman, as well as bodies related to financial affairs. All Oman's laws are promulgated on the basis of provisions laid down by the Basic Law of the State and must not conflict with them.

Firm Principles

The Basic Law of the State lays down the firm principles on which the state and the system of government are founded. Article 1 declares: "The Sultanate of Oman is an independent, fully sovereign, Arab, Islamic state. Its capital is Muscat." Article 2 stipulates: "The state's religion is Islam

and the Islamic Sharia is the basis of legislation."

Chapter One of the Basic Law of the State defines the manner and procedures for accession. Article 5 stipulates: "The system of government is Sultani (Royal), hereditary in the male descendants of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan, provided that the one to be chosen as successor shall be a Muslim, judicious, of sound mind and a legitimate son of two Omani Muslim parents". According to Article 9: "Rule in the Sultanate shall be based on justice, shura (consultation) and equality. The citizens have the right to participate in public affairs in accordance with the Basic Statute and the conditions stipulated by the Law."

Article 59 declares: "The sovereignty of the Law shall be the basis of government in the state, and the integrity, impartiality and probity of the judiciary shall be a guarantee of rights and freedoms." The Basic Law of the State guarantees the independence of the judiciary and makes interference in a lawsuit or the affairs of justice "a crime punishable by Law."

The State's organisational structure

The State's organisational structure comprises His Majesty and a series of specialised councils, institutions and authorities:

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

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

The Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers assists His Majesty the Sultan in drawing up and implementing general state policy and is the authority responsible for ensuring that policy is implemented. In this connection the Council submits recommendations to the Sultan on economic, political, social, executive and administrative matters of concern to the government; including proposals for draft laws and decrees; methods of protecting the welfare and interests of citizens, including guaranteeing the provision of essential services and improving the economic, health and cultural standards enjoyed by the population. The Council also sets out the general goals and policies for economic, social and administrative development and proposes methods and procedures for implementing measures to ensure the efficient use of financial, economic and human resources.

Development plans prepared by the competent authorities are discussed by the Council before being submitted to the Sultan for his approval. The Council also follows up implementation of approved proposals through to completion. It monitors the progress and performance of



His Majesty chairs a meeting of the Council of Ministers



the state's administrative apparatus and liaises between its departments, while generally overseeing the efficient implementation of laws, decrees, regulations, decisions, treaties, agreements and court rulings. The Council also undertakes any other responsibilities entrusted to it by His Majesty, or assigned to it under the provisions of the Law.

The Council of Ministers has a secretariat-general to assist it in the performance of its functions, the position of Secretary-General is currently held by HE Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud bin Hareb al Busaidi.

The Council of Ministers, headed by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, includes among its members:

HH Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shihab al Said
Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan
HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said
Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers
HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq al Said
Minister of Heritage and Culture
HE Sayyid Ali bin Hamoud al Busaidi
Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court
HE General Ali bin Majid al Ma'amari
Minister of the Royal Office
HE Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Hareb
Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs
HE Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim al Busaidi
Minister of the Interior
HE Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah
Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs
HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Hinai
Minister of Justice
HE Ahmed bin Abdulnabi Macki
Minister of National Economy and Deputy Chairman of the Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council
HE Sayyid al Mutassim bin Hamoud al Busaidi
Minister of State and Governor of Muscat
HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali al Qatabi
Minister of Fisheries Wealth
HE Dr. Ali bin Mohammed bin Moosa
Minister of Health
HE Sayyid Hamood bin Faisal bin Said al Busaidi
Minister of the Environment and Climate Affairs
HE Maqbool bin Ali bin Sultan
Minister of Commerce and Industry
HE Mohammed bin Ali al Alawi
Minister of Legal Affairs

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi
Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs
HE Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhi
Minister of Oil and Gas
HE Dr. Khamis bin Mubarak al Alawi
Minister of Transport and Communications
HE Sheikh Salim bin Hilal al Khalili
Minister of Agriculture
HE Hamed bin Mohammed al Rashdi
Minister of Information
HE Yahya bin Saud al Sulaimi
Minister of Education
HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthi
Minister of Civil Service
HE Dr. Rawiyah bint Saud al Busaidiyah
Minister of Higher Education
HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Salim al Rowas
Minister of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources
HE Dr. Rajiha bint Abdulamir bin Ali
Minister of Tourism
HE Eng. Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidi
Minister of Sports Affairs
HE Dr. Sharifa bint Khalfan bin Nasser al Yahya'eah
Minister of Social Development
HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Marhoon bin Ali al Ma'amari
Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar
HE Sheikh Saif bin Mohammed bin Saif al Shabibi
Minister of Housing
HE Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal bin Saud bin Hareb al Busaidi
Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers
HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Abdullah al Bakri
Minister of Manpower

The Defence Council

The Defence Council was set up by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos under Royal Decree No. 105/96 on 28th December 1996. Headed by His Majesty, its eight members are chosen on the basis of their rank or position. The Council, which meets at the instruction of Sultan Qaboos, examines issues related to the maintenance of Oman's defence and security.

The National Security Council

Royal Decree No. 63/2003, issued on 23rd September 2003, amended the name of the National Security Committee to the National Security Council. This Council, which considers all national security related matters, holds its sessions at the direction of Sultan Qaboos, either under His

Majesty's chairmanship or that of a Minister of the Royal Office. Its members include 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 Head of the Communications and Co-ordination Department.

The Council may request the attendance of non-members as and when appropriate. It has a secretary-general appointed from the ranks of the Royal Office staff.

Article 2 of the Law on the Prevention of Terrorism, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 8/2007 on 22nd January 2007, pronounced: "The National Committee for the Prevention of Terrorism shall be restructured and its responsibilities defined by a decision of the National Security Council, and it shall operate under its supervision."

The Financial Affairs and Energy Resources Council

This Council is responsible for setting out the state's fiscal policy and all matters related to its financial and monetary system. It prepares the annual General State Budget and studies financial allocations for development projects, as well as domestic and foreign investment and funding, savings and other financial and monetary matters. Royal Decree No. 122/2007, issued on 9th December 2007, restructured the Council under His Majesty's chairmanship.

The Council's remit includes the development of energy resources and the extent of their contribution to the national economy, as well as ways of improving the efficiency with which they are utilised. The Council meets under the chairmanship of Sultan Qaboos or its Deputy Chairman.

The Supreme Judicial Council

In addition to drawing up general judicial policies, the Supreme Judicial Council ensures the independence of the judiciary and monitors its development. In this connection it oversees the work of the courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office, supervises the upgrading of the courts and the litigation process, facilitates access to legal proceedings and considers nominations for appointments or promotions in the judiciary, in cases where the law stipulates such posts shall be filled by Royal Decree. As well as proposing draft laws on judicial matters and considering and commenting on draft laws submitted by the competent authorities, it also gives its opinion on draft judicial co-operation agreements between Oman and other states. The Council also studies and comments on any other matters put before it by His Majesty.

Higher Committees, Specialised Councils and Public Authorities

Article 56 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates: "Specialised Councils shall be established, their powers defined and their members appointed in accordance with Royal Decrees." The state's administrative apparatus includes a number of Higher Committees, Specialised Councils

and Public Authorities, each of which has responsibility for managing or overseeing a specific sector, producing a comprehensive overview and, where necessary, liaising with other relevant bodies, including the ministries, with the aim of serving the public interest and ensuring efficient co-ordination between departments operating within a specific sector.

The members of the Committees, Councils and Authorities include ministers and public figures involved in the relevant fields.

The Higher Committee for Conferences

The Higher Committee for Conferences is responsible for preparing, monitoring and liaising on conferences attended by Oman - particularly those related to the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council – in co-ordination with the relevant ministries. It is chaired by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

The Supreme High Committee for the Five-year Development Plans

In accordance with Royal Decree No. 1/2006, the Supreme High Committee for the Five-year Development Plans carries out a half-yearly evaluation of the Seventh Five-year Development Plan (2006-2010). It is chaired by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and its members include the Chairmen of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) and the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura), as well as a number of ministers and undersecretaries.

During the Plan's preparation, the Committee played a vital role in translating His Majesty the Sultan's priorities for the next phase of the country's development into practical guidelines for action on the ground – a role it continues to play for the five year duration of the plan. It also takes steps to ensure proficient co-ordination between the government, the State Council and the Consultation Council, and the direction of the nation's energies towards the achievement of its goals.

The Scientific Research Council

Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree No 54/2005 on 22nd June 2005 establishing the Scientific Research Council, known as the Research Council, and defining its prerogatives. The Council regulates and encourages scientific research and provides it with material and moral support. It is the country's prime authority in this field and responsible for liaising between all the different bodies and institutions involved in this sector.

The Council prepares a comprehensive strategy and national plan for scientific research, monitors its progress and development, defines priorities, sets out and oversees a programme – or series of programmes – for implementation and supports individual creativity and research projects, as well as the publication of scientific papers. It also undertakes any other tasks related to scientific research assigned to it by His Majesty. A draft scientific research strategy has been drawn up and is ready for implementation.



The Supreme High Committee for the 7th Five-year Development Plan meets to carry out its half-yearly evaluation of the Plan's progress

The Research Council is headed by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan.

The Economic Co-ordination Council

The Economic Co-ordination Council is a government council established by Royal Decree No. 94/99, issued on 22nd November 1999. It examines all economic issues, including any problems that might adversely affect Oman's economic development – particularly where the private sector is concerned - and proposes ways of stimulating the national economy in general.

The Economic Co-ordination Council represents the government at joint meetings with the Businessmen's Council and it is responsible for any other matters entrusted to it by His Majesty the Sultan. It has a secretariat-general at the Ministry of National Economy, which reviews matters within its remit, collects data and statistics and carries out studies on related topics. It is headed by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court.

The Civil Service Council

The Civil Service Council – headed by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court - draws up the general policy for the Civil Service and considers decisions, laws and procedures designed to increase Omanisation levels and improve the performance of the state's administrative apparatus.



The Higher Education Council

The Higher Education Council, set up on 27th September 1998 under Royal Decree No. 65/98, is headed by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. It has 15 members, including the Minister of Higher Education, who acts as its Deputy Chairperson.

The Council formulates general policy for higher education and scientific research in the Sultanate's universities and higher institutes of learning. Close liaison with these institutions aids the Council in ensuring its guidelines are in line with meeting the country's developing needs and achieving its cultural, social, economic and scientific goals. The Council reviews draft laws relating to education, studies and comments on associated matters referred to it by Sultan Qaboos or the Council of Ministers, considers issues put forward by universities or relevant government departments, prepares annual reports on the state of higher education for the Council of Ministers and submits recommendations in this regard.*(Also, see page138)*

The Accreditation Council

The Accreditation Council was set up under Royal Decree No. 74/2001, issued on 27th June 2001, to complement the work of the Higher Education Council. It researches the requirements and criteria for accrediting higher education institutions and their programmes and sets out the principles for accreditation within the context of the Higher Education Council's policies, as well as laying down procedures for evaluating the performance of the higher education institutions.

Under the terms of Royal Decree No. 32/2002, issued on 27th March 2002, the Accreditation Council was restructured under the chairmanship of Dr. Hamad bin Hashim al Dhahab. It has 10 members and meets every four months *(Also, see page139).*

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Council seeks to maintain and improve the standard of university education in the Sultanate and ensure the greatest possible degree of co-ordination between SQU course disciplines, graduates and the needs of the national development plan. It is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education.

The National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

The National Commission for Education, Culture and Science was set up under Royal Decree No. 5/74, issued on 16th September 1974, and is chaired by the Minister of Education. Its responsibilities include arranging and promoting contacts between Arab, Islamic and international organisations involved in education, culture and the sciences (UNESCO, ALECSO and ISESCO) and the relevant educational, cultural and scientific Ministries and bodies in the Sultanate. It disseminates information about Oman's heritage, as well as details of its activities, at home and abroad in the educational, cultural and scientific fields. *(Also, see page 139)*

The Supreme Committee for Town Planning

The Supreme Committee for Town Planning was set up in 1985 and restructured under Royal Decree No. 123/2007, issued on 9th December 2007. Chaired by the Minister of National Economy, it draws up general town planning policies within the context of existing development plans. It monitors the implementation and development of approved planning programmes and lays down principles for valuing land expropriated by the government - under the law - for the installation of public utilities.

The Committee endeavours to resolve any practical or financial problems encountered during the implementation of approved planning procedures.

The Tender Board

The Tender Board was established on 30th April 1973 and operates under the Tender Law and Regulations, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 86/84. The Board is responsible for opening and studying bids for the award of all government tenders with a value in excess of RO250,000, including purchases and the implementation of projects, with the exception of defence contracts and other projects or tenders stipulated as exceptions in the Tender Law and Regulations.

The Board seeks to guarantee the efficient implementation of government projects and the provision of goods and materials of the highest specifications, while ensuring the best and most efficient use is made of public funds. It aims to manage government tenders in a transparent, credible, fair, objective and professional manner.

The Board has the authority to monitor the implementation of the projects referred to above through to completion and is committed to supporting national industrial products and Omanisation policies. It is headed by the Minister of Transport and Communications.

In 2008 the Board awarded 454 tenders costing a total of RO2,496,189,128. *(Also, see page 199)*

The Capital Market Authority (CMA)

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) was established as part of the restructuring of Muscat Securities Market (MSM), under the Capital Market Law in the Sultanate of Oman, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 80/98 on 9th November 1998. Its board of directors is chaired by the Minister of Commerce and Industry. The CMA plays a monitoring role aimed at ensuring the highest possible degree of transparency in Securities Market operations, thereby improving performance, increasing the protection of the interests of investors and strengthening their confidence in Market activities in the interests of investors and the national economy. *(Also, see page 206)*

The Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO)

The Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), chaired by the Minister of Legal Affairs, engages in charitable works both domestically and internationally. It provides ongoing assistance to the Palestinian people - including help in reconstructing the Gaza Strip - as well as to numerous other needy causes, and it offers help in coping with accidents and disasters affecting individuals and communities, such as victims of tsunami, earthquakes and famines. At home the OCO supports social welfare projects and programmes for children, orphans, the disabled, the elderly and other people in need.

The State Audit Institution

The State Audit Institution was established under Royal Decree No. 95/99, issued on 22nd November 1999, as a financially and administratively independent body to replace the State Audit Secretariat-General. It is headed by HE Sayyid Abdulla bin Hamad bin Saif al Busaidi.

The Institution is an active member in the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), which operates as an umbrella organisation for the external government audit community worldwide. The INTOSAI aims to promote development in matters relating to cash and trade transfer knowledge. In keeping with INTOSAI's motto, *"Experientia mutua omnibus prodest"*, the exchange of experience among INTOSAI members, their shared findings and insights, are a guarantee that global government auditing continuously progresses with new developments.

Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI)

The Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI), established under Royal Decree No. 24/2003 on 3rd March 2003, is an independent legal entity under the supervision of the Diwan of Royal Court. It aims to safeguard, promote and develop Oman's traditional craft heritage and ensure its craft industries continue to thrive and attract new generations of artisans.

HE Sheikha Aisha bint Khalfan bin Jamayel al Siyabiyah – the first Omani woman to hold ministerial rank – is the chairperson of PACI.

The Authority issued a set of regulations for the craft sector as part of its craft conservation strategy. It stages a nationwide craft competition and 3rd March has been designated as Omani Crafts Day. Oman's traditional crafts have been documented and registered and their production and marketing techniques are constantly being upgraded. *(Also, see page 190)*

The Information Technology Authority (ITA)

The Information Technology Authority (ITA), established under Royal Decree No. 52/2006 on 31st May 2006, comes under the jurisdiction of the Minister of National Economy. It is a financially and administratively independent legal entity.

The Decree transferred all the functions and operations of the National Information Technology (IT) Committee, set up in 1998, to the ITA

The Authority is the body responsible for implementing the Digital Oman Strategy, through the creation of an integrated infrastructure to ensure the effective provision of e-government services for government departments, the business sector and the public. Its website address is: www.ita.gov.om.

The National IT Strategy was launched in May 2003 and Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) was opened at Al Rusayl Industrial Estate in September the same year.*(Also, see page 213)*

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) was established under Royal Decree No. 30/2002, issued on 12th March 2002 to regulate the telecommunications sector. It is a financially and administratively independent legal entity based in Muscat and funded from the public purse.

The TRA aims to ensure telecommunications services are available in every part of the country. It is responsible for implementing the approved policies for the telecommunications sector in line with the provisions of the Telecommunications Regulatory Law and – in co-ordination with the competent authorities - for ensuring compliance with international telecommunications agreements, to which Oman is party, and the decisions of international and regional organisations of which the Sultanate is a member. The Authority is headed by the Minister of Transport and Communications.

Article 5 of the Telecommunications Regulatory Law states: "The surveillance and monitoring of telecommunications is not permitted; nor is it permitted to disclose their contents, delay them or seize them unless they contain material which is in breach of public order or morality or violates the rights of others..."

The Electricity and Related Water Regulatory Authority

The Electricity and Related Water Regulatory Authority was established under Royal Decree No. 78/2004, issued on 20th July 2004. Based in the Governorate of Muscat, it is responsible for regulating the electricity and related water sector in accordance with the Law.

The Authority is a financially and administratively independent legal entity. It seeks to ensure the provision of electricity and related water services throughout the country and protect the interests of consumers – particularly those on limited incomes, the sick and the elderly. It is involved in facilitating the privatisation of the electricity and related water sector in the Sultanate, while keeping a keen eye on safeguarding the interests of the rural community and ensuring the efficient supply of electricity services to them.

The Authority is responsible for implementing the sector's general policy and preparing plans and programmes for developing it. It is headed by an executive director selected from among its members by the Council of Ministers. Every aspect of the Authority's operations is regulated by the Law and its funds considered public. *(Also, see page 243)*

The Oman Medical Speciality Board (OMSB)

The Oman Medical Speciality Board (OMSB) was set up under the terms of Royal Decree No. 31/2006, issued on 2nd April 2006. It is responsible for ensuring doctors in the Sultanate's hospitals are trained and qualified in line with the latest scientific advances in healthcare. Royal Decree No. 103/2006, issued on 2nd October 2006, appointed Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Salim al Futaisi as its Chief Executive Officer.

National Records and Archive Authority

Established by Royal Decree No. 60/2007 on 2nd July 2007, the Authority organises and manages records and archives. It is affiliated to the Council of Ministers and enjoys legal personality and administrative and financial independence.

Royal Decree No. 81/2008 issued on 14th June 2008 appointed HE Dr Hamed bin Mohamed al Dawyani to run this Authority. *(Also, see page 190)*

OMANI SHURA (CONSULTATION)

Over the past three decades Shura (consultation) in Oman has become an established institution, transformed from a traditional form of consultative process to the modern-style bicameral system laid down in the Basic Law of the State.Oman was the first Arab Gulf Co-operation Council state to adopt such a system.

The Council of Oman comprises the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla), whose members are appointed by Sultan Qaboos, and the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura), members, elected by the public to represent their respective wilayats.

The Consultation Council, set up in 1991, has had women members since its second term in 1995. The State Council, established in 1997, included women members from the start of its first term.

The two Councils continue to see their powers expand in parallel with growing popular involvement in their affairs and activities (including the Consultation Council elections – last held in October 2007 – and both Councils' day-to-day activities). In addition to developing ties with other Arab and international parliamentary bodies and associations, both the State Council and the Consultation Council play an increasingly vigorous role in responding to matters of public concern.

The Omani consultation process offers an effective channel for involving the public in shaping and directing the country's development, while its institutions have an important part to play in reinforcing the country's relations with the outside world.

The Council of Oman (Majlis Oman)

The Council of Oman (Majlis Oman) consists of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) and the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) and its members comprise the members of both these bodies. It meets at the invitation of His Majesty to study and discuss matters raised by him. Its decisions are taken by majority vote.

Sultan Qaboos opens the Council of Oman's annual session – which marks the beginning of the yearly sessions of the State and Consultation Councils – with a speech that defines the course and priorities for national action and sets out guidelines for the state's authorities and institutions.

In his speech on 11th November 2008 at the inauguration of the Council of Oman's annual session in Al Khuwair, His Majesty pointed out that the development of human resources was a cornerstone of Oman's sustainable development. The Sultanate, he noted, was providing "everything to help create the right conditions for the development and training of human resources, and for offering young people the opportunities to acquire an education that will enable them to gain useful knowledge, as well as the expertise and technical skills needed by the labour market and required by the sustainable development programmes."

Sultan Qaboos referred to the importance of information technology (IT) and telecommunications and the need for a national strategy for developing the potential and skills of Omanis in these fields.

On the impact of the global financial crisis, His Majesty noted that the policies Oman has followed over the past years had "helped our economy to avoid many of the worst effects of that situation." Development and construction will continue in accordance with the approved plans, Sultan Qaboos confirmed, alongside the drive to diversify Oman's sources of income, examine methods of exploiting alternative energy sources and achieving food security.

In response to His Majesty's call for closer co-operation between the

Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman, the two Councils held a meeting on 31st May 2009.

The State Council (Majlis A'Dawla)

The State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) plays a vital role in the social, economic and political development of Omani society. It carries out objective, in-depth studies of a range of issues, in accordance with the principle of championing the ideas and opinions of Sultan Qaboos. With the broad range and high level of experience and expertise its members have to offer, the Council provides a major platform for public participation in the nation's consultation process.

The State Council is a financially and administratively independent legal entity based in the Governorate of Muscat.

Prerogatives

The State Council (Majlis A'Dawla)'s powers and prerogatives, as defined in Article 18 of Royal Decree No. 86/97 on the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman), include: reviewing draft-laws before promulgation, with the exception of draft laws submitted directly to His Majesty for promulgation; preparing studies and submitting proposals to assist in the implementation of development plans and programmes; solving economic and social problems, encouraging investment and developing human resources while improving the performance of administrative departments. The State Council also studies and comments on topics referred to it by Sultan Qaboos or the Council of Ministers; submits its recommendations and prepares an annual report for His Majesty on the Council's activities.

Membership

The Chairman and members of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) are appointed by Royal Decree. Members include former ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors, senior judges and senior officers, as well as distinguished men of science and culture, dignitaries, businessmen and others selected by Sultan Qaboos. The number of State Council members must not exceed the number of members of the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura); in 2009 it had 72 members, including 14 women.

According to the law, State Council members must be nationals of Omani origin, not less than 40 years of age, well qualified and of good reputation. With the exception of people with recognised expertise in the fields of science, literature or culture, or university professors, membership of the State Council may not be combined with either membership of the Consultation Council, or public office.

Membership of the State Council is for a period of four years and is renewable. The Chairman is HE Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Mantheri.



There are currently 72 members of the State Council, including 14 women

Sessions and bodies

The State Council (Majlis A'Dawla), currently in its fourth term (2008-2011), has an annual session of not less than eight months duration, beginning from the inauguration of the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman). The Council Office determines the number of sittings on the basis of the topics and draft laws referred to it, or subjects proposed by its standing committees and approved by the Council Office. The Council Chairman can summon extraordinary sittings if required.

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

The State Council Chairman oversees the work of the Council, represents it in its dealings with other organisations and speaks on its behalf. He has two deputies chosen by direct ballot at the beginning of each Council term.

The Council Office draws up the Council's timetable and decides on sittings, the work of its committees and the rules for running and co-ordinating their operations. It also manages Council business between annual sessions. The standing committees study draft laws and topics referred to them, as well as other matters approved by the Council Office. The State Council has five committees – Legal, Economic, Social, Human Resources Development and the Committee for Monitoring the Implementation

of Development Plans. The Secretariat-General has an organisational and administrative function and assists the Council and its bodies in the exercise of their responsibilities.

The State Council is currently debating several draft laws and studying a number of topics directly related to economic and social development. They include –draft income tax, food safety laws and studies on the investment climate in the Sultanate, future food security, and general education and employment issues.

The State Council continues to build on friendly relations with other Arab and international parliamentary bodies through exchange visits. The Council Chairman, HE Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh Al Mantheri, visited the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republics of Yemen and Belarus. Meanwhile, numerous Arab and European parliamentary delegations travelled to Oman for talks with State Council delegations.

The National Committee for Human Rights

Royal Decree No. 124/2008, issued on 15th November 2008, established the National Committee for Human Rights and defined its prerogatives. The Committee, which comes under the jurisdiction of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla), is a legal entity with operational independence based in the city of Muscat.

The Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura)

2009, the year of the second session of the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura)'s sixth term, was particularly significant for the Council and for the consultative process in Oman in general.

The Council has been increasingly active in terms of debate on the draft laws and other topics, as well as in its discussions with ministers. It has also hosted other senior officials for discussions on a range of subjects.

The Council has increased the level of its participation in Gulf, Arab and international parliamentary bodies and its support for nurturing good relations, dialogue and common interests between peoples.

On 13th October 2008 the Consultation Council joined the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) after the Union's 183 members unanimously approved the Sultanate's admission to the organisation. From 7th to 9th March 2009 Oman hosted the Arab Inter Parliamentary Union (AIPU)'s 15th conference in Muscat. In April 2009 the Sultanate was elected deputy chair of the Arab Transitional Parliament.

The creation of the Consultation Council in 1991, was considered a highly significant step along the road of Oman's democratic development. The new Council replaced the old State Consultative Council, which had been in operation for 10 years (1981-1991).

The Consultation Council's members, who represent the country's wilayats, are elected in general elections by the Omani electorate, which

includes all Omanis over the age of 21. The latest Consultation Council elections were on 27th October 2007, when members were elected as representatives for the Council's sixth term (2008-2011).

Women members were represented on the Consultation Council from 1994 to the end of the Council's fifth term (2004-2007), however, none were successful in the sixth term elections, although 21 women, out of a total of 631 candidates, were put forward.

Greater co-ordination and integration

Co-ordination and integration between the executive, parliamentary and other state institutions are among the most distinctive features of a modern state. In this connection, the Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) provides a bridge between people and government, and offers the public an opportunity to take part in the decision-making process.

Meetings and discussion between various committees, councils and other associated bodies are frequent and ongoing.

The Consultation Council is a financially and administratively independent legal entity based in the Governorate of Muscat. Its chairman – HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Isa'ee – was appointed to the post under Royal Decree No. 88/2007, issued on 9th September 2007.

Prerogatives

The Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) plays an increasingly active role in preparing the Sultanate's development plans and monitoring their implementation.

According to the law and in its capacity as a partner of the government, the Council enjoys numerous powers and prerogatives, including:

- Reviewing draft laws before promulgation, with the exception of those submitted directly by the Council of Ministers to Sultan Qaboos for promulgation
- Debating economic and social laws currently in force, proposing amendments, where appropriate with the aim of upgrading where necessary.
- Helping prepare the draft Five-year Development Plans. The Council's chairman is a member of the Supreme High Committee for the Five-Year Development Plans, which decides upon principal features and guidelines and subsequently monitors implementation
- Debating the draft Five-Year Plan and the draft General State Budget - in the presence of the Minister of National Economy. The Council refers draft laws it has debated, together with its recommendations, to the Council of Ministers.
- Studying and commenting on topics referred to it by Sultan Qaboos or the Council of Ministers. The chairman also submits an annual report on the Council's activities to His Majesty the Sultan

Membership

At the present time the Consultation Council (Majlis A'shura) has 84 members who represent the Sultanate's 61 wilayats. They are elected by the public in general elections. Twenty-three of the wilayats, with populations of 30,000 or more, are represented by two members, while the remaining 38 wilayats, with populations below 30,000, are represented by a single member.

The size of the population of each wiliyat is determined at the beginning of each Council term, by a Ministry of Interior decision. The winning candidates are those who obtain the highest number of votes at the official polls. The Council's 84 members during its sixth term (2008-2011) were elected in the general election of 27th October 2007.

Citizens – male and female – have the right to stand for membership of the Consultation Council provided that they are nationals of Omani origin as defined by law. Candidates must be not less than 30 years old and of good social standing and reputation. They must not have been convicted of any criminal offence, indecency or dishonesty, although allowances can be made for those who have erred but been rehabilitated. All candidates must have a reasonable standard of education and appropriate practical experience. Membership of the Council is for a period of four years and renewable on re-election. A member may not combine membership of the Consultation Council with membership of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) or public office.

Sessions and bodies

Each Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) term is for four years, beginning from the date on which the official results of the general election are announced, and ending on 30th September of the fourth year. The Council's sixth term will end on 30th September 2011.

The Consultation Council's annual session runs for eight months a year, enabling it to hold sittings to debate and study topics, draft laws and other matters of concern.

The Council exercises its powers and prerogatives through the Council's Chairman, the Council Office, the Council committees and the Secretariat-General.

The Chairman of the Consultation Council oversees the Council's activities, represents it in dealings with other bodies and organisations and speaks on its behalf. He also has the right to summon an extraordinary sitting if required. He has two deputies who are elected from among Council members.

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

The Council's five standing committees are: Legal, Economic, Health

and Social Affairs, Education and Culture and the Services and Local Community Development Committee. Special ad hoc committees and working groups are formed from time to time, with responsibility for specific sectors such as tourism, the employment of national manpower, food security or special development projects, and dissolved when they when they have fulfilled their purpose.

The Secretariat-General consists of a secretary-general appointed by Royal Decree, together with one other member of staff. It assists the Consultation Council and its bodies in exercising their prerogatives and is responsible for all relevant organisational and administrative matters.



Operations and activities

The Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura) exercises its functions and prerogatives along parliamentary lines. It hosts ministers from the service sectors, who deliver statements on behalf of their ministries and replies to members' questions in open debates. These debates, which are published in the media, provide citizens with the opportunity to see how the government operates and how the Council contributes to the country's development and the decision-making process.

The Consultation Council also raises questions and requests debates with ministers on matters of public interest such as inflation, how to deal with the global financial crisis, government investments and other topics of public interest.

Outside experts are frequently invited to assist the Council when it is engaged in studying a particular subject or field requiring specific expertise, and this creates a link between the Council and other state institutions.

The Minister of National Economy, who is also the supervisor of the Ministry of Finance, attended the debate at the Council on the draft General State Budget in November 2008, and again the following month, in response to a request for a debate on the effects of the global economic crisis on Oman's national economy.

In May 2009 he attended a closed sitting to discuss government investments. Between November 2008 and the end of April 2009 the Ministers of Commerce and Industry, Education, Higher Education, Agriculture and Housing all delivered statements on behalf of their ministries in open



Members of the Consultation Council, are elected by the Omani people

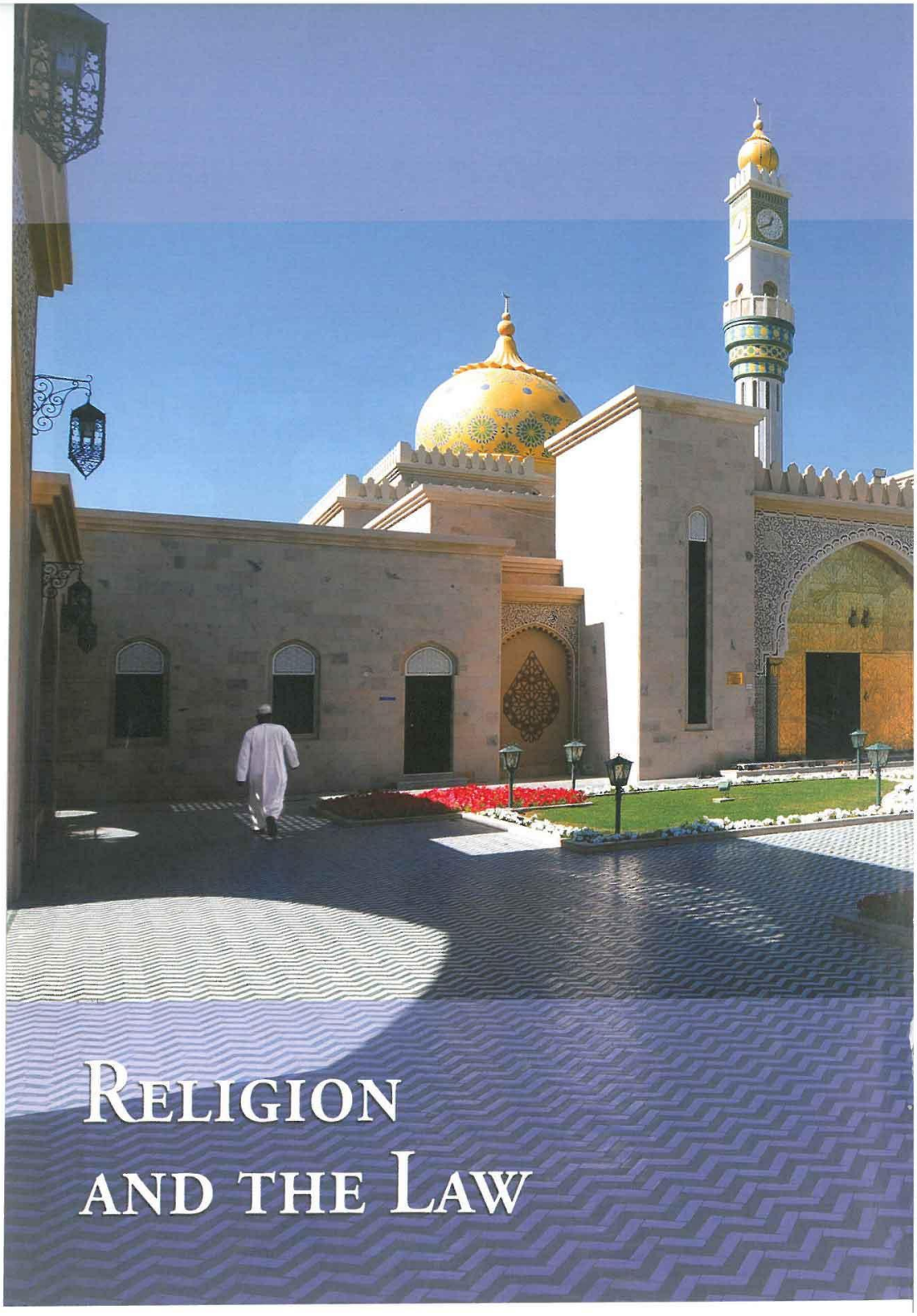
sittings, followed by open debates.

The Council approved proposed amendments to the Law on the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Water Sector on 26th May 2009 and studies are underway.

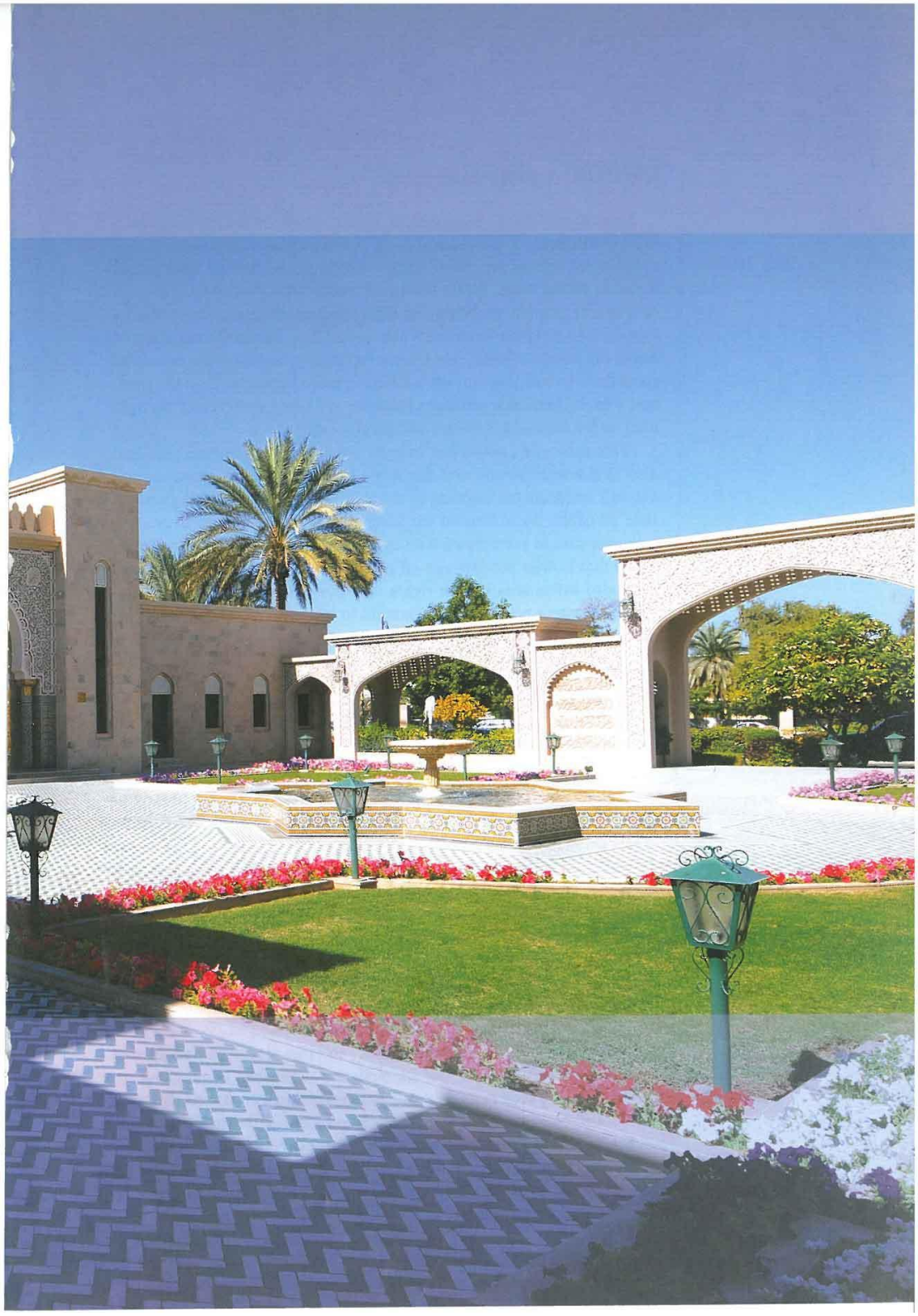
In new moves to extend co-operation, co-ordination and contacts with parliamentary institutions in other countries, the Council restructured its parliamentary friendship associations with the Republic of Yemen and the Islamic Republic of Iran and established parliamentary friendship associations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the Kingdom of Morocco.

The Sultanate also hosted the meeting of heads of Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (AGCC) Shura, national and parliamentary councils in December 2008 and, in the same month, hosted the third regional conference of Gulf women parliamentarians and women in political decision-making positions in the AGCC states.

These and other activities are designed to strengthen Omani ties with other nations and enable the Consultation Council to play a bigger role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between the Gulf states, peoples of the region and the wider world, while highlighting the steady development of the Sultanate's democratic process.



Religion and the Law



RELIGION AND THE LAW

Omani people are recognised as diplomatic and peace-loving, which has helped them in developing good relations with other cultures and civilisations across the globe – from China in the east to Europe and America in the west. While historically they have eschewed all forms of religious extremism, Islam and life's spiritual dimension has played a significant part in the Sultanate's nation-building. Sultan Qaboos pointed out to his people: "States that have no spiritual foundation are devoid of substance. In building nations, nothing is more important than the spiritual side. It is this that produces cohesion and unity, and creates the right climate for tolerance, security and good conduct."

This principle applies not only to intellectual and cultural life, but also to the legal sphere and the Basic Law of the State guarantees all Oman's residents the freedom to worship and practice their religion. Article 28 of the Basic Law of the State affirms: "the freedom to practice religious rites in accordance with established custom is guaranteed, provided that it does not infringe on public order or decency." The Basic Law also safeguards human rights. Moreover, Oman's Personal Status Law guarantees non-Muslims the right to implement the provisions that are applicable to them, insofar as they do not constitute an infringement of Omani traditions, as laid down in Article 282 of the Law.

There are several houses of worship in the Sultanate where followers of other religions can practice their religious rites in freedom and safety and with the protection of the law.

On the dangers of a bigoted approach to understanding religion, the Sultanate has warned this can only result in "backwardness, violence and intolerance in Muslim societies. In fact this has nothing to do with Islamic thinking, which rejects immoderation and forbids extremism." Years ago – before the waves of extremism and violence began to sweep through some Islamic states and societies, and certain other countries as well – Oman stressed the need to keep abreast of the modern age by adopting "an Islamic intellectual approach based on modern interpretative judgments that are also fully compatible with the principles of the Faith. Such an approach should be capable of showing the world the true face of Islam and the essence of its immortal Sharia – which is suitable for every time and place - while also offering appropriate solutions to the problems that preoccupy today's Islamic societies."

Oman has not been content merely to issue warnings and appeals. The steps it has taken to put its moderate views and convictions into practice can be seen in its domestic policies and in its relations with other states and peoples, including its efforts to reconcile the different Islamic schools of thought and promote a dialogue between Muslim scholars, as well as between Muslims and scholars of other faiths. These initiatives are designed to present a true picture of Islam and refute the false no-



His Majesty joins the Eid Prayer at Sohar in 2008

tions being spread about it – some of which are the result of a deliberate campaign, while others are based on simple ignorance and misunderstanding.

Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture

The Sultanate's Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs plays an important role in promoting a proper understanding of the Islamic faith and safeguarding Oman's heritage and traditions. The Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture (SQCIC), which is attached to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, co-ordinates its activities in conjunction with the Ministry and is a pivotal player in promoting dialogue, cultural contact and understanding of Islamic civilisation in its broadest sense.

The SQCIC stages lectures by international scholars, intellectuals and academics and takes part in seminars and symposiums. In 2007, it organised seven lectures by academics and scholars at American and European universities. During the same year the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs attended 26 seminars, conferences and forums in European, Arab and other Islamic countries. *(Also, see page 184)*

The Omani Holy Quran

The Omani Holy Quran, both printed and electronic versions were launched on 8th September 2008 by the Minister of Heritage and Cul-

ture. The work, which took 12 years to complete, was prepared by calligraphers Omar Kamal Al Qudusi of Egypt and Omanis Salem bin Khalfan Al Balushi and Mohammed Bin Qasim Al Qasmi.

Cultural interaction

A series of annual seminars on the development of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) sciences in Oman began in 2002. The latest - a seminar in April 2009 on the future of Islamic *fiqh* –highlighted the importance of keeping abreast of modern civilisation, while remaining faithful to the eternal truths and universal values of the Islamic religion. The seminar was attended by 35 scholars, intellectuals and academics from the Sultanate and representatives of 14 Arab, Islamic and foreign countries.

Oman encourages intellectual and cultural contacts with other societies. Sultan Qaboos academic chairs exist in several leading American, European, Australian and Asian universities to promote the study of Arab and Islamic civilisation and relations between the Islamic and Arab worlds and other societies. The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in Washington D.C. is particularly active in fostering greater understanding between the Omani and American peoples. In February 2009 the Centre took part in the Arabesque Festival in the American capital.

The foundation stone for the Lebanese-Omani Cultural Centre was laid in Beirut in 2009, also in February. On completion, the Centre will be a beacon of intellectual and cultural interaction and understanding between peoples in the region and beyond, reflecting Oman's own approach to such matters.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs services are available via the internet. As well as publishing its quarterly magazine "Al Tasamuh" (Tolerance), which promotes respect for different ideas and points of view, the Ministry provides Hajj services and Friday sermons, as well as information about mosque programmes and the Holy Qur'an memorisation schools that come under its jurisdiction. There are over 13,950 mosques in Oman.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs provides welfare services for Omani pilgrims during the Hajj season and supervises various religious schools and summer centres across the country. It also invests *Awqaf* (endowments) and *Bait al Mal* (treasury) funds in productive projects and provides facilities for the collection and distribution of *Zakat.*

As well as promoting awareness of the true nature of Islam, the Office of His Eminence the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate also issues Sharia *fatwas* (religious opinions) and represents the Sultanate at Islamic conferences and religious events. The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs oversees the Institute of Sharia Sciences, which trains imams and preachers and grants degrees in Sharia Sciences (*fiqh* and preaching). It also produces books on religious subjects, as well as copies of the Holy Quran and related publications.



A seminar on Islamic jurisprudence highlighted the importance of keeping abreast of modern civilization, while remaining faithful to the values of the Islamic religion

The Law and Access to Legal Proceedings

The Omani judiciary's main qualities are impartiality and justice; these are guaranteed by Article 59 of the Basic Law of the State, which stipulates: "The sovereignty of the Law is the basis of governance in the State. Rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the dignity of the judiciary and the probity and impartiality of the judges."

Oman's judiciary's practices and goals are inspired by the values of justice, equality, pride in being part of one nation and respect for the rights that go with it.

This is true of the courts and of the conciliation and settlement committees, which offer a simple and straightforward alternative system, based on Omani tradition for resolving disputes and enabling litigants to obtain their just dues by mutual consent. Article 60 of the Basic Law of the State stipulates: "Judicial power is independent and vested in the Courts of Law, of whatever type or status, which issue judgments in accordance with the Law."

Article 61 states: "There is no power over the judges in their rulings except the Law. Judges can only be dismissed in cases specified by the Law. No party may interfere in a law suit or in matters of justice; such interference shall be a crime punishable by law."

The rights of individual citizens are protected in accordance with the highest international standards. An accused person is considered in-

nocent until proven guilty in a legal trial in which all guarantees are put in place to ensure his right of defence under the Law. No accused person may be subjected to physical or psychological abuse, and there can be no crime and no punishment except in accordance with the Law, before which all citizens are equal. These and other safeguards are covered under the provisions of Articles 17 to 27 of the Basic Law of the State.

Sultan Qaboos, who has stressed that "the implementation of justice is imperative and that there must be no deviation from it," has established a Supreme Judicial Council, of which he is head. In addition to this, laws have been promulgated on the Judicial Authority, the Legal Profession, the Public Prosecution Office, Civil and Commercial Procedures, Notary Public Offices, General Mobilisation and the Imposition of a State of Emergency. Meanwhile, Royal Decree No. 126/2008, issued on 23rd November 2008, promulgated the Law on the Prevention of Human Trafficking, and Royal Decree No. 124/2008 stipulated the establishment of the National Committee on Human Rights which is affiliated to the Majlis A'Dawla and which has an autonomous legal character.

In a move to facilitate access to judicial proceedings and ensure justice and the rule of Law is available to all, citizens on limited incomes are now exempted from litigation fees by order of His Majesty.

The Law on Conciliation and Settlement, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 58/2005, provides for the formation of conciliation and settlement committees in various parts of the country, thereby lightening the burden on the judicial system. The committees provide a channel for settling civil, commercial or personal status disputes within the context of Omani custom and enable litigants to reach a settlement by mutual consent without recourse to the full judicial process. Each of the Sultanate's 33 conciliation and settlement committees is headed by a judge and its members appointed on the basis of a decision by the Minister of Justice, who is also the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council.

Infrastructural Projects

Work is approaching completion on infrastructural projects such as the construction and renovation of court complexes, notary-public offices and premises for the Public Prosecution Offices. Working practices at the courts are being modernised, regular training programmes are being run for judges and steps are being taken to provide easier access to judicial proceedings for members of the public.

In May 2009 an agreement was signed for the construction of Muscat Court Complex, which will cover an area of around 50,000 square metres; this project follows the opening of the new court complexes in Ibri and Ibra in 2007. Similar facilities will be built at Sohar, Buraimi, Rustaq and Nizwa. Work has been completed on the new Court of Appeal building in the Salalah Court Complex and the Supreme Judiciary



The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Bausher, one of the largest mosques in the Islamic world. Along with the adjoining Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture, it promotes dialogue, cultural contact and understanding of the Islamic civilization

Institute in Nizwa will open soon. The Institute will graduate and train judicial and legal personnel to the levels required by the Sultanate's courts.

The Judicial System

Over the years the Sultanate has developed an integrated judicial system. All legal, organisational and administrative structures are in place. The Ministry of Justice supervises ongoing efforts to simplify procedures, improve staff performance levels, construct and maintain modern facilities and introduce better working practices and systems, including more user-friendly databases.

The Judicial Authority Law regulates Omani courts and defines their functions and jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of the military courts is limited to offences committed by members of the armed forces and security forces and – under the terms of the Law - does not extend to other categories.

The Omani court system is as follows:

The Supreme Court

The Supreme Court, based in Muscat, is the highest court in the land. Headed by Sheikh Ishaq bin Ahmed al Busaidi, it rules on the extent to

which laws and regulations comply with the Basic Law of the State and its provisions. In its supervisory capacity, it ensures the correct implementation of the Law by the courts and rules on appeals filed before it.

The Supreme Court has a technical office, which extrapolates legal principles from the Court's rulings and issues collected legal rulings in classified form. It also produces a periodical devoted to judicial matters and legal research. The President of the Supreme Court heads the judiciary's Administrative Affairs Council, responsible for considering every aspect of personnel affairs. A Directorate-General of Judicial Inspection comprises judges from the Supreme Court and the Courts of Appeal.

The Courts of First Instance

The Courts of First Instance – the first court level – are responsible for ruling on civil and commercial cases, requests for arbitration, personal status cases and general, labour, tax, rent and other cases within their jurisdiction under the terms of the Law.

Criminal circuits are set up under the jurisdiction of some of the Courts of First Instance on the basis of a decision given by the Minister of Justice. The circuits deal with specialised cases and other categories as laid down by the Law. The Judicial Authority Law regulates the work of the different courts.

The Courts of Appeal

The Courts of Appeal - situated in Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Ibra and Ibri - consider disputed rulings delivered by the Courts of First Instance. The Appeal Court circuit consists of three judges. Additional Appeal Courts are to be established in Buraimi and Rustaq.

The Notary-Public Departments

The Notary-Public Departments, which are covered by their own law promulgated under Royal Decree No. 40/2003, play a vital role in safeguarding rights and entitlements and ensuring that working practices and legal transactions are conducted in a smooth and efficient manner. The Departments produce documents and deeds, attest signatures, confirm the dates on unofficial documents and papers and produce marriage documents, divorce certificates, widowhood confirmation documents and other papers. There are around 60 Notary-Public Departments in different parts of the country. They are independent departments and can be found in all the former Sharia courts.

The Administrative Court

The Administrative Court rules on administrative disputes. It hears claims filed by civil servants against their departments and deals with other cases within its jurisdiction, ensuring all public sector employees

and departments receive their just entitlements under the terms of the Law.

The State Security Court

The State Security Court is an independent judicial body operating under the State Security Court Law promulgated by Royal Decree No. 64/2003, issued on 23rd September 2003. It is headed by Sayyid Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidi, State Advisor for Justice Affairs.

The Public Prosecution Office

The Public Prosecution Office is responsible for bringing general cases on behalf of society and oversees law enforcement in the different regions of the Sultanate. Its powers include the authority to enforce criminal laws, pursue the guilty and implement rulings under the Law. The Public Prosecution Office Law was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 92/2001. It employs highly qualified male and female Omani personnel and enjoys the benefits of advanced technology. The Public Prosecution Office in the wilayat of Barka has had a woman director of administration since April 2008.

Legal Affairs

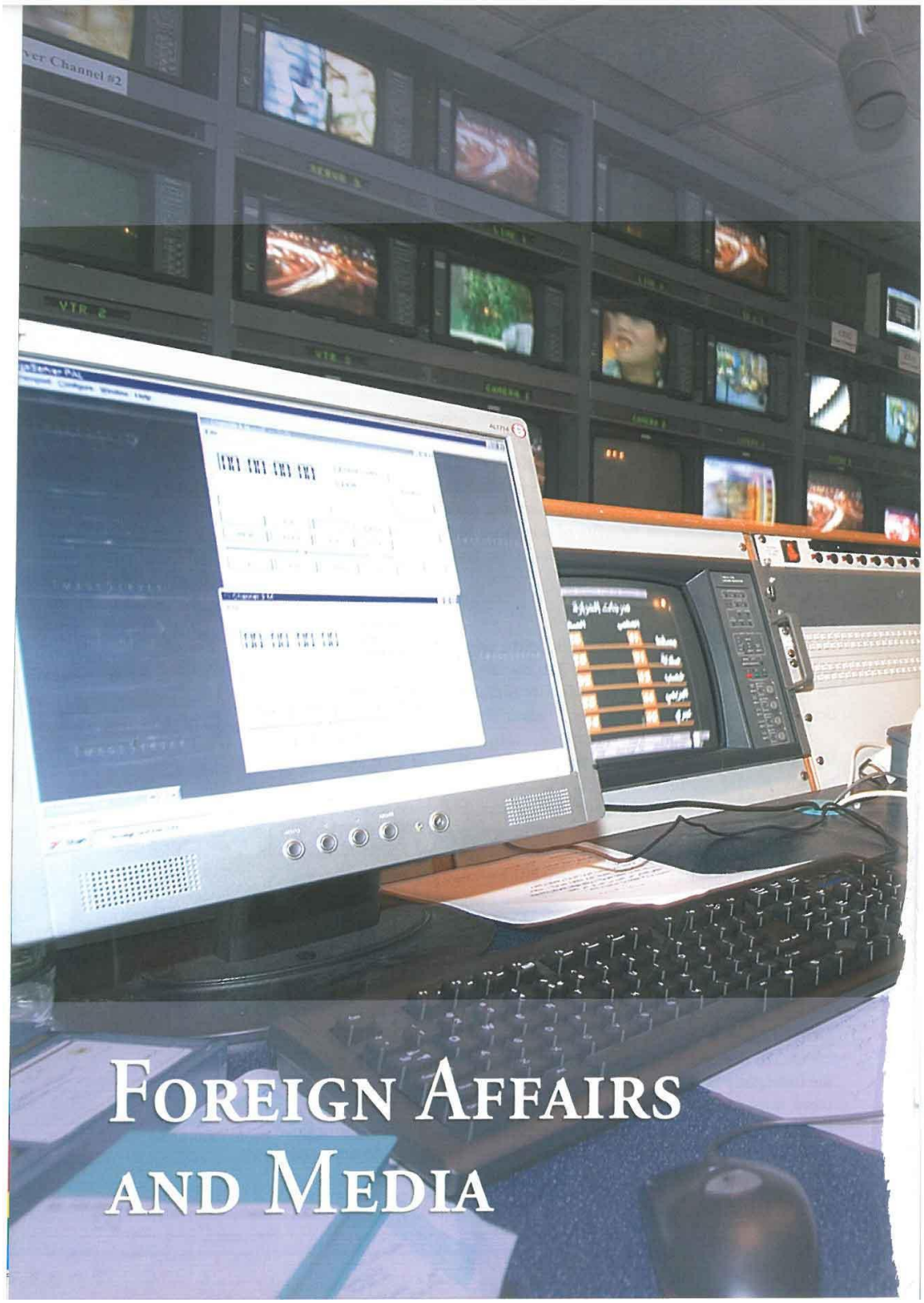
The Ministry of Legal Affairs reflects the importance Oman attaches to the rule of law in the Sultanate. The country's legal system is based on Royal Decrees issued by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, which in turn derive their authority from the Basic Law of the State.

These decrees promulgate laws regulating to various aspects of the life in the community and the rights of its members, as well as the activities of, and relations between, the different state institutions. The Ministry of Legal Affairs prepares and revises draft laws, drafts Royal Decrees, international agreements and contracts in which the Omani government is one of the involved parties. It also gives legal opinions and advice on matters put before it by other ministries and government departments.

The Ministry gives legal opinions and officially approved interpretations of Royal Decrees, laws, decisions and regulations when circumstances demand, while protecting government interests in disputes arising out of the implementation of contracts.

Official Gazette

On the first and 16th days of each solar month the Ministry publishes the fortnightly "Official Gazette", containing the official versions of decrees, laws, ministerial decisions and regulations issued in the Sultanate. It also compiles, collates and publishes annually, bound volumes of the "Official Gazette", as well as a guide to Royal Decrees, decisions and laws in book and CD form, which are available at local bookshops.



Foreign Affairs and Media



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Sultanate's character and history are reflected in its policies and relations with other states around the world; the main features of which are discretion, candour and openness. Such credentials have given Oman added weight and effectiveness in its efforts to bolster peace and stability in the Gulf, the Arab region and the wider world. At the same time, its foreign policy is an important instrument for promoting development within its own borders.

In his speech at the annual opening of the Council of Oman on 11th November 2008, Sultan Qaboos said: "We live in a world of overlapping and interconnected interests and policies, and our co-operation with this world is based on the Sultanate's higher interests and designed to help promote security and prosperity across the globe. These policies have earned our country the respect and admiration of the international community. Co-operation and mutual interests between states within a framework of harmony and peace is of vital importance . . . and our membership of the different international and regional blocs has the sole purpose of contributing positively and effectively to anything and everything that can bring benefits to humanity."

Strengthening Gulf co-operation

The special relationship between the Sultanate and its fellow member states of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (AGCC) and the Republic of Yemen is based on the strong ties between them, the roots of which extend far back into their common history, and also on the common interests and aspirations which they all share for both the present day and the future.

Over the past four decades – both before and after the AGCC Council was established - the Sultanate has sought to reinforce and expand co-operation between the member states and has worked tirelessly to develop ties with the neighbouring Republic of Yemen, creating opportunities for its closer integration into the AGCC. At the same time, it seeks to establish the warmest possible relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran, across the waters of the Gulf, for the sake of the stability and security of the Gulf littoral states.

Sultan Qaboos underlined this point when he stressed: "We want our region to be far from the disasters of wars...We want it to advance along the road of development, to reap the benefits of its cash surpluses and enjoy prosperity, stability and progress. All this can be achieved on a principle of simple reciprocity, according to which we respect the interests of others in the same way that we expect them to respect our own. In such a situation, the only thing peoples will hear will be hymns of peace."

On 29-30 December 2008, Muscat hosted the 29th AGCC Summit under the chairmanship of Sultan Qaboos. Its final communiqué and the

Muscat Declaration, issued by the Summit, marked a new step forward in the Council's efforts to promote further integration between states. The Monetary Union Agreement and the Monetary Council's basic statute were approved - with Oman reserving its position on this question – along with the updated security strategy. Additionally, AGCC states were urged to take effective measures to deal with the impact of the global financial crisis.

The Muscat Declaration focused on issues of human and environmental importance and Sultan Qaboos reinforced Oman's commitment by donating funds for an award for related activities in the AGCC states, as a means of raising the profile of these vital sectors. The Muscat Summit also made further progress in broadening the Republic of Yemen's involvement, by making it a member of two additional AGCC bodies and affirming the importance of supporting Yemeni development efforts, within a bilateral as well as a collective framework.

Reflecting the Sultanate's close relations with fellow AGCC member states, His Majesty visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in May 2008 and the State of Qatar in August 2008. Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, visited the Sultanate in May 2009 and His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, attended the AGCC Emergency Summit in Riyadh on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan in January 2009 and the 11th AGCC states' Consultation Summit in Riyadh in May 2009.

On 4th August 2009 Sultan Qaboos embarked on a three day official visit to Iran, accompanied by a high-ranking delegation, following an invitation extended by the Islamic Republic's President Dr Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. The two leaders discussed the strong historical relations between their neighbouring countries in the context of improving and strengthening them. The visit was in keeping with His Majesty's strong desire to cement principles of good neighbourliness and relations between the Omani and Iranian peoples and all peoples of the region.

As chair of the AGCC Supreme Council's current term, Oman hosted the 19th joint meeting of AGCC foreign ministers and their European Union counterparts in April 2009. Several bilateral visits took place between the Sultanate, the AGCC states, the Republic of Yemen and the Islamic Republic of Iran with the aim of strengthening ties and promoting common interests.

An active role in the Arab region

The Sultanate's policies within the context of the Arab region enjoy widespread respect at both official and popular levels. In backing joint Arab action and working to develop relations with Arab states within the framework of the Arab League, it is particularly admired for the positive nature of its contributions.

Efforts to upgrade and reinforce the effectiveness of the Arab League's

His Majesty and his brother leaders of the AGCC states at the 29th Summit in Muscat in December 2008







His Majesty exchanges views with the Prime Minister of the State of India, Dr Manmohan Singh during a visit to Muscat

operations are a priority for Oman. It unreservedly backs Arab causes, particularly Palestine, and works to promote peace in the Middle East and the creation of an independent Palestinian state. It champions stability and the resolution of differences in Lebanon, Iraq and Somalia, as well as reconciliation between different Arab states, in the interests of the Arab nation as a whole.

In this connection several Omani projects have been completed in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, with the aim of supporting the Palestinian people and strengthening their resistance to Israel's brutal aggression and its "siege and settlement policies", which are destroying any chances for a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The Sultanate has played an active part in meetings and other activities designed to promote joint Arab action, including the Economic Summit in Kuwait in January 2009, the 21st Arab Summit and the Arab-South American Summit, both of which were held in Doha in March 2009. Oman is chair of the Arab Inter Parliamentary Union's current term and was also unanimously elected by all the Arab states to act as deputy chair of the Arab Transitional Parliament.

In the Sultanate's continual attempts to nurture stronger and friendlier relations between regional and international states, numerous exchange visits between leaders and ministers, have taken place, as well as numerous meetings of joint committees. In May 2008, Sultan Qaboos visited the



His Majesty discusses matters of mutual interest with His Highness Sheikh Mohd bin Rashid al Maktoum, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai

Arab Republic of Egypt and the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah in August of the same year. Meanwhile visitors to the Sultanate included Lebanese President, General Michel Suleiman, in February 2009, President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in March 2009, Syrian President Dr. Bashar Al Assad in April 2009,Dr. Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, and Khalid Mish'al, head of the Hamas Political Bureau, in May 2009.

The Sultanate and the wider world

Oman is firmly committed to playing a positive role within the Middle East region and across the globe. With the experience gained from its past, including historical relations with the major powers and the continents of Africa and Asia, it recognises the strategic and economic importance of the Gulf to the outside world. It is also acutely aware of the fact that the security and stability of the region is intimately linked to that of the international community.

The Sultanate supports the United Nations and its agencies and organisations – UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) etc. - and backs their efforts to promote peace, stability, inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Oman played an active role in setting up the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IORARC) and offers its ongoing support



His Majesty grants an Audience to HRH Crown Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands

to its activities. The 52nd session of the IAEA's general conference in October 2008 unanimously approved Oman's membership of the agency and the Sultanate subsequently joined, following the issue of Royal Decree No. 135/2008 on 16th December 2008.

In championing the causes of peace, justice and respect for human rights, the Sultanate enthusiastically supports measures to prevent terrorism at every level. While it believes there should be a thorough study into the causes of terrorism, it supports international co-operation and efforts to eliminate terrorism in all its forms, to allow the people of the world to live in peace and security. At the same time, it draws a distinction between terrorism and legitimate self-defence and resistance to aggression as sanctioned in international law.

In addition to supporting reform of the United Nations, Oman encourages general moves towards putting greater emphasis on economic co-operation and upgrading international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Such moves, the Sultanate believes, would serve the interests of all countries around the world and help counter the effects of the global financial crisis, particularly on developing countries.

The Sultanate co-operates closely with the global community in combating human trafficking. It accepts its full responsibilities under international law and the UN protocol on the suppression and penalisation of



In May 2009 His Majesty greeted the Prime Minister of Hungary, Ferenc Gyurcsany during his visit to the Sultanate

human trafficking, which it ratified in 2005. In this connection the National Committee on Human Rights was established under the jurisdiction of the State Council (Majlis A'Dawla) by Royal Decree No. 124/2008, issued on 15th November 2008. The Law on the Prevention of Human Trafficking was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 126/2008, issued on 23rd November 2008, which provided for the creation of The National Committee on the Combating of Human Trafficking to enforce the law; this body is currently drawing up a national plan to prevent human trafficking.

Oman's ties with other countries continue to expand, as evidenced by the growing number of visits exchanged between senior Omani officials and their foreign counterparts and Oman's increasing diplomatic representation around the world. There were also several other exchange visits at various levels, as well as meetings of joint committees and political consultations with countries around the world. All these moves reinforce the active role played by the Sultanate in promoting stability in the region and beyond. *(Also, see page 54).*

The role of Omani diplomacy in development

Along with its efforts to promote peace and stability internationally, Omani seeks to serve the goals of its own national development by reinforcing and expanding co-operation and common interests in economic, technological, scientific, cultural and environmental fields, while attract-



His Majesty exchanges views with Dominique Strauss Kahn, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund at the Royal Camp in Seih al Makarim, Sohar, in October 2009

ing investment that would encourage the opening up of new markets for Omani products and the setting up of joint projects with countries in areas including Asia, Africa, South America and other parts of the world.

In its efforts to expand such co-operation, Omani diplomacy involves the participation of Oman's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and joint businessmen's associations, in its dealings abroad. Omani delegations invariably include OCCI and Omani private sector representatives, in overseas missions to various parts of the globe. Their presence helps raise the Sultanate's economic profile around the world, by highlighting development efforts, achievements and opportunities.

Oman has diplomatic relations with over 150 states and it is a member of over 105 regional and international organisations and bodies.

THE MEDIA

The Omani media is encouraged to take a candid approach when presenting issues concerning Omani society, including national and international events. Its brief is to avoid exaggeration and, at all times, to be truthful and objective. Regionally the media is sometimes accused of a sycophancy and, while Oman is not entirely immune from this charge, it is gaining in international respect and stature as it becomes increasingly hard edged in its news gathering and reporting.

In addition to publishing a wide range of newspapers and magazines, including online publications, the private sector has become increasingly active in radio and TV broadcasting following the promulgation of the Law on Private Radio and Television Establishments in 2004. The fact that several private electronic TV and radio stations and channels now exist is in the interests of viewers, listeners and – ultimately – the country as a whole.

Sultanate of Oman Radio

Sultanate of Oman Radio has made impressive advances in developing its technical and human resources, as well as in satisfying the Omani public's interest in events at home and abroad. Its general Arabic service, which broadcasts round the clock, can be accessed throughout Oman as well as around the world, through its satellite transmissions or from its website: - www.oman-radio.gov.om.

Sultanate of Oman Radio's four main services – the general Arabic service, the Youth service, the Holy Qur'an programme and the English service – cater for a range of audiences and tastes, though they all have a distinctly Omani character.

The General Arabic service

(Broadcasting on AM 1242 KhZ IN Muscat, on 576 kHz in Haima and on 738 kHz in Salalah. Also on FM 94.4 MHz in Muscat)

The general Arabic service is Sultanate of Oman Radio's main service and broadcasts round the clock on medium and short waves from its stations and sub-stations across the country. These stations, some of which are solar-powered, have varying capacities and functions.

The general Arabic service has four, three-monthly schedules a year, as well as special schedules for the month of Ramadhan, National Day, Eid al Fitr, Eid al Adha and various other occasions. Around 90 per cent of its daily transmissions consist of local programmes, many of which focus on the country's development efforts from a variety of angles. Some of its most popular and dynamic programmes contain input from members of the public as well as government officials.

Through its network of domestic and foreign correspondents, reinforced by experts' comments and analyses of major news stories, the general Arabic service provides extensive coverage of domestic and global events aimed to educate and inform every segment of the community. There are three daily one-hour news programmes, as well as local news bulletins at 2 pm and 7 pm and an hourly news summary.

The Youth service

(FM 100 MHz in Muscat and Salalah, but on different wave lengths elsewhere in the country)

The majority of Oman's population is made up of young people and the Youth service is considered a particularly important element of



A multi-stage training programme for Omanis working in the press, radio and TV is on-going

Oman Radio's programming output. With its widely varied programme content, it has succeeded in attracting a large number of listeners – not only among young people but among all members of the community.

In 2008 the Youth service increased its hours of transmission to 18 hours a day – from 6 am till midnight. Although its normal schedules are suspended on 23rd July (Renaissance Day) and 18th November (National Day) and replaced by coverage of the celebrations. On other days its programme "Haadha'l Sabaah" (This Morning) provides a forum for a frank exchange of views between government officials and members of the public and enables citizens to monitor, contribute - and sometimes even help determine the outcome - of issues that affect their daily lives.

The Youth service's terrestrial transmissions can be received in nearly every part of the Sultanate. It is also transmitted by satellite via Arabsat, Nilesat and Hot Bird 4, and over the internet on www.oman-radio.gov.om/rdra/default.asp.

The Holy Qur'an programme

(FM 932 MHz in Muscat and wef 2008 on FM96.7 MHz in Salalah and Taqah. In November 2009 it will be possible to receive in Quryat, Saham, Saiq and Sur)

While giving priority to the Holy Qur'an itself and related topics, Sultanate of Oman Radio's Holy Qur'an programme also aims to pro-

mote the Islamic concepts of moderation, dialogue and tolerance.

The Holy Qur'an programme attracts listeners from a wide spectrum of the community and its hours of transmission have been increased from 7 hours a day, when the service was launched in 2006, to 18 hours a day in 2008, i.e. from 6 am till midnight. In the summer of 2009 an agreement was signed to set up a number of FM stations across the country, thus extending the Holy Qur'an programme's coverage to the entire nation by the end of 2010.

The programme can also be received on the satellite radio channels and over the internet on www.oman-radio.gov.om.

The English service

(FM 90.4 MHz)

Sultanate of Oman's English service, which broadcasts for 18 hours a day on the FM band – from 6 am till midnight – is an important channel for communication and dialogue between Omani nationals and members of non-Arab communities living in the Sultanate. As it can be received via the internet on www.oman-radio.gov.om and, in this way provides a link between Oman and people around the world.

The English service presents material on cultural topics, music, tourism and heritage, as well as programmes on the Sultanate's development and local political, economic and other topics.

There are co-operation arrangements – including programme exchanges - between Oman Radio and the radio stations of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council states and other Arab countries. Programme exchange agreements exist between the English service and broadcasting services in a large number of Asian and European countries.

Non-government radio and TV channels

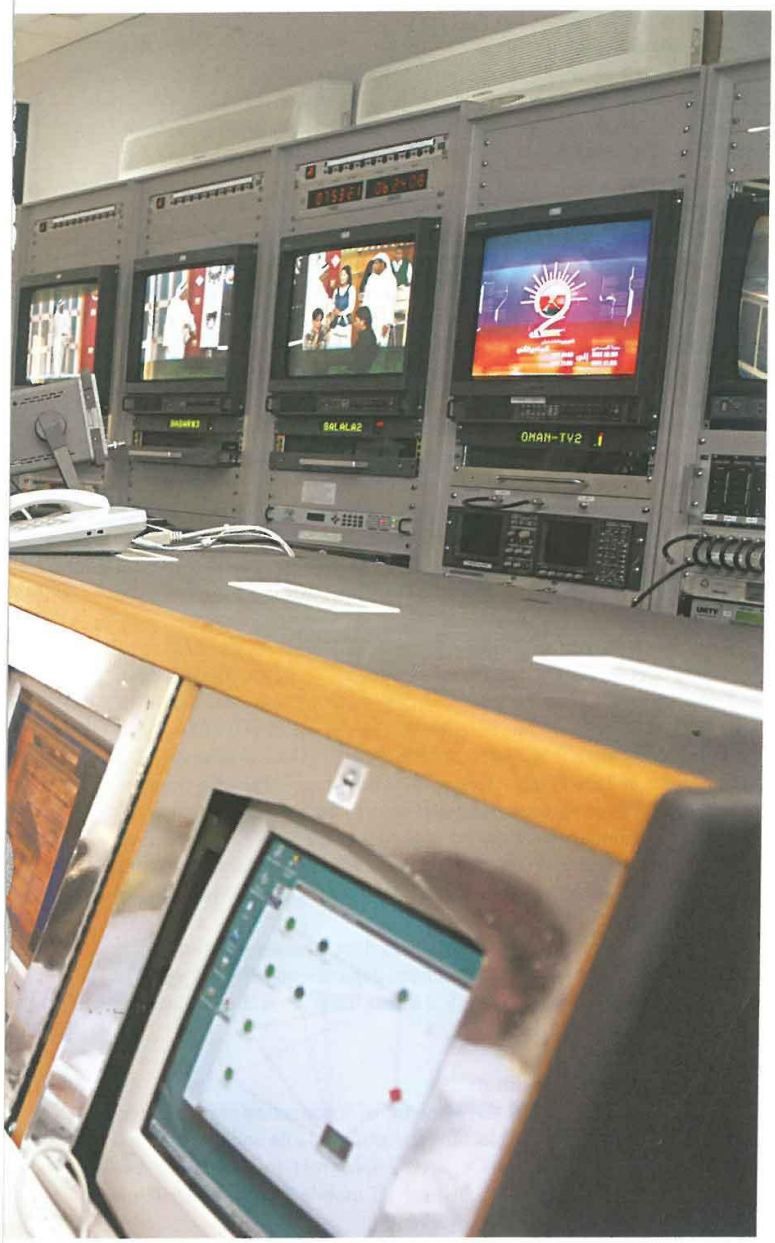
It is now over five years since the Law on Private Radio and Television Stations, promulgated in 2004, opened up opportunities for the private sector to own and manage radio and TV channels in the Sultanate.

The following private radio stations broadcast on the FM band:-

- Radio Hi - FM 95.9 (English), owned by the Media Entertainment Network
- Radio Wisal – FM 96.5 MHz (Arabic), owned by Sabco Media
- Radio Hala - FM 102.7 MHz (Arabic), also owned by the Media Entertainment Network, and
- Radio Sound of the Gulf – FM 107.7 (Arabic), owned by Qatar Radio

The Majan TV (Arabic) channel began transmitting test programmes at the end of 2008 and currently transmits for several hours a day.





Editing video footage for the two Oman TV Channels

Sultanate of Oman Television

The Omani media, which enjoys an intimate relationship with the community and its traditions, aspirations and priorities, employs the latest technology to cover events at home and abroad.

Sultanate of Oman TV's transmissions can be received throughout Oman and the rest of the world, either by satellite or via the internet on www.oman-tv.gov.om.

Sultanate of Oman TV has two channels:

Channel One, which transmits daily round the clock, and

Channel Two, which transmits from 4 pm till midnight.

Channel Two, which began in 2006, is mainly targeted at the country's youth and has a high proportion of sports programmes and other material of general interest to the younger generation.

Sultanate of Oman TV provides coverage of development-related activities and important national occasions. Through its network of correspondents in Arab and world capitals, it also reports on regional and international events, while expert commentators and analysts take part in discussion programmes and various live events.

A large proportion of Sultanate of Oman TV's material is locally produced. It transmits seven daily news bulletins, including an English bulletin and an economic bulletin, while its hour-long news programme after midnight – "Hasaad al Yawm" (The Day's Harvest) – covers the major news stories of the day.

In 2008 Sultanate of Oman TV produced eight films: "Al Nahhal" (The Beekeeper), "Al Hayaat fi'l Juzur" (Life on the Islands), "Al Sayyaad wa'l Bahr" (The Fisherman and the Sea), "Oman al Insaan wa'l Makaan" (Oman, People and Places), "Tareekh al Nuqood" (History of Money), "Al Mar'a 'l Omaniyyah" (Omani Woman), "Al Mahmiyyaat al Tabi'iyyah" (Nature Reserves), and "Tareekh Oman al Jeeyoloojiy" (Oman's geological history). In addition a National Day film is made annually for showing around the world on 18th November. In 2008 it was entitled "Oman, People and Places" – it was translated and shown in Arabic, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and also in Korean.

Sultanate of Oman TV also produces documentary programmes in collaboration with various government departments. Digital systems have been introduced and the TV's video library has a computerised indexing and search system.

Oman TV on mobile handsets

In the summer of 2009 the Ministry of Information signed agreements with Oman Mobile Telecommunications Co llc and with Omani-Qatari Telecommunications Co SAOC (Nawras) to enable the two Oman TV channels to be watched on 3G mobile handsets. Different viewing packages will become available.



A culture and heritage programme is recorded in Oman TV's studios

Training Omani personnel

Almost all employees in specialist areas of Oman Radio and Oman TV are nationals, along with a significant proportion of people working in the local press.

Present levels of Omanisation in the media sector took many years to achieve and training programmes to improve production and presenting skills are ongoing for national personnel. The Ministry of Information has instituted a multi-stage training programme for Omanis working in press, radio and TV. The first stage of this programme, which began in January 2009, was conducted by expert international instructors. Groups of trainees are later sent for on-the-job training at leading media establishments abroad. Expertise – among both Omani and non-Omani personnel – continues to be highly prized among the country's media moguls, who are continually raising the bar in this important sector.

In 2008, some 67 training courses – 34 in the Sultanate and 33 abroad - were attended by 302 employees. The Ministry of Information's Media Training Centre, which also trains personnel from other Arab Gulf Co-operation Council states, plays a vital role in maintaining and improving the role of the country's media personnel.

The digital studio complex & other development projects

The digital studio complex and related projects represent a significant

leap forward in the use of state-of-the-art radio and TV technology. Work is proceeding steadily on its construction, expected to go into operation towards the end of 2010.

The complex, built on four floors in an architectural style that is a blend of the traditional and the modern styles, covers an area of 21,000 square metres. It will comprise 13 transmission, production and music studios, a theatre, a news room, a control room, services and utilities, a central technical area, a library and other features. Its systems have been designed to incorporate the latest digital technology.

The satellite studio, installed in 2008, transmits a selection of the best radio and TV programmes via the Badr 6 Arab satellite system. Other current projects include the upgrading of the Ministry of Information's internal internet system and an agreement - signed in May 2009 - to provide TV transmission lines between studios in al Qurm and transmission stations in other parts of the country, via a fibre-optic link. Microwave technology will be employed at three isolated locations.

Planning for digital transmission

The Ministry of Information plans to introduce its terrestrial digital TV service during the Eighth Five-year Plan (2010-2015). It will enable viewers to receive digital transmissions with an ordinary TV aerial, eliminating the need for a satellite dish or special receiving set.

Digital transmission provides better and more extensive TV coverage and overcomes the problem of geographical barriers. The sound is clearer, the picture has higher definition and it is possible to receive a large number of channels. Transmission can also be received via computer or mobile telephone and the system will result in better data services.

Omanet

Omanet – Oman's direct channel to the world - is constantly being upgraded and its pages are regularly updated. Through its services the outside world can follow development in the Sultanate and find the answers to any questions they want to ask about the Sultanate. The Omanet website provides coverage of national, cultural, social and economic events and affairs and produces a daily electronic newspaper in Arabic and English for subscribers in Arab and foreign countries.

The service is known to be particularly popular with Omanis living abroad - www.omanet.om.

Channels of communication with the world

The Ministry has been publishing its annual booklet since 1979 – the latest being Oman 2008-2009 – in Arabic, English, and several other foreign languages for distribution around the world. As well as producing books and other publications on the country's development and achievements, the Ministry of Information invites journalists and other media people from



An active Press Centre during the 29th AGCC Summit held in December 2008

around the world to visit the country and experience for themselves its many attractions. In 2008, 277 Arab and foreign media people and 12 TV and radio teams came to Oman at the Ministry's invitation, while a further 182 media visitors came from the Gulf states to cover the 29th Arab Gulf Co-operation Council Summit in Muscat in December, chaired by His Majesty the Sultan.

Embassies and information attaches' offices abroad play an important part in promoting contacts between Oman and other countries in a range of fields, including the media.

Together with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Information helps organise the annual Muscat International Book Fair, the latest of which ran 26 February – 3rd March 2009. It displays various materials, including books, photographs and film, on Oman's history and achievements at Arab and international book fairs.

Oman News Agency (ONA)

Oman News Agency (ONA), the Sultanate's official source of information on Omani affairs. ONA transmits in Arabic and English, by satellite and through its internet website.

Since being transferred to the auspices of the Ministry of Information, ONA has focused increasingly on upgrading its professional and technical performance, improving the quality of its output and expanding the distribu-

tion of its services at home and abroad. All the staff of its editorial, technical and electronic sections are Omani nationals.

ONA's "Sabq" mobile telephone SMS service provides subscribers with the latest political, economic, sports and general news updates. It also has an archive containing news coverage and photographs of major events, particularly those that have taken place in Oman.

ONA's global network of Omani correspondents provide thorough and efficient coverage of developments relevant to the region. All major events in Oman are covered in news reports, pictures and/or by in-depth analyses.

ONA supplies local news and photographs to international subscribers, including the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA), Asia Pulse, the Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA), as well as media correspondents and organisations domestically and internationally. It also enjoys co-operation and exchange arrangements with regional and foreign news agencies - www.omannews.gov.om.

The Omani press

Most of Oman's press is owned by the private sector and is not subject to censorship. Its operations, including procedures for setting up newspapers, publishing houses, printing presses and advertising companies, are regulated by the Law on Printed Matter and Publications, amended by Royal Decree No. 87/2004, issued in August 2004.

The private sector Arabic paper "Al Watan" – Oman's first newspaper – began publication in 1971, followed by the government's Arabic paper "Oman" in 1972. Subsequently, the press became subject to the Companies Law and a new set of regulations was promulgated.

The latest Arabic daily newspaper – "Azzaman" – first appeared in August 2007. Recent years have seen a significant upswing in the publishing sector and today there are 79 daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, half-yearly and yearly newspapers, magazines and other publications. In line with international trends, there has also been a rise in the number of free magazines.

Today there are around 20 newspaper establishments and over 70 printing presses. In addition to these, several ministries and government departments issue their own magazines detailing their activities and issues of interest.

Before 1970 not a single newspaper was published in Oman, the media sector simply did not exist. Today, there are seven daily newspapers in Muscat alone. Four of these – "Oman", "Al Watan", "Al Shabiba" and "Azzaman" - are in Arabic, while the other three - "Times of Oman", "Oman Daily Observer" and "Oman Tribune" – are in English. Another English newspaper, 'Muscat Daily' is due to appear on the streets in October 2009. There are several weekly papers issued in tabloid form, consisting mostly of sports coverage, miscellaneous features and advertising, which are distributed free of charge, either as newspaper supplements or as separate publications.



Three daily newspapers are now published in English by the private sector, and one by the government

Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising

Oman Establishment for Press, Publication and Advertising (OEPPA) is one of the Sultanate's largest press establishments in terms of its technical and human resources and the number of publications its produces. It is a financially and administratively independent body that operates as a company and has the highest Omanisation level of any press establishment in the country. Its publications include two daily newspapers, two weekly magazines, a fortnightly magazine and three quarterly magazines.

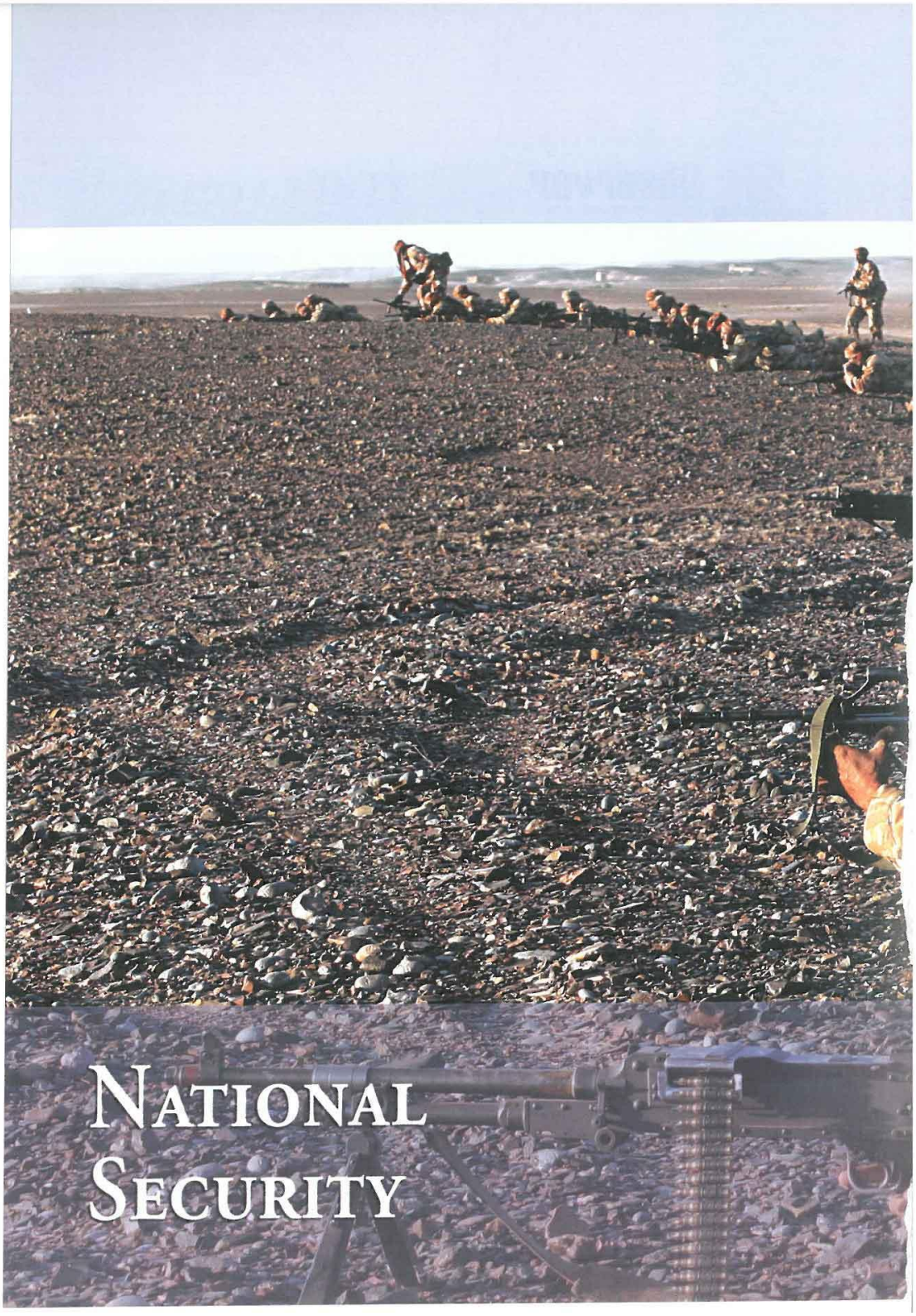
OEPPA runs training courses within the Sultanate and abroad to improve the professional and technical standards of its staff.

The Media Creativity Competition

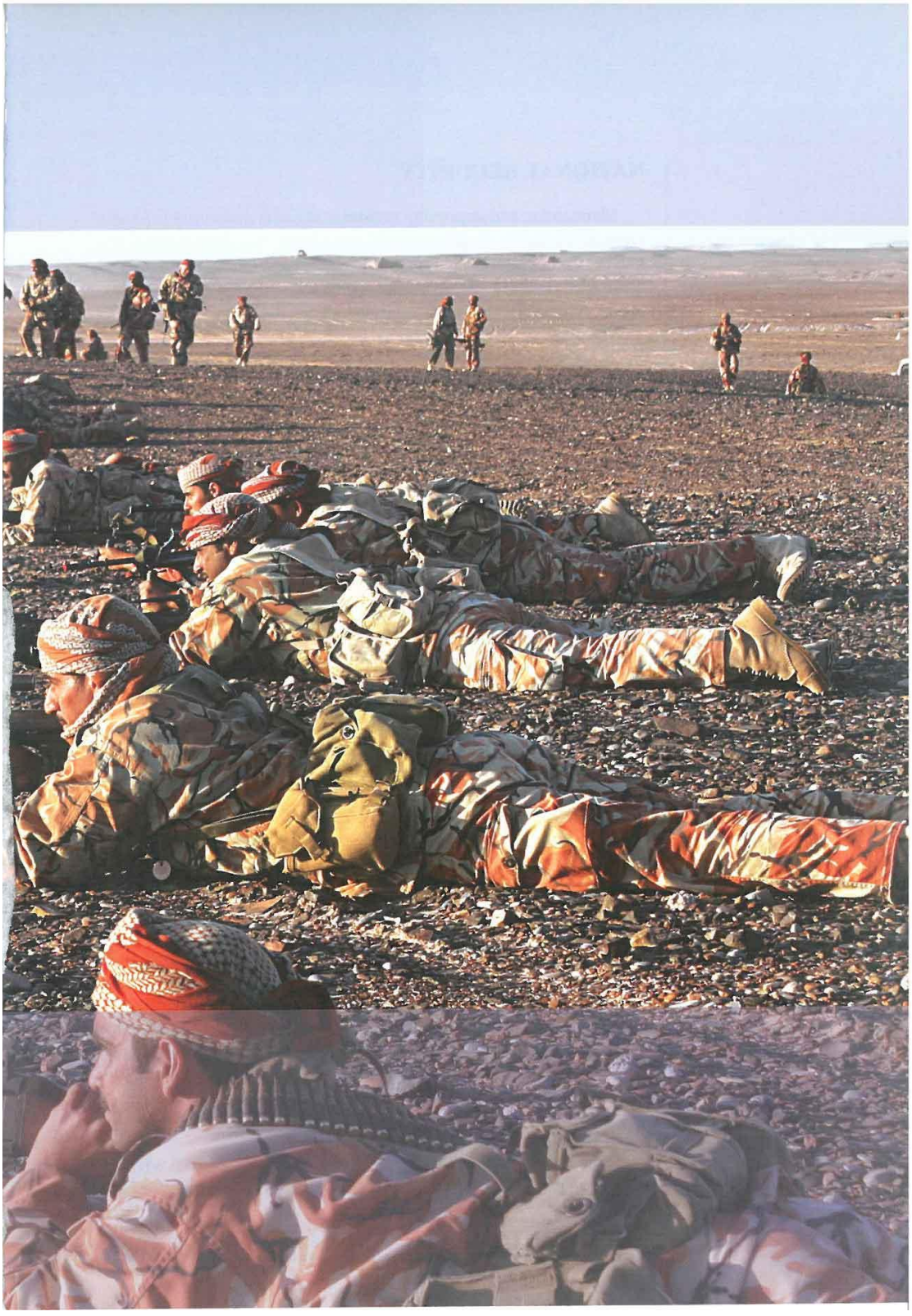
The Media Creativity Competition was introduced in 2004 to encourage and recognise creative talents and engender a competitive spirit among Omanis employed in the media. This competition is held every two years.

This year – 2009 – the competition merged with that previously organised by the Oman News Agency, and the number of fields covered by the contest was increased from 29 to 67.

Some 315 entries were submitted in the 2009 4th Media Creativity Competition, which covered a comprehensive range of press, radio and television disciplines from column writing and investigative journalism to radio playwriting and TV serial production.



National Security



NATIONAL SECURITY

Maintaining and improving standards of national security is a topic close to the hearts of governments and citizens around the globe and Oman is no exception. In a region that has experienced more than its share of turbulence, the Sultanate stands out as a beacon of stability, peace and security. The 2008 Global Peace Index, published by the Intelligence Unit of the respected British magazine "The Economist", listed Oman as the most secure country in the Middle East and Africa, while a report, issued in London in March 2009 by the Oxford Business Group, describes Oman as "an oasis of peace" in the region. Sultan Qaboos and his government are dedicated to preserving the country's safety and integrity and see each Omani citizen as a vital partner in the protection and defence of the nation.

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF)

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) play an essential role in defending the nation. In developing the SAF and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), the Sultanate focused its attention on intensive training rather than the establishment of an intensive arms programme, recognising that highly trained manpower was its most important defence asset.

The three main arms of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) – the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) – along with the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO), form a modern, well organised and well equipped fighting force that boasts a full range of integrated modern weaponry. All its bases are linked by a sophisticated command and control system.

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO)

The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) deploys an impressive range of integrated, high-performance, hi-tech weaponry, alongside highly trained manpower and support services including firepower control and air defence units.

The infantry, including the Sultan of Oman's Armoured Division, the Sultan of Oman's Artillery, the Sultan of Oman's Parachutes, the Signals Unit, the Sultan's Armed Forces Engineers and the other support units are all equipped with modern weaponry and recent years have seen a big leap forward in the application of sophisticated IT systems.

In recent years, the Firqat forces have undergone significant upgrading in terms of their organisation, training, installations, services, utilities and other areas.

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO)

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) is equipped with advanced fighter, interceptor and other aircraft, as well as anti-aircraft missiles



Royal Army of Oman teams have had many successes in International Marksmanship competitions

and modern radar, defence and weapons systems to ensure a high level of combat proficiency at all times and in all circumstances.

In addition to its F-16 fighters, RAFO's combat capability is reinforced by a number of Hawk and Jaguar aircraft along with Super Lynx and NH90 helicopters, that also provide back-up for the Royal Navy of Oman in protecting the coastline as well as offering support services for members of the public in the mountain areas. To enhance their skills and expertise, they also take part in exercises with the air forces of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council states and other friendly countries.

The Airbus A320-300 has replaced RAFO's BAC-111 transport planes.

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO)

The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) has a fleet of gunboats, fast missile boats and support, training, cargo and hydrographical survey vessels, which can be deployed to protect the Sultanate's coasts and territorial waters and monitor the passage of ships and oil tankers through the strategic Strait of Hormuz. RNO also provides support for joint amphibious and marine transport operations.

Three advanced ocean patrol boats currently being built to the highest operational specifications will reinforce the RNO's capability in Omani waters and the open seas.



The RNO is responsible for the defence of the Sultanate's coastline and territorial waters

The Said bin Sultan Naval Base with its world-class facilities is one of the Sultanate's leading naval establishments. Its Naval Training Centre is accredited by the AGCC Computer HQ as an International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) examining centre.

The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO)

The Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) is an important element of Oman's modern military set-up and, with its infantry, armoured and artillery units and their advanced equipment and systems, it has achieved a high standard of proficiency and combat capability. The RGO trains personnel on the full range of its systems and equipment and holds specialist courses at various different levels. Its Technical College produces highly qualified technical personnel.

In addition to the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO), the RGO also has three other military bands that perform on national occasions and other events at home and abroad. In addition to their security duties, the Red Helmets motor-cycle team stage stunning acrobatic displays, while the RGO free-fall parachute team and cavalry also attract enthusiastic crowds at various national events.

Engineering, Medical and Social Services

The Ministry of Defence's Engineering Services provide technical



In addition to its F-16 fighters, RAFO's combat capability is reinforced by the Hawk and Jaguar aircraft, along with Super Lynx and NH90 helicopters

and engineering support for military exercises, as well as essential services and infrastructure facilities at military camps, bases and associated installations. Other functions include road-building in military areas as well as undertaking projects in some of the governorates.

The National Survey Authority produces military and civil maps, carries out aerial photography, maintains the National Geographic Archives and provides aeronautical charts and geographical data, as well as geographical aids and training in cartography and map production. The Institute of Survey Sciences and Map Production is responsible for the training of military and civilian personnel in this field.

As well as being equipped to ensure armed forces personnel and their families receive top-quality medical services, the Armed Forces' Medical Services also offer emergency medical support and provide assistance through their flying doctor service. The Armed Forces Medical Services School and the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Hospital in Al Khoudh are among the SAF's leading medical establishments.

Military Social Services at the SAF's Staff HQ provide social welfare for serving and former SAF officers and other ranks so that they and their families can enjoy stability in their daily lives. Their services include housing loans and care and rehabilitation for the disabled to enable them to become reintegrated into the community. The Sultanate is a member of the Arab Union of War Veterans and Victims Associations.



The Royal Guard of Oman regularly takes part in Exercises

The Morale Guidance Department organises media coverage of military, social, cultural and sporting events involving the SAF and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) and issues the magazine "Jund Oman" (Soldiers of Oman), as well as other publications. It produces and presents radio and TV reports and programmes in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and helps ensure the smooth running of the annual military Hajj mission. Other responsibilities include organising competitions and running the information and cultural service on the Ministry of Defence's morale guidance internet website.

The SAF Museum at Bait al Falaj Fort chronicles Oman's military history through the ages, while the Information Technology (IT) sector meets the IT needs of all the SAF's formations and units.

Facilities and training

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) have a number of educational and training institutions for training officers and other ranks in a range of specialist military, scientific, technical and technological disciplines. These include the Command and Staff College, the SAF Training Regiment, the Officers' Training School, The SAF Signals School, the School of Administration and Ordnance, the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy, the Technical Air College, the Royal Air Force of Oman's Command and Control School, the Ju-



Engineering Services assist in military areas as well as undertaking projects for the citizens

nior Naval Staff School, the Fleet School, the Royal Navy of Oman's Naval Training Centre and the RGO Technical College, as well as a number of other Defence Ministry and SAF schools and training centres. SAF personnel are also offered the opportunity to complete their higher education at home and abroad.

Mobilisation and field exercises are held at various different levels to improve the combat capability of the armed forces, either within the SAF or in conjunction with the armed forces of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council states and other countries.

Cultural, academic, scientific, religious and sporting activities

The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) attach great importance to providing personnel with the opportunity to develop their cultural, academic, scientific, religious and sporting interests and activities. Libraries and social clubs have been set up at SAF headquarters, with links to all units and bases across the country via the Ministry of Defence's internal network.

The sailing ship RNOV Shabab Oman is a traditional vessel, providing outward bound and leadership training for military and civil personnel. She has visited more than 100 ports in 43 countries since being commissioned into the RNO in 1979, building and nurturing cultural contacts with other peoples, raising Oman's profile internationally while highlighting its history and contribution to human civilization. The ship also takes



Sports are encouraged and teams in various fields have represented their country internationally

part in international competitions and has won a number of prizes, including, for the fifth time, the International Friendship Trophy in the Tall Ships Races in the Netherlands in 2008; later that year it was awarded the trophy for the sixth time – in Portugal.

The SAF is committed to instilling religious values and principles in its personnel and mosques have been built at its units, bases and camps. In the furtherance of health and fitness, personnel enjoy facilities including a military sports complex and a shooting range. Sporting competitions enable personnel to maintain a high level of physical fitness and the Sultanate's highly accomplished military sports teams represent their country at many Arab and international events. For example, the SAF shooting team emerged champions in the final day's events at the Bisley International Marksmanship held in the UK in July 2009. They took 27 cups, 83 gold medals, 34 silver and 13 bronze. The National Free Fall Team of the Sultan of Oman's Parachutes took part in the World championships held in Slovakia in August 2008 and topped the 15 Arab and Asian teams, and were ranked 13th in the world overall. The SAF athletics team also performed with distinction at a number of Gulf and international championships.

The bands of the SAF and the RGO are highly trained and accomplished musicians who regularly take part in domestic and international events and competitions.

Contributing to development

As well as defending the nation and protecting its achievements, gains and security, the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) play a direct part in supporting the country's development efforts. They are extremely well equipped and have a presence in many parts of the country, taking on projects such as road-building in the rugged mountainous and desert areas and frequently assist with the provision of food, water, health and other essential services for the people living in those remote regions.

The SAF trains civilians in navigation, telecommunications and administration, runs military training programmes for students, takes part in search and rescue operations in cases of accidents and natural disasters. The vigilance of its forces helps prevent illegal immigration and contributes to the nation's security and wellbeing in numerous other positive ways.

Retired SAF and Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) personnel frequently join the private sector or set up their own enterprises, contributing their skills and experience to the Sultanate's ongoing development process. In recognition of their role, 7th December has been designated SAF Veterans' Day.

THE ROYAL OMAN POLICE (ROP)

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) plays a vital role in maintaining security, law and order throughout the country. It is a highly trained and qualified force with access to cutting edge technology to assist in protecting the security of the state and the individual while serving the public with vigilance and proficiency.

Advanced electronic services

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) keep abreast of new developments and employs the latest data systems technology in its operations. Its internet website – www.rop.gov.om – offers a broad overview of the police services available to the public including online services.

In addition to the six-portal electronic service at Muscat International Airport and its system for speeding up passenger arrival and departure procedures, an electronic payment system - or residence card in the case of non-Omanis - is currently being introduced that will offer facilities similar to those of a bank card. From 2008 the public have been able to use an automated fee-paying system for ROP services, such as vehicle registration documentation, driving licence renewal and the like.

Visas can now be obtained by filling in an electronic application form as a first step towards a fully automated visa system. Following the success of the automated link between Al Wajajah border post and



Modern police facilities are being built countrywide

the Hatta border post in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there is now a similar link between the border post at Hafeet and the one at Mazyad in the UAE. A similar automated service has been introduced for handling passport and residency procedures. In co-ordination with the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant authorities, the ROP is also offering a range of other facilities for promoting and encouraging tourism.

In an initiative designed to minimise inconvenience for applicants, an ROP mobile unit launched in April 2009 began issuing ID and residence cards in the Governorate of Musandam in May 2009. The service will be extended to cover the whole country.

National Committee on Human Rights

Royal Decree No. 124/2008 set up the National Committee on Human Rights in November 2008, appointing the Inspector-General of Police and Customs as its head.

New builds

New police stations have been opened in Shinas and Masirah, as well as a traffic services building in Sohar and a technical inspection facility at the Rustaq (Al Hazm) police unit. Premises have been built for the Riot Control Directorate and for the Al Najda Police Directorate at the Special Task Force HQ. New traffic services buildings are

under construction in Sur, Sumail and Rustaq and work on the forensic laboratory in Muscat is in its final stages. A state-of-the-art Residents' Fingerprinting building is operating beside the Directorate-General of Passports and Residence office in Seeb.

A Civil Defence building was opened on Nizwa's industrial estate in 2008 and work was completed on the construction of the Directorate-General of Civil Defence in Seeb's Airport Heights district. Work continues on the construction of the Civil Defence Directorate in the Governorate of Dhofar and the civil defence centres in Salalah (Awqad), Barka, Bidbid and Wadi Al Jizzi.

Search and rescue and crisis management

The launch of the National Search and Rescue Team marked yet another step forward for the ROP. Trained by international experts, the team is the first of its kind to specialise in search and rescue operations in urban, as well as rural, areas; it comprises elements from the military, security and government services.

The National Civil Defence Committee has meanwhile, established a national team, with members drawn from various government departments, trained to deal with various crisis management disciplines. A national database has also been set up to store full details of all human and material resources available for coping with crises.

With its advanced equipment and staff of qualified Omanis, the Directorate-General of Civil Defence is on stand-by to help protect lives and property from fires and other disasters and to raise awareness of the importance of civil defence procedures at all levels.

Traffic and ambulance services

In the wake of a steady increase in the volume of vehicles on Oman's roads, the Directorate-General of Traffic has been working closely with other authorities to simplify procedures for dealing with minor traffic accidents. The aim is to minimise congestion, and inconvenience, as well as expense for the parties involved. Following its successful introduction in Muscat, the system was applied nationwide from March 2008.

Women's traffic police patrols –currently operating in the Governorate of Muscat - are among the latest duties undertaken by female officers of the ROP, who first began playing a part in the force in 1970.

A variety of moves designed to simplify and speed up Police procedures, particularly for dealing with minor traffic accidents, are underway. An automated fine collection system for traffic violations has been introduced and fines can now be paid through the ROP's internet payment portal. Other projects include an improved, international-standard, automatic vehicle inspection service covering every area of the country. The Traffic Safety Institute at the Directorate-General of



ROP helicopters assist in emergency search and rescue cases

Traffic spreads the traffic safety message, particularly to students and young people, and holds training courses for drivers.

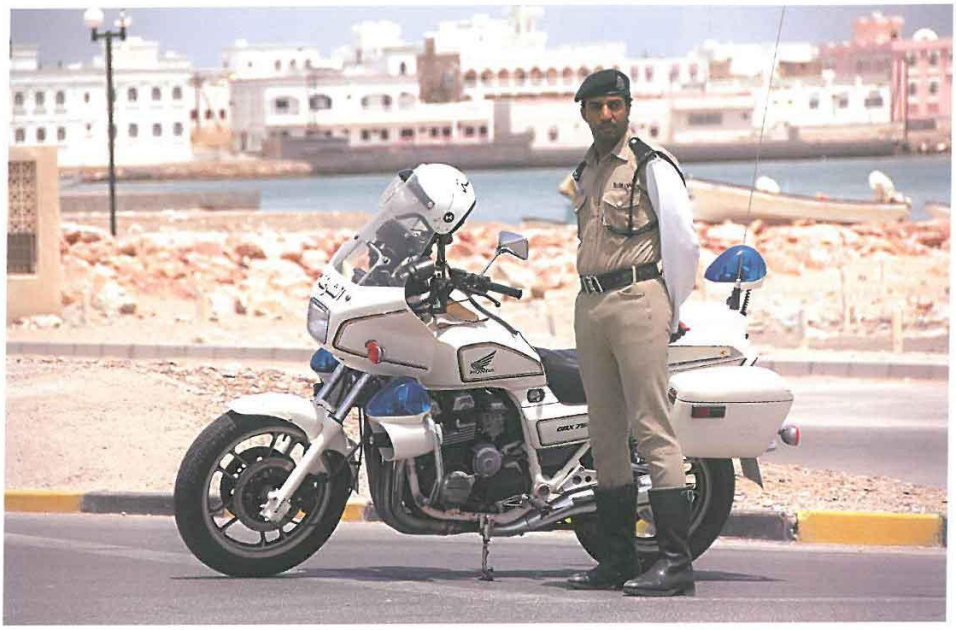
The ROP's Ambulance Service is being upgraded to provide prompt medical care for victims of traffic accidents and other mishaps. There are 23 first aid centres in the governorates of Muscat, Dhofar, the Batinah, Dakhiliyah and Sharqiyah regions, located near accident black spots. Several additional first aid units are under construction across the country.

Specialist police units and improved coastguard security

New specialist police units including the Police Juvenile Unit, established in the Al Bustan district in July 2008, will contribute to overall ROP efficiency. An institution has been set up to deal with juveniles subject to the provisions of the Juveniles Accountability Law, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 30/2008 and issued on 9th March 2008.

The ROP has also set up a Financial Investigations Unit to look into financial crimes, particularly money-laundering and the possible funding of terrorism.

The installations and equipment of the Directorate-General of Police Aviation are being modernised; it is acquiring more aircraft and its duties are being expanded. Recently, its fleet acquired a number of Agusta Westland 109A and AW/139 helicopters with advanced fire-



At the 2009 Royal Camp reference was made to the number of vehicle accidents. All were asked to be aware of what is happening on the Sultanate's roads

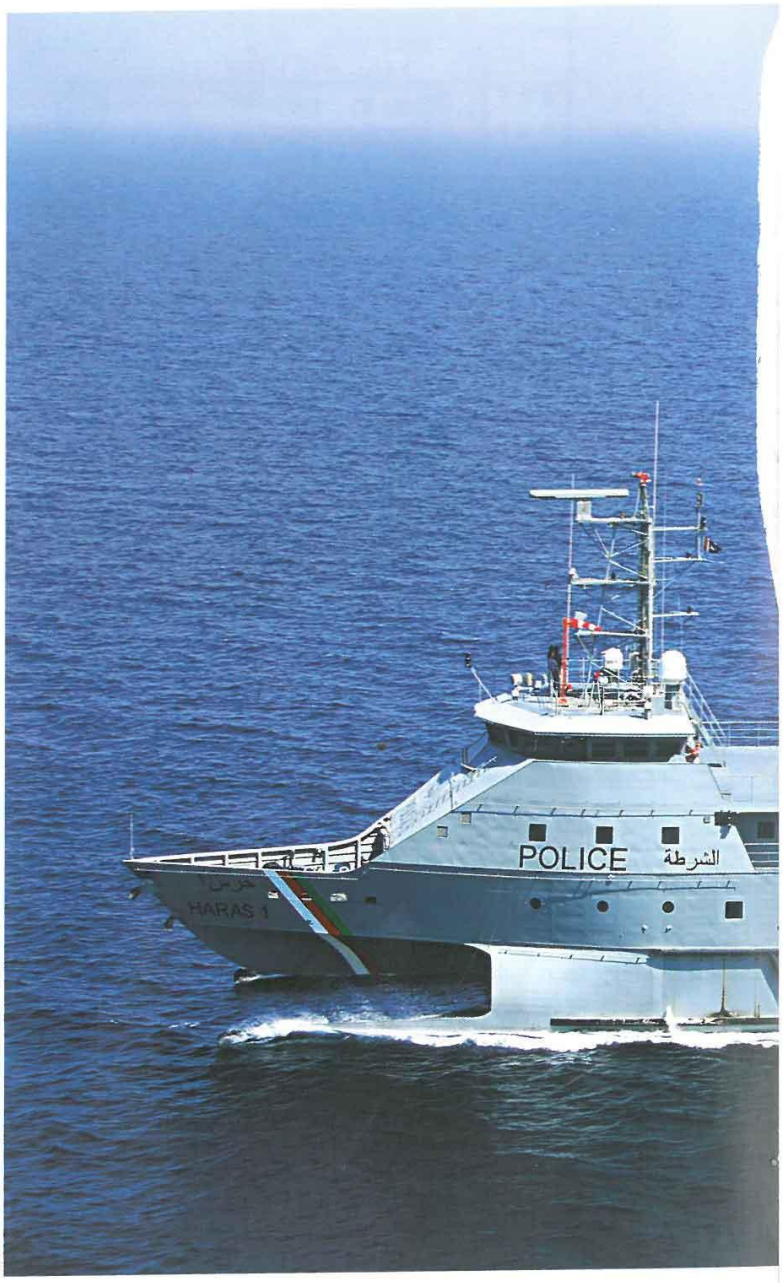
fighting, rescue, air ambulance, spraying and night vision equipment.

The Police Coastguard Command has been equipped with fast patrol boats to assist in preventing smuggling and illegal immigration, among other operations. A number of these boats are equipped with rescue facilities that include a helicopter landing deck and medical assistance unit.

A new Police Coastguard Command building is due to be constructed in Sidab, complete with workshops and facilities for servicing the new boats and a coastguard training centre is currently under construction.

There are currently 15 Oil and Gas Security Police stations at hydrocarbon export harbours, as well as at production and processing plants. Studies are being carried out on plans to construct other stations at Port Qalhat and Port Duqm.

Where airport security is concerned, the Emergency Response Centre is undergoing an extensive expansion and modernisation programme, in accordance with international standards for aircraft accident management centres. The systems for issuing permits and carrying out checks and inspections at Muscat International and Salalah Airports are already in operation, while customs clearance departments at overland border crossings have been modernised. The Directorate-General of Customs has been supplied with container and motor-vehicle inspec-



'Haras-1", the ROP's catamaran-style patrol boat provides security in Oman's territorial waters


A407CD
حرس ١
HARAS 1



The ROP are committed to providing the best possible service to the public

tion equipment, to ensure the smooth movement of goods between the Sultanate and other countries.

Training and Awards

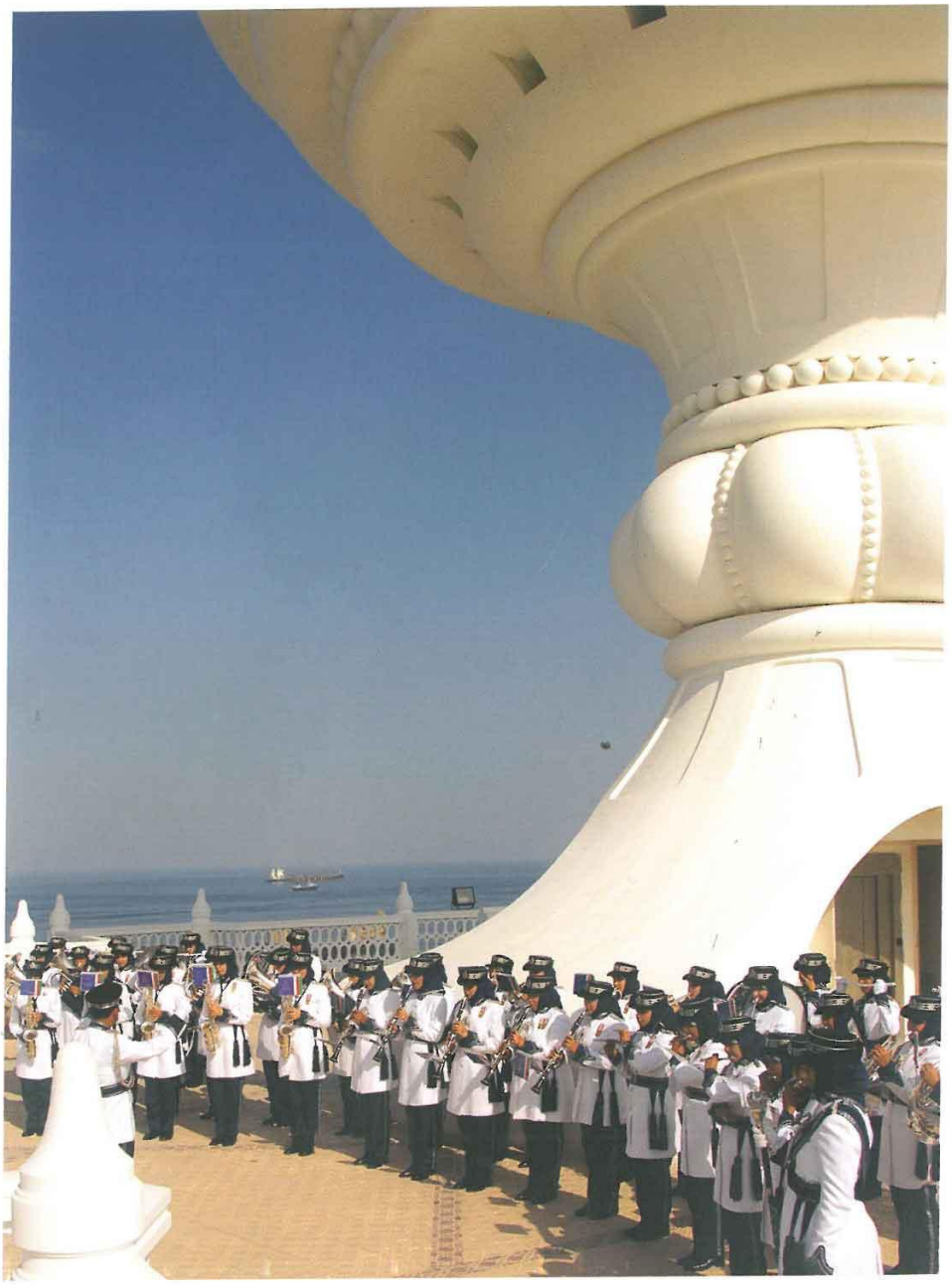
The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences - the educational and training institution responsible for training members of the police force - runs diploma courses in police sciences for university graduates and those with equivalent qualifications. It also organises training courses to improve the operational proficiency of all ROP staff.

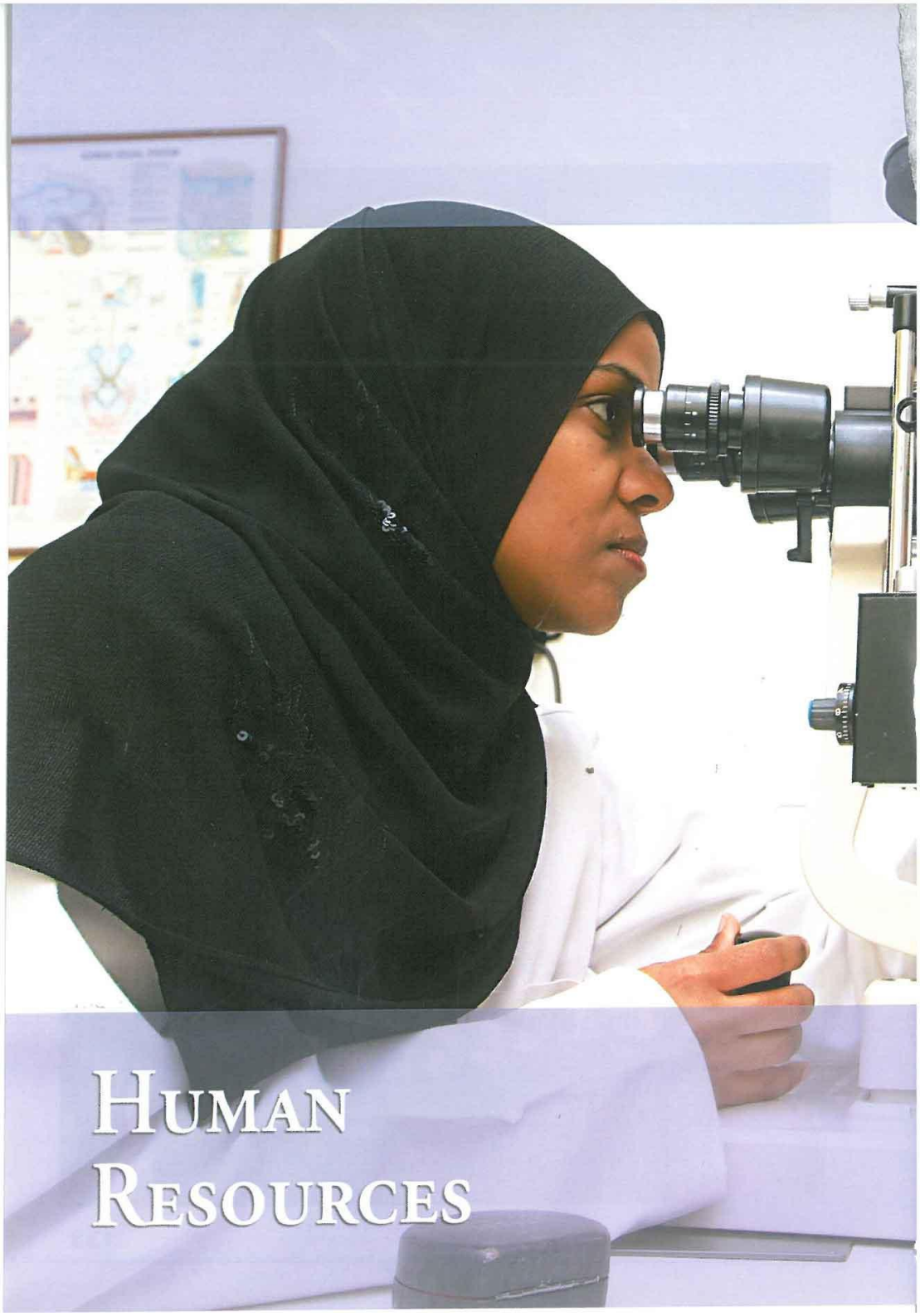
On 23rd June 2009 the Civil Status Directorate-General received a 'United Nations Public Service Award Finalist' certificate for 'Improving the Delivery of Service category - Better Management, Better Public Service". This Directorate has also bagged some international awards in the past including the E-governance award in the "World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)".

Courteous and firm

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) are committed to maintaining security while providing the best possible services for all members of the public – be they Omani nationals or foreign visitors. The force is committed to carrying out its duties courteously - maintaining the rights of the individual - while applying the law in a firm and unequivocal manner.

The Women's Band of the Royal Oman Police perform in Al Riyam Park in Muscat





Human Resources

HUMAN RESOURCES

Sultan Qaboos has frequently described Omani citizens as the Sultanate's greatest resource and asset. He has also observed that a country that ignores the female half of its population squanders 50% of its potential. Since His Majesty acceded to power in July 1970, social development has been regarded as the lynchpin of Oman's strategic development and progress.

In order for Omanis to continue to achieve their full promise as members of a modern, cohesive society the government has kept human resources development high on the agenda of successive Five Year Plans.

EDUCATION

Over the years the importance attached by Sultan Qaboos to education has been a driving force behind Oman's development. Education is recognised as a major element in the government's vision for the future, underlined by the fact that expenditure in this sector during the current Seventh Five-year Plan has already topped RO1.879 billion.

In the 2008-2009 school year there were 541,436 students in 1,050 schools across the country (including special needs schools), and 43,672 teachers.

Figures for the 2007-2008 school year show a total of 339 private schools in the Sultanate (including four international schools which Omanis are also permitted to attend), teaching international syllabi aimed at students of all nationalities. During the 2008-2009 school year, these private schools had around 55,000 male and female students and some 4,000 teachers.

Pre-school education

The Ministry recognises that private education has a major role to play in Oman's educational programmes, particularly during the pre-school phase. A seminar on pre-school education held in December 2008 looked into ways of improving the performance of the country's pre-school institutions and discussed a range of strategies. Government incentives and facilities for giving the private sector a more effective role in education from the pre-school stage right up to pre-university are ongoing.

Post-Basic Education

During the 2007-2008 school year, the Ministry of Education introduced a new plan for the post-Basic Education stage (Grades 11 and 12), having gathered information from various sources including international guidelines and consultancy studies, with additional input from seminars and conferences organised by the Ministry. Recognising the importance of particular years in a child's growth and development, the

Ministry has decided that grade 11 and 12 pupils should be taught in separate buildings. During 2008-2009, there were 51 such schools in various parts of the country.

The Ministry has added careers advice to its list of basic services to help students discover their potential, interests, talents and aspirations, and to explore the job opportunities available to them.

The Ministry of Education is approved as an Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (AGCC) "institution of expertise" for the production of life skills and career development syllabi for teachers of those subjects. Oman scored highly in the 2005 Human Development Index in the Arab Region for improvements in the quality of its educational services; mention of this also appeared in the 2008 evaluation report on Education for All in the Arab Region. The Sultanate has been approved by UNESCO to oversee and monitor the development of post-Basic Education in the Arab region as a whole.

The Ministry of Education also supervises a total of 114 Holy Qur'an schools, as well as 33 international schools for children of expatriates.

The Ministry attaches great importance to special needs education, which it supports with a range of programmes and services. Schools in this sector include Al Amal School for the Deaf, the Special Educational Needs School, the Omar bin al Khattab Institute for the Blind and the Al Wafa Centre for the Blind.

Education is a vital element in training manpower to play its part in Oman's development process. The importance the government places on an educated workforce is reflected in the funding allocated to making the Sultanate's education system the best it can be.

Higher education is undergoing a rapid transformation in response to changes taking place in the world. The Ministry has adopted a number of steps to meet the challenges such change poses. Over recent years, higher education has expanded significantly in terms of the number of specialised institutions in Oman, as well as the numbers of students enrolling and the range of academic courses on offer.

This expansion reflects official determination to provide the Sultanate with the trained manpower it needs to continue to move forward. In 2007-2008 there were 57 higher education institutions in the Sultanate – 33 government-funded and 24 privately owned. During this period some 78,930 male and female students were enrolled in private education at home and abroad; of this figure 52,631 (67%) were studying at the government's expense and 26,299 (33%) at their own expense. The total number of students in higher education was 10.6% higher than it during previous year.

The Higher Education Council

This Council sets out the policies and strategies for higher education including student intake. It examines all aspects of higher education,



In the 2008/2009 school year there were 541,436 students in 1,050 schools across the country

including the current challenges, and offers appropriate solutions or alternative courses of action. In 2007-2008 these included:

1 – Scholarships within the Sultanate for the sons and daughters of families on social security and those in difficult circumstances. The private sector was encouraged to award scholarships in this category. A total of 8,196 male and female students were enrolled in the programme.

2 – Scholarships abroad for the highest-performing general education diploma graduates, including grants and places offered to students from Oman. This programme benefitted 1,021 male and female students.

3 – Offering wider opportunities for students to enrol on private higher education courses in the Sultanate and providing incentives for social institutions, companies and educational establishments to offer student grants and help boost intake. Almost 26,000 male and female students attended these private universities and colleges – 37% of the total number enrolled in higher education in the Sultanate.

(Also see page 71)

Higher education in the private sector

Alongside state-sponsored higher education, the Sultanate also provides the private sector with financial and moral support to enable it to play its role as an effective partner, and monitors progress to ensure

academic standards are maintained. Private universities have also been given grants of RO17 million each to be spent on maintaining and improving buildings, utilities and laboratories.

Non-government institutions of higher education receive other forms of support, particularly when they are first established. These include various land grants, exemptions and subsidies. They also enjoy the benefits of expertise from highly-qualified government and private sector personnel, as well as exemption from all business taxes – certain other fees - for a period of five years. Private universities are eligible to receive grants equal to 50% of paid-up capital up to a maximum of RO3 million.

Private establishments of higher education also receive various forms of indirect support. The government allocates 1,500 scholarships every year for students from families on social security, as well as a further 600 for students living in difficult circumstances. In 2007-2008 some 2,421 scholarships were awarded to students in these categories.

Private institutions of higher education have helped boost student intake in the higher education sector. There has been a steady rise in numbers enrolled at these establishments, from 6,234 in 2001-2002 to 25,988 in 2007-2008, the latter figure representing 37% of the total number of students enrolled in higher education in Oman.

The Accreditation Council

In 2006 the Accreditation Council carried out a comprehensive study of higher education in the Sultanate, bringing in experts from home and abroad for the purposes of assessment, comparison and recommendation. On the basis of this study the Accreditation Council produced a quality system management plan for higher education in the country, compatible with the highest international guidelines and introduced an advanced accreditation system, which includes continual assessment and quality control based on specific criteria. *(Also, see page 71)*

The National Commission for Education, Culture and Science

As well as keeping the country's appropriate ministries and authorities abreast of global developments in education, culture and the sciences, the Commission, established in 1974, arranges contacts with international organisations involved in similar fields for the exchange of skills and expertise. At home it works to create an atmosphere in which each citizen's intellectual potential, is valued and nurtured.

The Commission's secretariat-general is responsible for a wide range of educational, cultural, scientific and media activities, frequently in co-operation with other organisations including UNESCO, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), among others. It holds meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops



The practical part of learning is as important as the theory

in a variety of disciplines, frequently with international partners.

Scientific research

The Ministry of Higher Education is a keen supporter of scientific research in the private universities and colleges. By funding academic chairs and sponsoring serious, social research initiatives, the Research Council helps enable these institutions to establish themselves as nationally recognised research establishments. Over recent years private higher education institutions have produced a significant volume of research and hosted numerous scientific and academic conferences and seminars, attended by scholars and scientists from around the world.

Higher Education Admissions Centre (HEAC)

The Higher Education Admissions Centre (HEAC) co-ordinates procedures for admitting students into higher education. An electronic data exchange system was set up in 2007 to exchange information and statistics between the HEAC and various schools and institutions. Now, enrolling students can complete the procedure using their home computer, or online facilities available to them at any one of 500 local centres throughout the country.

Students can also apply by SMS text on their mobile phones. Oman's

fully automated and user-friendly 'E-admission system', one of the first of its kind in the world, was given a UN Information Society World Summit Award.

The education portal

The Ministry of Education's Electronic Educational Portal is progressing well. The project will be introduced in three phases. Phase one (2006 and 2008) converted administrative operations for schools in Muscat and Buraimi into an electronic-system, using the School Management System (SMS). Phase two (2009-2013) will see the development of the portal's contents, the completion of all administrative functions within the system and the extension of the scheme to cover every education directorate in the country. This phase will launch the Learning Management System (LMS) and Document Archives System (DMS). LMS involves publishing and using digital text, e-books and audio and video materials, while DMS enables users to send, track and archive electronically. Phase three (2014 to 2016) will develop the portal's e-financial system in line with Digital Oman trends.

Students Studying Abroad

The number of Omani students studying abroad (both sponsored and private) in the 2008-2009 academic year is recorded at 31,595, including 18,418 boys and 13,177 girls. Omani students are enrolled in courses in approximately 40 countries, including the USA, the United Kingdom, Russia, Spain, China and Slovakia.

Universities

The country's only public university is Sultan Qaboos University, but there are five private universities which represent an increasingly significant component of Oman's growing higher education sector.

Sultan Qaboos University

Since it opened in 1986, setting a high standard for the intellectual and educational development of Omani citizens has been one of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)'s major goals. Today, the university stands as the living embodiment of Sultan Qaboos' vision of a centre of knowledge and expertise that would serve every section of the community.

SQU's impressive advances in scientific and academic fields have contributed to Oman's overall educational development and produced an admirably high standard of graduates. However, not content to rest upon its laurels, the university has instigated a number of initiatives, including hosting an international team of respected academics from North America, Europe, Asia, Australia and the Arabian Gulf, who were invited to rate SQU's progress and put forward some suggestions on maintaining year-on-year progress in the future. Every year SQU



Using a variety of machinery is all part of the learning process for engineering students at government and private universities

employs outside examiners and assessors to conduct an evaluation of its facilities and courses.

SQU constantly develops, updates, and reviews its scientific and academic programmes to ensure they are in tune with the needs of Omani society and global developments. The student intake is 2,708.

Following the success of its master's degree and research programmes, SQU has introduced Doctorate Programmes in some of its colleges. The College of Engineering has already received accreditation from the US Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) for all of its programmes.

SQU hosts and takes part in local and international conferences which, in addition to enhancing its reputation in academic and research circles around the globe, provides it with access to academic and scientific expertise in other parts of the world and a range of opportunities for co-operation.

Sultan Qaboos University operates a two-semester system and all its degree courses are based on credit hours. The programmes comprise lectures, discussions, debates, practical and laboratory studies, and field training.

SQU's nine colleges include: the Colleges of Arts and Social Sciences, Education, Commerce and Economics, Nursing, Law, Medicine and Health Sciences, Science, Agricultural and Marine Sciences, and

Engineering.

The College of Law became SQU's eighth college in the 2006-07 academic year. Two years later it was joined by the College of Nursing as part of efforts to Omanise the nursing profession in collaboration with SQU's Hospital.

The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre at SQU is scheduled to open in the near future, with a library, an Omani Studies Centre, and a multi-purpose hall.

Sultan Qaboos University Teaching Hospital

Uniquely among the Sultanate's medical services, SQU Hospital's highly specialised medical facilities include a bone marrow transplant unit, cell flow analysis equipment and a wide range of other specialised equipment to provide advanced treatment and consultancy services. SQU Hospital offers these specialist services, along with others including paediatric neurology, rheumatism and diabetes treatment services as well as heart surgery, and corneal transports.

Student trips. An opportunity is offered to those students who have excelled academically or in other university-related activities, to go on an annual trip funded by Sultan Qaboos. These trips, which have taken students to countries including Australia, the United States, Canada, China and Germany enable them to broaden their horizons and to learn first hand about other civilisations and cultures. In June 2009, 32 top students visited Russia and Hungary.

The Five Private universities

Sohar University was established in 2000 and is located near the Port of Sohar, its industrial estate and special economic zone, which makes it the largest industrial site in Oman. Sohar University has an academic alliance with the University of Queensland, Australia.

Nizwa University – is the highest seat of learning in the Dakhiliyah region and since 2004 has seen student enrolment - from all over the country – soar from 1,200 to 5,800. Academic partners include the University of Wisconsin, Oregon State University, the University of Aberystwyth, Robert Gordon University as well as a Portuguese and a French university.

Dhofar University, in the south of Oman, has seen student intake grow steadily from 1,347 in 2004 to 2,150 in 2008. Its main academic partner is the American University of Beirut.

At the **German University of Technology** in Muscat**,** which offers degrees in Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development, Urban Planning and Architectural Design, Information Technology and Applied Geosciences, some 80% of the students are women. The university is academically aligned to RWTH Aachen University in Germany.

The Oman Arab Open University, launched in 2008, specialises in alternative forms of learning. It enrolled more than 1,000 students



Universities and colleges now offer degree courses in a variety of disciplines

within the first few months of opening its doors. More than 75% of its recruits are mature students. The university is fully accredited by the UK Open University system, which means successful applicants may transfer to UK institutions.

In addition to the above, there are three new Oman-based universities in the planning stages, i.e. Muscat University, the University of Buraimi and one in the Sharqiyah region.

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

Some 30 HEIs come under the Ministry of Higher Education, they include:

6 Colleges of Applied Sciences;

5 private universities;

2 private university colleges, i.e. the Majan and the Modern College of Business & Sciences;

17 colleges that are privately-run and offer degrees

Other HEIs are supervised by the Ministries of Manpower, Health, Transport, Defence, Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the Royal Oman Police and the Central Bank of Oman.

Colleges of Applied Sciences

The Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS), established in the summer

of 2007 by Royal Decree, evolved from the six government Colleges of Education established in the mid-1990s. The CAS offer degree programmes in a number of disciplines, related to the diversification of Oman's economy. They are located in Sur, Sohar, Nizwa, Ibri, Rostaq and Salalah. There were 7,856 male and female students registered at these colleges in 2008.

With effect from September 2009, Sohar CAS will have a new engineering degree programme, possibly academically linked to a European university. There will be an annual intake of 50 students in each of three degree courses – mechanical, electrical and chemical engineering.

MANPOWER

Large-scale development for almost four decades has brought about fundamental change in the Omani economy, presenting new opportunities for the private sector to play a greater role in economic growth. The country has seen a significant increase in the numbers of self-employed Omanis in the vocational, commercial and service sectors creating a growing demand for manpower.

In seeking to supply the labour market with qualified national manpower the Sultanate has focused on training young Omanis in the necessary skills to ensure the success of its Omanisation policies. In 2008 work was ongoing on vocational training and technical education programmes to keep pace with the private sector's requirements. Courses for trainees and students at national vocational training centres and colleges of technology all now include on-the-job training as part of the curriculum.

Technical education

In 2008, some 6,844 male and female general education diploma graduates enrolled on training and educational courses at the Higher College of Technology in Muscat and the six Colleges of Technology in al Musana'ah, Nizwa, Ibra, Salalah, Shinas and Ibri – an 8.3% increase compared with the 2007 intake of 6,318 students.

Subjects taught at the colleges of technology include engineering, information technology, applied sciences, pharmacology and commercial studies, among others. After completing their foundation year students are assigned to one of 33 specialist disciplines. At the end of 2008 some 21,295 students were enrolled at the country's colleges of technology with males accounting for 59.5% and females 40.5% of the total.

The government Vocational Training Centres offer vocational courses in a variety of subjects including: electricity, electronics, refrigeration, air-conditioning, mechanics, welding, metallurgy, motor vehicle maintenance and repairs and building construction. Trainees are given courses at three levels – semi-skilled worker, skilled worker



Vocational training programmes are popular with students

and craftsman. During the 2007-2008 training year from September to May, 7,651 male and female trainees were enrolled on vocational training programmes.

Courses at the Fishermen's Training Institute in al Khabourah, in the Batinah region, include: fish farming, fisheries advice and guidance, quality control, engine repairs, and fishing boat manufacture and repairs. The Institute also holds courses to develop fishermen's skills and train them in the use of modern equipment with the aim of improving overall efficiency and productivity.

Other Colleges

The Ministry of Manpower is also responsible for the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO) and the Oman Tourism College (OTC).

IMCO received its first intake of students in September 2005. It educates and trains deck officers, marine engineering officers, port and transport managers, process operators and technicians. The STC-Group and the government of Oman are the founders and owners of IMCO.

OTC was established in 2001 and the College now offers five streams of hospitality and tourism programmes, from tour guiding and culinary services to front office and housekeeping, tourism and hospitality management. It is a joint undertaking of the government of Oman

and a private consortium of Austrian tourism institutes.

Other initiatives

The **Sanad** programme was set up in 2001 by the government to help promote and foster the development of small-scale enterprises in Oman. Young men and women from 18-40 years of age are given support to start their own business, including maximum loan facilities of RO5,000. Loans are repayable over a period of seven years and accrue interest at an annual rate of 2%. More than 40% of the beneficiaries are women.

The **Sharakah (Youth Fund)** programme is owned and operated by the Fund for the Development of Youth Projects. Its core mission is to provide equity and other means of financial support to small and medium-scale enterprises owned by Omani entrepreneurs which will, in turn, provide other citizens with career opportunities.

Intillaqah is a non-profit programme modelled on a Shell-funded initiative called 'LiveWIRE', which is now running in 25 countries. Intillaqah Oman was born in1995. On 2lst June 2009 Sharakah signed an agreement with Intillaqah supporting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship Award by providing sponsorship. Sharakah and Intillaqah will work together towards promoting a stronger culture of entrepreneurship as the success of Oman's economy is dependant on the success of these young people.

Employment

According to the National Manpower Register, at the end of 2008 the total number of registered private sector Omani workers was 161,004, of whom 131,011 were male and 29,993 were female. According to published figures, 61.7% of Omani wage earners in the private sector are in the skilled category or higher. A further 38.3% are semi-skilled. Some 81.4% of the total number are males and 18.6% are female.

A Ministerial Decision was issued in July 2009 requiring the percentage of Omani employees in private sector professions, to increase to 100% in marketing, 90% in airline and tourist companies, and 85% in the 3*, 4* and 5* hotel industry for 2009-2010.

A GCC agreement, reciprocal between the six states, encourages job seekers to look for jobs in neighbouring countries with local manpower shortages. In this connection a Labour Office has been set up in the capital of each GCC country. During 2008, the Labour Office offered jobs to 921 Omanis in neighbouring Doha and Dubai.

The government promoted co-operation with the private sector in implementing recommendations emerging from national seminars on the employment of Omanis.

In 2008 the Ministry of Manpower upgraded its recruitment and employment services by setting up the Job Information Centre which

provides data on job seekers, hoping to match them with job opportunities in the private sector, to the benefit of both. A mobile employment office has also been established to provide job seekers with registration, training and recruitment services in their local areas.

SOCIAL WELFARE

Social welfare is a major government priority backed by a series of support initiatives. The Ministry of Social Development's social security programmes include a livelihood projects scheme, which helps those on welfare benefits to acquire new skills towards achieving economic self-sufficiency.

The Ministry has also taken steps to transform traditional social work models into independent associations and institutions that operate alongside the government in providing social and economic care for those in need.

Particular attention was focused on the social security sector in 2008-2009. Services to enable families on social security to improve their living standards included a number of projects and proposals put forward by the Ministry in conjunction with other government and private sector bodies.

Services for the disabled

The government has introduced a set of wide-ranging initiatives to improve the quality of its vocational, social, psychological and health programmes for the disabled. These include a wider choice of vocational training subjects, better psychological and social support and counselling services, and medical and family rehabilitation programmes tailored to meet the interests and aspirations of disabled individuals and the needs of the labour market.

Livelihood projects

Livelihood projects are the cornerstone of Oman's social welfare programme and designed to improve the economic conditions of families on social security. Schemes to provide employment for the disabled, people on social security benefits and others in similar categories have been expanded to cover several of the country's regions. The Ministry also intends to find employment for 400 people from families on social security and people with disabilities in private sector establishments.

Family welfare

The Ministry's Family Counselling and Guidance Department offers members of the public counselling for psychological and social problems. By the end of 2008 there had been 145 such cases. The Department also operates social awareness programmes through the media, holds lectures and takes part in symposiums and conferences at



A number of wide-ranging initiatives have improved the quality of educational programmes for the disabled

home and abroad.

The Sultanate has made impressive advances in respect of the role of women and women's rights. It has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and produced its first national report on current and projected legislative, judicial and administrative measures to put the Convention's provisions into effect. After joining CEDAW, the Sultanate set up a committee to monitor the implementation of its provisions. A workshop on the Convention held in February 2009 came up with a number of recommendations.

The Ministry of Social Development has also introduced measures to ensure services provided by child welfare institutions are of the highest quality. It plans and supervises education projects and other activities for children and makes effective provisions for minors in need of alternative care.

Orphaned children and others in similar categories are placed with foster families or in orphanages. At the end of 2008 some 327 children had been placed with foster families and 120 were in local orphanages.

Non-government associations

The Sultanate encourages voluntary work and the operation of non-

government social welfare associations. Members of the public are considered essential components in the smooth running of a community that serves the overall public interest.

These associations are effective partners in Oman's development and offer a formal framework for non-profit humanitarian work.

The Ministry of Social Development oversees 94 non-governmental institutions, i.e. social associations and clubs across the country. These include 51 Omani Women's Associations. There are 21 professional associations, 12 charitable associations and 10 social clubs. The latest to be registered, in June 2009, were the Oman Hereditary Blood Diseases Society and the Oman Diabetes Society.

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI)

At the end of 2008 there were 147,194 Omanis registered with PASI. The Board has met regularly during the course of the year. In June 2009 it discussed the first draft of PASI's 5-year strategic plan.

THE CIVIL SERVICE

The Ministry of Civil Service is the body responsible for the administrative development of the government's civil departments, which complement the country's economic and social progress.

The Ministry's main focus is on improving administrative performance, simplifying procedures and providing citizens with easy access to government services. It aims to ensure the country has an efficient, competent administrative apparatus capable of making the best possible use of available resources at minimal cost, while keeping abreast of modern administrative systems and practices.

One of the major objectives of Oman's development strategy is to fully develop a comprehensive administrative apparatus of state, staffed by well-trained, qualified personnel. To this end the Civil Service Council has approved a series of training plans for government staff. Over recent years some 17,670 employees have received training at home, while a further 700 have been sent on scholarships abroad. Some 31 government personnel have received training grants from various Arab and friendly states and 202 training scholarships have been awarded by oil companies operating in the Sultanate.

The Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Manpower work closely in upgrading the data recorded in the Manpower Register.

According to the available figures, 1,473 civil service staff were sent on work-related academic courses in 2008. Published figures show that 2,129 nationals with appropriate specialist qualifications joined the government sector in 2008.

The success of the Sultanate's Omanisation plan, to create job opportunities for young Omanis, show that at the end of 2008 there were 118,990 personnel working in the Civil Service, of whom 104,927



At the end of 2008 the National Manpower Register listed 161,004 Omani private sector workers

(88.2%) were Omanis. The government target is to increase this ratio to 95% by 2020.

A comparison between the 2008 figures and those of the previous year show the number of Omani employees grew by 5,031 during that period, while the number of non-Omanis fell by 665.

Women number 43,830 or 41.9% of the total personnel employed in Civil Service departments, showing a significant increase over the past 10 years.

HEALTH

Cutting edge health care facilities across the Sultanate provide Omani citizens with a comprehensive range of services comparable with any in the world.

In 1976 the Ministry of Health introduced the first of its development plans for the health sector leading to the provision of services that have resulted in large scale improvements in the general health of Oman's population. The year 2008 marked the third phase of the Seventh Five-year Health Development Plan (2006-2010). The Plan follows a results-based strategy which, while focusing on the priorities of an Omani-based public health policy, also takes account of regional and international trends, and the United Nations Millennium Declaration to which Oman is a signatory - that sets out eight development targets and a programme to improve

general health care in the global community up to the year 2015.

The Sultanate's health care system operates at three levels. They are:

1 – Effective, high quality primary health care provided by the health centres, polyclinics and local hospitals in all the Sultanate's regions.

2 – Secondary health care provided by the referral hospitals across the country, which offer specialist medical care.

3 – Hi-tech specialist health care provided by the major hospitals in the Governorate of Muscat.

High quality, advanced primary health care is provided nationwide, producing noticeable improvements in the health of the Omani population. The Ministry attaches great importance to secondary and tertiary health services. Progress recorded in the health sector has resulted in significant falls in the prevalence of contagious diseases and a rise in life expectancy. Oman has also seen sharp falls in infant mortality rates; while in 1970, 118 children per thousand died in the first year of their lives, in 2007 this figure had been reduced to 10 deaths per thousand.

The country operates an extensive immunisation programme. In 2008 the percentage of children immunised against polio, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough rose to 99.2% while against measles it rose to 98%. In the same year the Ministry of Health added inoculation against two additional diseases – pneumococcal vaccine PCV7 (3 doses) and vaccine-associated with paralytic polio IPV (one dose) to its list; the Sultanate recorded its 14th successive year without a single incidence of polio and there were only six confirmed cases of measles. Diarrhoea cases fell to 240 per thousand children below the age of five and confirmed cases of malaria fell to 965, of which 957 were imported.

Upon receiving news of the outbreak of the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, from the World Health Organisation in 2009, the Ministry of Health immediately formed a special committee to monitor and manage the threat. Advice was given to the public via the media, and a special hotline was established. Scanners were installed at ports and airports with the aim of detecting suspected incoming carriers of the virus.

Statistics

Such achievements were made possible by the Health Ministry's successful and ongoing manpower recruitment and training programmes. At the end of 2008 the Ministry employed 23,870 people, some 68%of whom were Omani. A total of 1,079 – or 30% – of the country's 3,620 doctors, and 9,250 members - around 65%- of the national nursing staff, are Omani.

At the end of 2008 there were 58 hospitals in the Sultanate - 49 of which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. There were 5,497 beds, representing 19 beds per ten thousand of the population. Of these, 4,605 beds – or 83.8% of all hospital beds – were in the Ministry of Health hospitals.



Cutting edge health care facilities exist across the Sultanate

Some 242 health centres, clinics and dispensaries were operating in the Sultanate in 2008, providing Primary Health Care, 197 of these were operated by the Ministry, including 74 health centres with beds, 72 without beds, 21 polyclinics and 30 local hospitals.

The government-sponsored health service covers the entire country, including rural and urban districts. Its facilities include:

. In the Governorate of Muscat: the Royal Hospital is a general health facility with 623 beds; Khoula Hospital is a 485 bed facility specialising in orthopaedic surgery, neurosurgery, cosmetic surgery and burns); the 96-bed al Nahdha Hospital specialises in ear, nose and throat surgery, ophthalmic surgery and treatments, jaw, gum, dental surgery and related treatments, dermatology and nervous diseases while the 76-bed Ibn Sina Hospital deals with referrals related to psychological and nervous disorders. Other facilities in the Governorate include al Rahma Hospital in Ruwi (24 beds), specialising in chest problems; Quriyat Hospital (31 beds), Bausher Polyclinic, al Wattayah Polyclinic (gynaecological and maternity), Quriyat Polyclinic and 23 health centres, including two with maternity beds. In addition the Ministry of Defence and Royal Oman Police have their own hospitals. Sultan Qaboos University also has a referral hospital which is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education.

. In the Governorate of Dhofar: the Sultan Qaboos Hospital, the Governorate's referral hospital, has a 450 bed capacity. Dhofar also has hos-

pitals in Taqah. Tawi Ateer, Rakhyut, Sadah and Madinat al Haqq,with a total of 538 beds between them. Other facilities include the Salalah Polyclinic and 28 health centres, including 22 with maternity beds.

- In the Dakhiliyah region: six hospitals – in Nizwa (the region's referral hospital), Sumail, Bahla, Adam, Izki and al Jabal al Akhdhar - with a total of 544 beds. The region also has four polyclinics, in Nizwa, Sumail, Izki and Bahla, and 16 health centres, including four with maternity beds.
- In the Sharqiyah region: 10 hospitals – in Sur (the South Sharqiyah referral hospital), Ibra (the North Sharqiyah referral hospital), Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan, Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali, Sinaw, Masirah, Wadi Dima wa'l Ta'een, Wadi Bani Khalid, Samad al Shaan and Bidiya. The Sharqiyah is divided into two health regions – the North Sharqiyah with its referral hospital in Ibra and13 health centres including six with maternity beds, and the South Sharqiyah with two polyclinics (in Sur and Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali) and 15 health centres, including 10 with maternity beds, contributing to a total of 787 hospital beds in the Sharqiyah region.
- The Batinah region: 10 hospitals – in Sohar, the referral hospital for the North Batinah has 363 beds, while Rustaq with 235 beds is the referral hospital for the South Batinah. Smaller facilities operate at Saham, Wadi Bani Ghafir, Wadi al Sarmi, Wadi Mistal, Wadi al Hawasna, Wadi al Haimli, Wadi Bani Kharus and Wadi Hibi. The Batinah is also divided into two health regions – the North Batinah with the Sohar polyclinic and five other polyclinics in the wilayats of Sohar, Saham, Shinas, Suwaiq and al Khabourah, as well as 15 health centres, including three with maternity beds. The South Batinah enjoys the services provided by polyclinics in Rustaq, Barka and al Musana'ah, as well as those of 10health centres, all with maternity beds. The Batinah region, as a whole, has a total of 761 hospital beds.
- The Dhahirah region: three hospitals – in Ibri, the region's referral hospital, Yanqul and Tan'am - with a total of 260 beds. In addition to a polyclinic in Ibri, there are 11 health centres in the region including nine with maternity beds.
- The Governorate of Buraimi: two hospitals – in Buraimi, the Governorate's referral hospital and Wadi al Jizzi. The Governorate also has four health centres.
- The Governorate of Musandam: three hospitals – in Khasab, the Governorate's referral hospital, Bukha and Daba al Bay'ah – with a total of 156 beds. There is also a polyclinic in the wilayat of Khasab, as well as three health centres, all with maternity beds.
- The Wusta region: three hospitals – in Haima, al Duqm and al Jazir – with 72 beds. There are also eight health centres, seven of which have maternity beds.



At the end of 2008 there were 58 hospitals in the Sultanate, 4 of which were privately-run. Here Sohar's government hospital

According to the latest available figures, the Health Ministry's out-patient facilities received over 11 million visits in 2008, more than ever before, boosting the use of other medical services such as laboratories, radiology and dental treatments. At the end of 2008, around 252,000 cases were treated at various hospital in-patient departments, including with 88,533 surgical operations.

Other departments and bodies – including the Diwan of Royal Court, the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Oman Police, Sultan Qaboos University and Petroleum Development Oman - provide private health services for their staff and their dependants and there is growing private sector investment in this sector. Four private hospitals were in operation at end of 2008, around 360 general clinics, 219 specialist clinics and polyclinics, 128 dental clinics, 48 clinics specialising in traditional Chinese and Indian medicine, and 10 medical laboratory and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) diagnostic centres.

Training

The Ministry of Health has established training institutes, offering study programmes at first diploma as well as post diploma levels. It has a continuous sponsorship programme of selective undergraduate and postgraduate studies overseas in a comprehensive range of specialties.

The general nursing programme is offered at nursing institutes



Training for nurses is offered at nursing institutes around the country, as well as at degree level at the College of Nursing at Sultan Qaboos University

throughout the Sultanate. Allied health programmes are offered at several Ministry of Health training institutes in Muscat. The Institute of Health Sciences conducts the following programmes: Medical Laboratory Sciences, Physiotherapy, Radiography and Dental Surgery Assistant. The Omani Assistant Pharmacy Institute conducts the Assistant Pharmacy programme and the Oman Medical Records Institute supervises the Medical Records Technology programme. The Oman Institute of Public Health has conducted a series of public health related programmes, namely, Public Health Inspectors, Health Education, and Nutrition and Dietetics. Currently this Institute is offering a post basic diploma programme in Health Education and two short programmes of one semester in Nutrition and Dietetics and School Health.

The post basic nursing specialty programmes at the Oman Specialised Nursing Institute offer Nephrology Nursing, Midwifery, Critical Care Nursing in Paediatric and Neonatology, Nursing Administration, Critical Care Nursing (Adults) and Mental Health Nursing.

SCOUTS & GUIDES

The scout and guide movement in Oman is one of the oldest youth movements in the country and dates from the formation of the first scout troop at the Sultaniyah School in Muscat in 1932. The first girl guide troop was set up at the Fatimah Al Zahra School in Muscat in

1972. From Muscat the movement spread to every part of the country becoming a model of Gulf, Arab and international excellence instilling in its members – girls as well as boys – the motivation to develop their physical, spiritual, intellectual, social and emotional potential to become good citizens, a credit to themselves and an asset to their community.

Oman's Scouts and Guides have been closely involved in the development of the Scout and Guide movement throughout the Gulf. There is ongoing renovation and improvements of the permanent scout camps across the country as well as improvements to the training and camping facilities.

In addition to publishing a large number of books on scouting, including reference books on leadership development, guide books for troop leaders and booklets on peer education the Sultanate is a frequent organiser and host of the many international Scout and Guide events in which young Omanis are keen participants.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said, is a keen supporter of the movement and Oman's Chief Scout. At His Majesty's direction, the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides was established by Royal Decree in 2007, bringing the movement under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education.

OUTWARD BOUND OMAN

A major project aimed at using the outdoor environment to unlock the human potential of young people in the Sultanate of Oman was announced in May 2009. Working in partnership with the Ministry of Education, and private sector companies the Outward Bound Oman/ Tahaddi project has been set up to help young Omanis to develop key life skills through challenging outdoor exploits outside the classroom and into unique learning environments, including desert, mountains and seas.

Established in 1941, Outward Bound is the global leader in experiential education. There are 'schools' in over 30 countries around the world, in which 200,000 young people a year participate. Outward Bound Oman will be the first Outward Bound operation in the Arab world. On an Outward Bound course, young people are equipped with essential life skills. Participant testimonials show that Outward Bound courses improve academic achievement through raising aspirations, self-confidence and motivation to succeed -www.outwardboundoman.com

SPORTING ACHIEVEMENTS

In June 2009 Sultan Qaboos issued the order to initiate a consultancy study for the construction of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Sporting Excellence. An agreement was subsequently signed with



For 3 years in a row the Sultanate's scouts came top in the 'World Jamboree-on-the-Air" and the 'World Jamboree-on-the-Internet"

High Performance Consultants of Canada, who will focus on encouraging sports intended to help qualify young Omanis for participation in regional and international competitions; the long term objective being to create a world class athletic environment in the Sultanate.

Committee Representation

An honour was accorded the Sultanate when in October 2009 the Oman Olympic Committee Vice-Chairman, Habib bin Abdulnabi Macki, was elected as one of the 6 new members of the International Olympic Committee, the first time an Omani has been elected to the IOC.

In 2008 the Sultanate was elected as vice-chair of the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport (CIGEPS) for the Arab region and also elected to co-chair the Sport and Culture working group with Ecuador at the meeting in Paris.

Oman Sail

Oman's sporting achievements during 2008/09 have been many and varied but 2008 saw special accomplishments in sailing.

Among the most important developments has been the establishment of Oman Sail, an exciting new initiative that aims to rekindle the Sultanate's long and glorious maritime heritage and to create Omani



Oman Sail's Masirah won the iShares Cup in 2009. Here Masirah and Renaissance take part in the Venice, Italy event

role models to inspire the next generation. Formed in 2008, under the guidance of the Ministry of Tourism, it is already making waves both locally and internationally.

In March 2009, Mohsin Al Busaidi, as part of a crew of five, made history, as he became the first Arab to sail non-stop around the world onboard Oman's trimaran Musandam. Success has followed success as a further two teams represented Oman in the 2009 European iShares Cup Extreme 40 competition. After 118 races across six venues in Europe, the final results came down to the last race of the last event. After a tough battle, Masirah claimed victory in the last leg in Almeria, Spain, to become the 2009 iShares Cup champions while the second Oman boat, Renaissance took 3rd place overall. Crewed by international teams, two Omani trainees have spent the last two years as apprentices and have now won their full time place on the Asian circuit this winter which visits both Hong Kong and Singapore before the finale in Muscat between 1-5th February 2010.

Oman Sail have also just launched the first of a new class of giant trimarans known as Arabian 100s (A100). Assembled in Salalah, this new addition to the fleet is called Majan, after the ancient name for Oman. Majan will now sail with a crew of seven: 50% of the sailors will be Omani offshore trainees joined by three international professional crew and a cameraman providing the one-on-one training that

the recruits require at this early stage of their career. The first chapter will be 'Tour of Arabia' that will see the team visit Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar before joining the Dubai-Muscat race back to Muscat at the end of November 2009. In 2010, the team will then head off to trace the route for an inaugural 'Indian Ocean 5 Capes Race' - a new course that will see the Oman team cover 15,000 nautical miles over 40 days and pass the Capes of Ras Al Hadd (Oman), down to Cape of Good Hope (South Africa), across the frozen wastes of the Southern Ocean to Cape Leeuwin (SW Australia), past Cape Piai on the tip of the Malaysian peninsula (the southernmost point of mainland Asia, just to the west of Singapore), and back underneath Cape Comorin (southern tip of India) to Muscat.

At the heart of all this success lies the Oman Sail Academy, which aims to make sailing accessible to the nation. Community sailing and try sailing for kids courses are now being run in the first academy in Muscat and by 2015 the project aims to have six further academies running across the country enabling over 30,000 Omanis to try sailing.

Further information on the project can be found at www.omansail.com.

Delighted officials and players hold the coveted Gulf Football Cup in January 2009

Football

Oman's sporting achievements in 2008-2009 were exceptional; the national football team's victory v. Saudi Arabia in the 19th Gulf Cup was a huge triumph and the culmination of years of effort and planning.

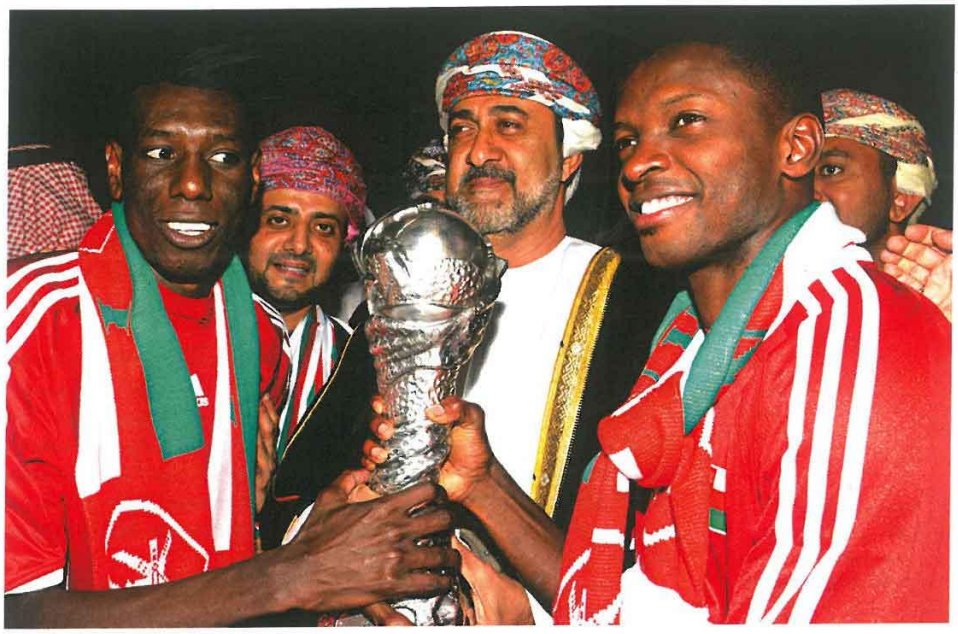
Another sporting highlight was the launch of the first ever Oman Mobile League, with a new logo for the elite 12 first division clubs championship. The launch represented the first step by the Oman Football Association, under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, to realise the dream of transforming the Sultanate's domestic league into a professional union that will fall in line with the Asian Football Confederation guidelines for participation in the Asian professional Champions League by 2012. As part of these efforts, talks will be held between top officials from FIFA - the world soccer governing body and English Premier League - with various local ministries, on the future of launching a professional league within the next two years.

Formula Car Racing

In the final two races of the season of the 2009 Protyre Formula Renault BARC Championships held at Throxton in the UK, Oman's ace driver, Ahmad Said al Harthy, catapulted to the 2nd place in the overall standings of the championship. It was a maiden championship podium finish for the Oman Racing Team driver, who also created history by becoming the first Arab driver to achieve the honour.

Oman's football team, champions of the 19th Gulf Cup for the first time

Camel & Horse racing: The Oman Equestrian Federation and Oman Camel Racing Association, along with Royal Cavalry and Royal




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Camel Corps, organise annual horse racing and camel races across the Sultanate from mid-October to April. On 17th September 2009, the Ministry of Sports announced that the launch of the 2009-2010 camel racing season would see the optional use of robotic riders in the racing arena and noted that the Omani Camel Racing Association would issue licences accordingly. Only riders aged 18 and over will henceforth be eligible to participate in the Al Arda races, one of which will feature endurance and the other an exhibition of horsemanship. In October 2009 the Ministry of Sports announced that an agreement had been signed for a modern horse racing track, with world-class amenities covering an area of two million square metres, scheduled for completion at al Rahba Farms in Barka in 2011.

Pure Arabian Horse race in the UK: In September 2009 the Royal Cavalry sponsored a pure Arabian horse race, at Salisbury racecourse in the UK, in coordination with the Arabian Racing Organisation. The Royal Cavalry sent its horses to race at various Arabian horse meets in UK racing and was also responsible for organizing the World Arabian Horse Organisation (WAHO) Conference in February 2009, which attracted delegates from around the world, including the WAHO chairman Dr Hans J Nagel.

An Omani, Nabil al Busaidi, was the first Arab to reach the North Magnetic Pole in April 2009

2nd International Tent-pegging Championship: Organised by the Oman Equestrian Federation, the February 2009 event was held at the Al Rahba Farm in Barka near Muscat. The Sultanate's riders bagged overall honours in the championship with 10 medals - three gold, four silver and three bronze, competing against teams from Yemen, India, Pakistan, UK, Jordan, Egypt and Sudan. Naser bin Saqar al Khamisi was judged best Omani horseman.

Arctic trek: Nabil al Busaidi entered the record books as the first Arab to reach the North Magnetic Pole in April 2009. He walked and skied his way across 650kms, pulling 50kgs of equipment, and the flag of the Sultanate of Oman. Al Busaidi now hopes to become the first Arab to participate in the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in 2010.

1st Asian Youth Games: Held in Singapore the Sultanate participated in two events – athletics and diving.

University Games: Oman took part in the 25th Universiade (World University Games) for the first time, participating in two events in the Games, held in Belgrade in July, athletics and swimming.

2010 Muscat Asian Beach Games: A multi-sport event, to be held every two years, is sanctioned by the Olympic Council of Asia. At the inaugural session of the Asian Beach Games held on the Indonesian island of Bali in October 2008, Oman won gold in the beach football event.

An architect's concept drawing for the 2010 Muscat Asian Beach Games scheduled to be held on the Batinah coast in December 2010

The Sultanate is currently preparing to host the 2nd edition of the Games, from 8th to 16th December 2010. A purpose built Sports City is under construction in Musannah, to host and house the athletes, offi-





cials and organisers. The 11 sports disciplines involved include: Beach Football, Beach Handball, Beach Volleyball, Beach Sepak Takraw, Beach Kabbadi, Jet Ski, Sailing, Marathon Swimming, Triathlon, Body Building and Woodball.

Cricket: Oman won the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Trophy Challenge tournament in Thailand but disappointingly finished 10th at the ICC World Cup qualifiers in South Africa and was subsequently relegated to the ICC World Cricket League Third Tier.

Oman women's cricket team took part in the ACC under-19 cricket tournament and also participated in the ACC Twenty20 tournament in Kuala Lumpur in July to record its first international win with a victory over Kuwait.

Golf: The national golf team finished fourth overall in the 12th GCC championship held in Saudi Arabia. The team also took part in the 29th Arab Golf Team Championship in Ras al Khaimah, UAE, and finished 10th out of 16. However, the Omani team won the silver at the GCC tournament in the nett category in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Oman's first grass golf course opened to the public, initially with nine holes in May 2009 and in October, the 18-hole championship golf course was inaugurated. Several other grass golf courses are under construction and by 2011, Oman will have the potential to host an international PGA Tour event.

Athletics: The girls' teams won 20 medals, taking the Sultanate to third place in the first Gulf women's sports tournament in Kuwait in March 2008. Meanwhile, the national athletics team won 10 medals at the 11th GCC under-16 athletics championship in Saudi Arabia.

Volleyball: Oman participated in the Asian preliminary qualifiers for the world championship and finished second but bowed out in the next round.

Weight-lifting and body-building: The Oman national team came top in the youth category and third in the men's category in the 16th championship in Jordan. Meanwhile the national team won 19 medals in the ninth GCC Weightlifting Championship held in the UAE in July.

Power-lifting: Oman won 23 medals in the Asian championships in India in May 2009 with four gold, 15 silver and four bronze medals.

Swimming and Diving: The national swimming team won four medals in the ninth long-distance swimming championship in Kuwait in 2009 and seven medals in the GCC short distance championship in Abu Dhabi in 2008. Musallam al Khaduri made history when he became the first Omani to participate in the FINA world swimming championship in Rome in August.

The Omani national diving team came second at the Amsterdam International Open Championship held in May 2009.

Ice-skating: The Sultanate received a big boost with the establish-

ment of the Omani Ice-Skating Committee, which sent a team to participate at the ISU Grand Prix in Turkey.

Motorbiking: The Oman Automobile Association recognised Muscat Bikes Club and Oman Classic Bikes Club.

Oman's Omar al Mamari undertook a drive on his Honda CBR 1100 bike from the Oman Automobile Association premises in Muscat to the city of Salalah, some 1031 kms south (640.634 miles) and returned to Muscat the same way averaging a speed of 94.1 km and covering a total of 2062 kms (1281.267 Miles) in 24 hours-setting, thereby setting the world record for the Greatest Distance travelled on a Motorcycle in 24 Hours (individual). His achievement was recognised by the World Records Academy on July 1, 2009. Omar al Mamari again covered 2,127km in 24 hours in August 2009 in an attempt to find a place in the Guinness World Records. He now is waiting to hear from the Guinness authorities to acknowledge his feat and has sent them his supporting documents.

Go-karting: Oman Automobile Association has announced the reopening of a go-karting circuit by the end of the year.

Summer of Sports 2009: Around 20,000 young people of various nationalities enrolled to participate in the activities held at sports complexes, schools and local clubs in different governorates and regions during June, July and August.

Tennis: Oman participated in the Asia/Oceania Group Two Davis Cup tie against Hong Kong in July 2009, but was relegated to Group III. Fatma al Nabhani entered the main draw of the Wimbledon, England, girls' event thanks to her new junior ranking of 33rd in the world and 4th in Asia. She reached the quarterfinals of the Wimbledon junior doubles event along with her Russian partner Yana Buchina.

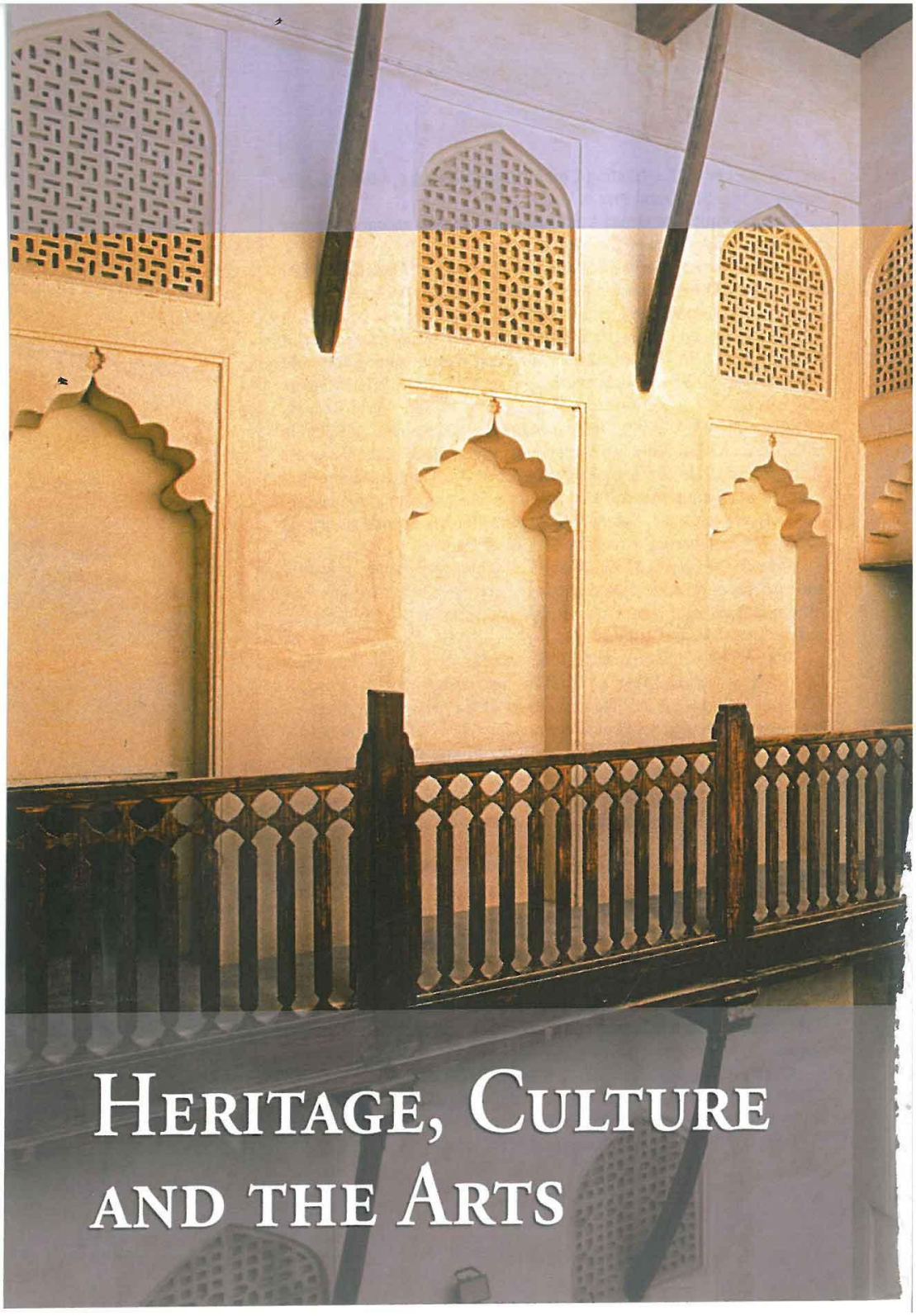
Traditional games: These games are keenly encouraged as part of the Sultanate's cultural heritage. Tournaments are held annually in the wilayats and regions.

Taekwondo: Oman took part at the first Asian Martial Arts Games in Bangkok. Held in August, one of the three Omani participants, Khalid al Mahrouqi, reached the quarterfinals in the featherweight category.

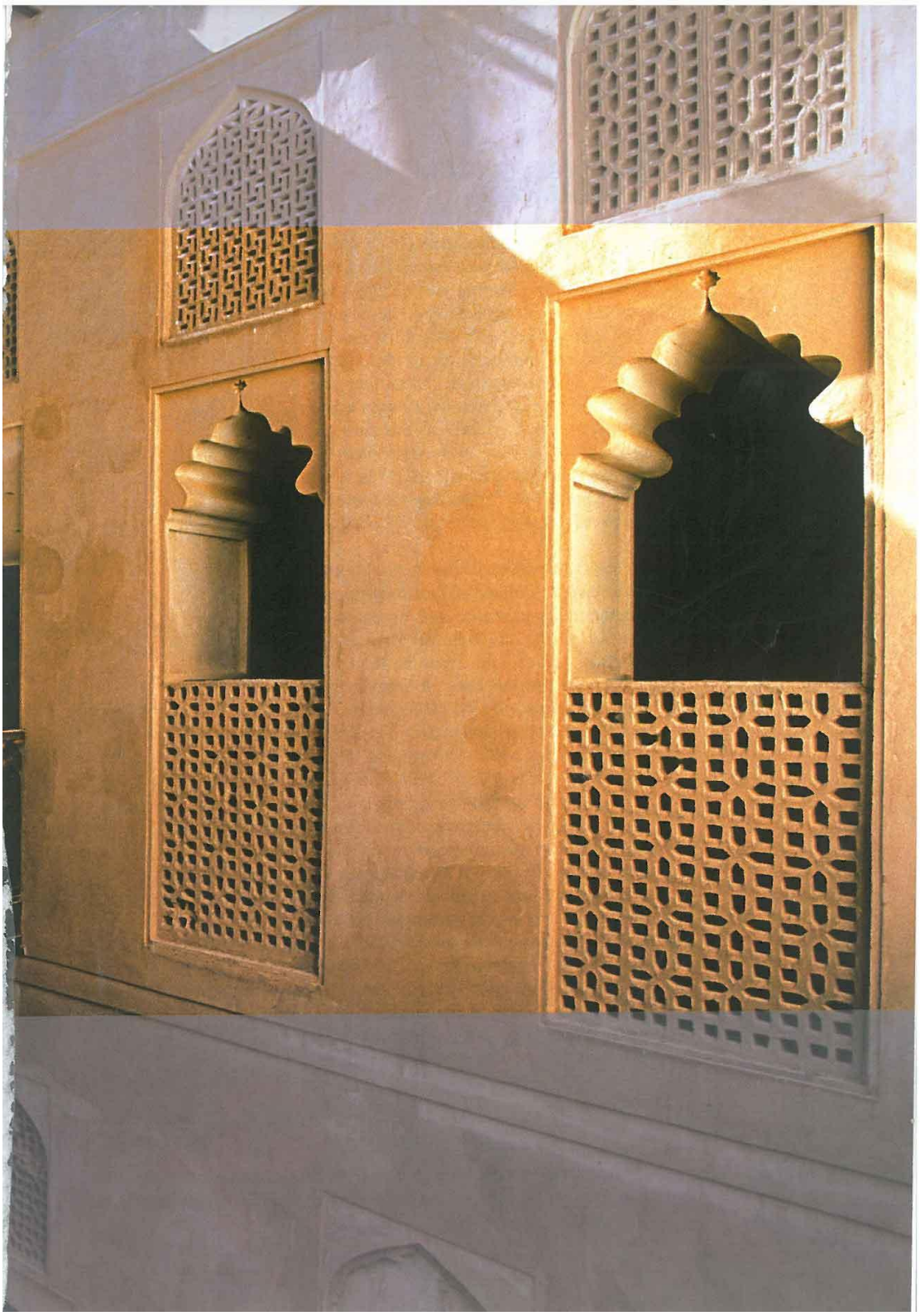
Handball: Oman made its first ever participation at the World Games in Kaohsiung, Taiwan and did well to finish fourth.

Sports website (www.sportsoman.com): This site, which underlines the importance of sport in everyday life in Oman, was awarded first prize in a national competition to select the best Omani internet website.

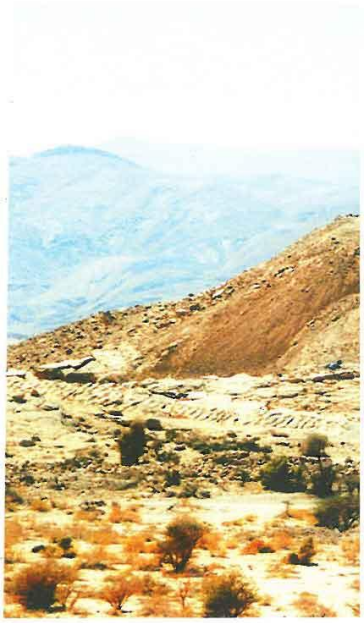
Olympic Torch Relay: In April 2008 the Beijing Olympic Games Torch Relay passed through Muscat – the only Middle East capital to enjoy the honour – and was carried by 80 sports personalities (including 57 from the Sultanate) over a distance of 22 kms.



Heritage, Culture and the Arts



HERITAGE, CULTURE AND THE ARTS



Oman's geographical location, its terrain and resources have been important factors in the way its economy and culture have evolved over the generations. The country developed trading links with other nations centuries ago and, by virtue of those links, became a bridge between civilisations and a focal point of the Arabian peninsula and the ancient world. Modern day Omanis are rightly proud of the way in which their nation has expanded into a vibrant 21st state but celebration of history, heritage and culture remain an essential part of life in the Sultanate.

The Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs oversees the restoration, maintenance and development of a variety of sites, from the Bronze Age Salut site, which dates from the third millennium BC, to the Land of Frankincense sites that feature on UNESCO's World Cultural and Natural Heritage List. Several other government departments are also closely involved in safeguarding Oman's heritage and culture for future generations. The Ministry of Heritage and Culture takes part in ongoing excavation work at a number of archaeological sites as well as carrying out maintenance work on ancient buildings and monuments. Its remit includes museums and international book exhibitions, in which it participates in collaboration with the Ministry of Information. It also restores and prints copies of old manuscripts and promotes present-day cultural activities such as the theatre, the cinema, the arts and literature.

The Ministry of Information, also involved in culture and the arts, supports the Oman Centre for Traditional Music (OCTM) and prints books. The Ministry of Tourism's activities in this sector include the Al Feleij Castle Theatre programmes. The Bait Al Baranda Visitors' Centre, which comes under Muscat Municipality's jurisdiction, also runs programmes that are both cultural and entertaining.

Archaeology

The Salut Culture

In 2004 a team of archaeologists from Italy's Pisa University made a preliminary study of the Salut heights in the Dakhiliyah region's wilayat



Archaeology in Salut. Recent discoveries this season indicate an early-Bronze Age, 3rd Millennium BC site

of Bahla under the supervision of the Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs. During the first phase the team discovered an Iron Age site, but during the period under review work revealed a new site dating from the early Bronze Age in the 3rd Millennium BC.

The historical importance of Salut is directly linked to the beginning of the history of Oman and thus related to the early arrival of the Arab tribes from other parts of Arabia. The site is also linked to the early evidence of the aflaaj (water channel) system in the Omani peninsula. The site is on the top of a rocky hillock about 20.45 metres high at the heart of what was once an ancient oasis occupying a large area on the western side of a valley at the junction of Wadi Bahla and Wadi Sayfam.

The latest excavations revealed a circular stone structure immediately beneath the surface of an area of flat ground, which probably dates from the first occupation of Salut at the beginning of the Bronze Age in the third millennium BC.

The architectural features of that period can be clearly seen in the large fort-like structure on the highest point of the site, which consists of a circular wall with a diameter of around 12 metres, built round a central area. The structure marks an ancient burial ground, where the remains of a long-boned skeleton were discovered lying in the foetal position. Several artifacts were found nearby including beads, a bronze pin and a white stone mace head. Other finds at the site include stone and bronze

implements, pottery fragments and votive objects (snakes in particular), as well as examples of mud brick and stone construction.

The main features of the Salut site are the advanced fortification techniques used in its buildings, an architectural style distinctive for that period and the sophisticated falaj (i.e. channel) irrigation system that was used there.

Al Baleed Archaeological Park

The park includes the site of the historic city of al Baleed, as well as services and facilities for visitors and tourists and the Museum of the Land of Frankincense. The Museum comprises two halls: one that illustrates historic Oman and its cultural heritage over the ages, and a Maritime Hall containing models of Omani ships and other exhibits highlighting the country's marine history. The Museum welcomed 53,010 visitors in 2008.

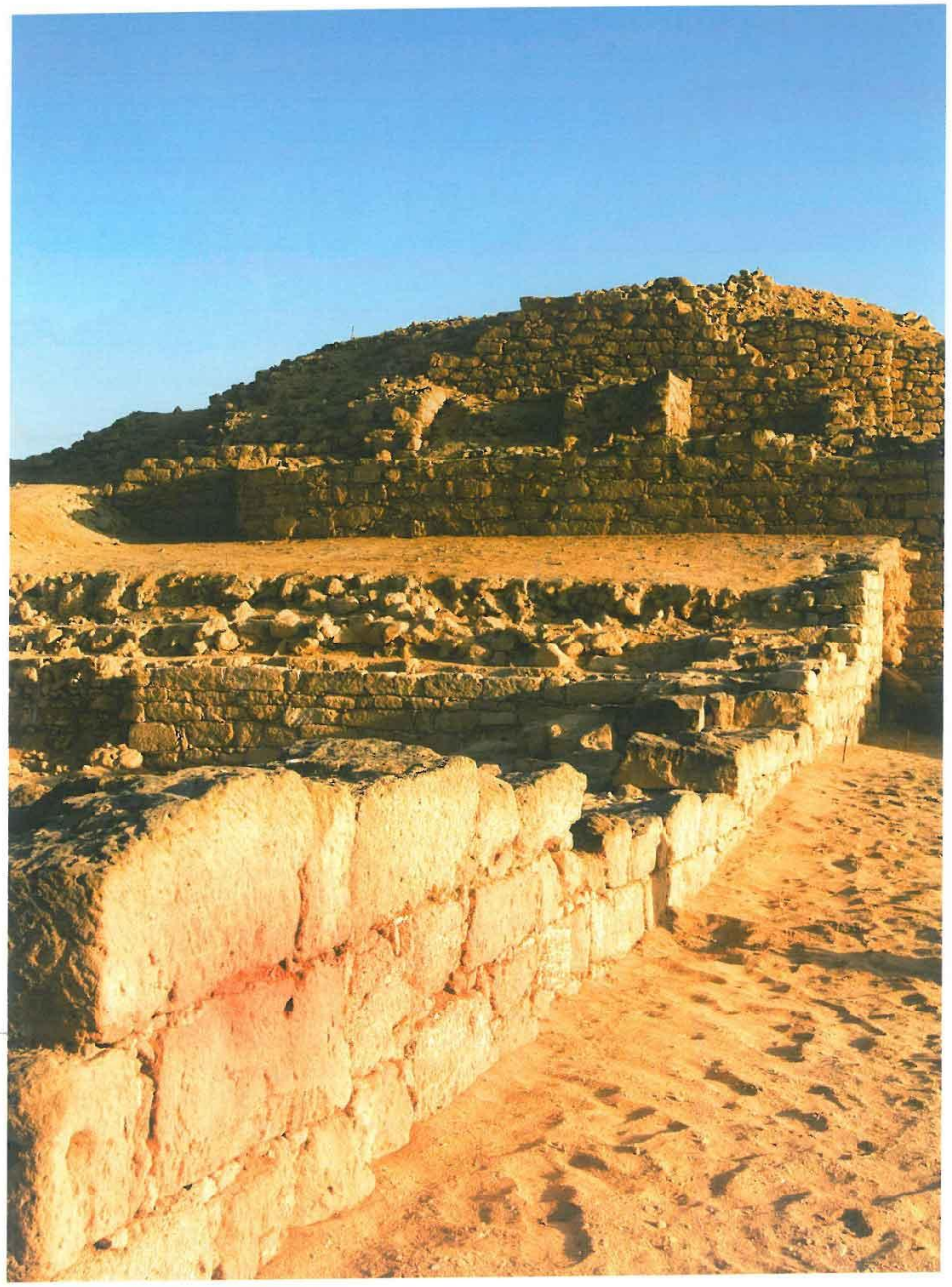
The city of Al Baleed lies on Salalah's coastal strip in the area between Al Dahareez and Al Hafah. The history of Al Baleed pre-dates the dawn of Islam. It was a main settlement during the late Iron Age becoming an active central city during the Islamic era. The style of buildings was clearly influenced by the cultural and architectural character of other major cities of the period. The remains of its Grand Mosque, believed to be one of the oldest mosques in the Governorate of Dhofar, dating from the 4th century AH (10th century AD), have been excavated. Its architectural style reflects the affluence enjoyed by the city during that period. The mosque covers an area of 1,732 sq.m including a main prayer hall that once housed rows of impressive columns; so far, 144 column bases have been excavated.

Khor Rori (Sumhuram)

Finds at Khor Rori (Sumhuram), during the latest archaeological excavations in 2008, include the limestone head of a human statue, which appears to have originally been a votive object. Other items include a 15.5cm cube-shaped incense burner with a pyramidal polished base patterned to resemble twisting snakes. On one face of the incense burner there is a depiction of a crescent moon with a disc inside it, while on the opposite face there is an image of an eagle with outstretched wings and tigers or similar felines. Another similar sized incense burner was also unearthed complete, apart from some missing ornamentation on its corners. Three of its four faces were engraved with designs and rectangular shapes, while the fourth had an astronomical theme of a type common in the south of the Arabian Peninsula.

Recent excavations at al Baleed have shown it originally dates from as far back as the pre-Islamic period

A third incense burner discovered on the site has aroused the most interest. At 25cm high and cube shaped with a hollow section on its upper side, the burner is decorated with reliefs of three animals - a lion and two mountain ibexes. The lion has a shaggy mane and is resting on its front paws. In the opening at the top of the incense burner there is a design





The ancient city of Wubar (Shisr) is situated some 170 kms north of Salalah, and is mentioned on UNESCO's World Cultural and Heritage List

depicting a two-horned crown - a distinctive symbol of the gods of Mesopotamia.

Shisr (Wubar)

The ancient city of Wubar is in the niyabat of Shisr on the southern side of the Empty Quarter desert. It is around 170kms north of Salalah and 90kms from the wilayat of Thumrait. Historical sources show the city as being on the old frankincense route while excavations have revealed numerous traces of settlements dating from the Iron Age and the Islamic period, as well as evidence that frankincense was produced and traded there. Within its citadel are the ruins of an administrative building, as well as the remains of a main gateway, some round and square towers and a number of chambers. The general layout of Shisr (Wubar) citadel is similar to that of the ancient citadel of Hamran near the Salalah plain, which dates from the same era.

The Office of the Adviser to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs is currently drawing up a plan to develop the site and turn it into a tourist attraction.

Wadi Dawkah - the frankincense tree reserve

The frankincense tree reserve in Wadi Dawkah is currently undergoing restoration work. New trees are being planted there to help restore balance

to the areas of the wadi where tree numbers are sparse and to ensure the survival of the frankincense tree – which has played such an important part in Oman's history - in its natural, historic habitat. Viewing platforms are also being installed at various locations and the site will be connected to electricity and water supplies.

Wadi Dawkah, was chosen as the site of the frankincense tree reserve because it is just 40kms to the north of Salalah, once the hub of the frankincense trade. The reserve covers a 14sq.km area of rocky, pebbly, semi-desert terrain, including small hills and shallow depressions, formed when the wadi was repeatedly flooded in ancient times.

Excavations at the Bat site

An American archaeological mission working under the supervision of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture has completed its second season at the Bat archaeological site – part of the village of Bat, which lies 24 Km east of Ibri. The site was originally excavated by an archaeological mission from Denmark, which began operations there in 1972.

This season digs were carried out by a team of archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania on two towers – Qasr Al Khafaji and Al Matariyah – to uncover the foundations of the towers and identify when they were built before beginning restoration work. Restoration work continues on the ancient burial grounds at Bat and the Ministry has now completed its study of plans to fence off the archaeological sites.

Zakait oasis

A systematic archaeological survey was carried out by French and Italian teams of archaeologists on a 12 sq.m area opposite the small oasis of Zakait in the wilayat of Izki, with the aim of documenting the contents of the site and the extensive Bronze Age remains in the area's mountains, estimated to date from the Hafeet era (late fourth millennium and early third millennium BC). The survey concentrated on the structural features of the tombs, now documented with photographs and text and incorporated into a comprehensive study.

A total of 398 items were recorded, including a small, conical,orange-yellow earthenware jar with a cylindrical neck notably similar to Mesopotamian jars found in Bronze Age tombs.

Other sites

Archaeological missions in the Sultanate continued their operations on sites at Ras Al Hadd, Bahla, Ras Al Hamra, and in the wilayat of Adam and the Governorate of Dhofar during 2008.

In April and May 2008 – in co-operation with Italy's Bologna University - aerial photographs were taken of archaeological sites including Qalhat, Shiyaa' Bahla, Salut, Halban, Shannah, and other areas. These images show walls and the layout of the sites in precise detail and will

be used in the preparation of future site management and restoration plans.

Preservation of antiquities

For three successive years the French expert, Madame Christine Pariselle, has supervised a course in the preservation of antiquities and ancient artifacts, in co-operation with the French Embassy and in collaboration with the antiquities expert at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.

Forts and castles

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture is responsible for preserving, maintaining and renovating the Sultanate's ancient monuments, including forts, castles, towers, walls and former residential quarters. It documents and prepares annual maintenance plans for these structures, and in 2008 completed restoration work on Al Muslimat Tower Wadi Al Ma'awil, Bidbid Fort, Al Faiqain Citadel in the wilayat of Manah, Al Khabourah Fort, Fazah Citadel in the wilayat of Liwa and Al Areen Wall in Mutrah.

Maintenance work is currently underway at Sohar Fort, Bait Al Maqham in Bausher, the Al Hamoudah Mosque in Ja'alan Bani Bu Ali and Al Hilal Wall in the wilayat of Suwaiq. Meanwhile, restoration work is ongoing at a number of forts and fortified towers across the country.

Museums

Oman's museums have an important role to play in enriching the nation's cultural life and showcasing its heritage. In 2008 they received 76,660 visitors.

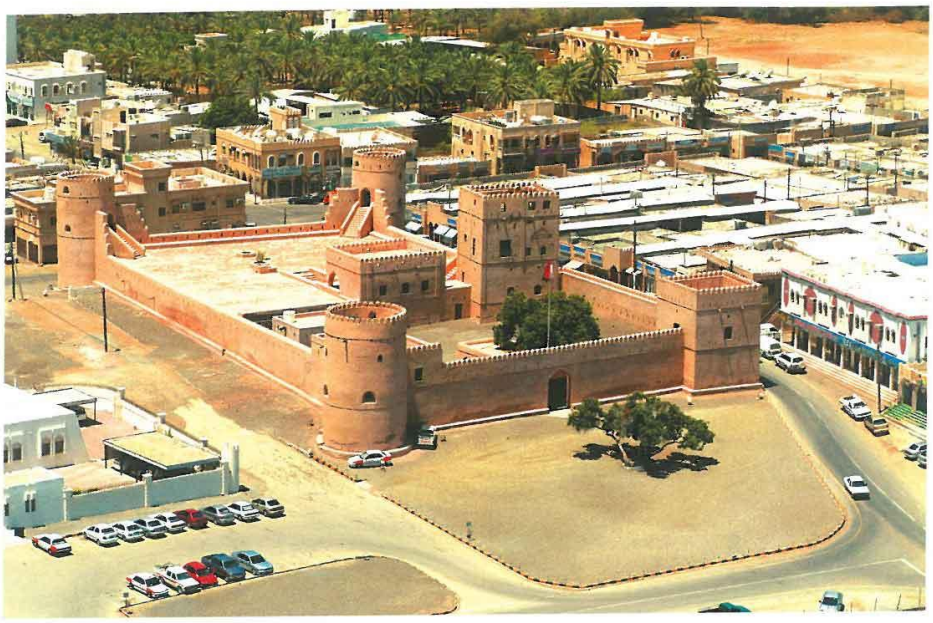
Museums, which come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture include:

The Museum of Omani Heritage inaugurated in 1974. It has since been refurbished and extended and, in 2006, unveiled a new exhibit showcasing Oman's heritage, in a display called the "cycle of life", detailing customs, traditions and daily activities in the Sultanate from bygone days to the present.

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture Museum in Ruwi, previously known as the Bait Al Sayyid Nadir bin Faisal bin Turki Museum, contains a rich collection of artifacts. First opened in 1978, it moved to Ruwi in 1988, where it was renamed the **National Museum**. Exhibits include a copy of a letter, believed to have been from the Prophet Muhammed to Abd and Jaifar, the kings of Oman, and the Omani people in the eighth year of the Hijrah (630 AD), inviting them to embrace Islam. The Museum also contains a number of rare exhibits brought from the old Al Alam Palace in Muscat, as well as portraits of the Sultans of Oman in chronological order, clothes and silver jewellery belonging to Sayyidah Salma bint Said bin Sultan, and some old documents and postage stamps. Other items include the old-style Omani flag, carried by the spaceship Apollo 11 to the

Restoration work is currently underway on the Sultanate's forts and castles. Here the restored Sunaisala Fort, in Sur





Suwaiq castle, in the Batinah region, is distinguished by three round corner towers, with the fourth corner being occupied by a square keep in the style of pre-cannon architecture

surface of the moon in July 1969, the present Omani flag carried by Apollo 17 in December 1972 and some fragments of moon rocks.

The Natural History Museum opened in 1985 at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture compound in Muscat. Its exhibits include examples of Oman's natural features, as well as land and sea life. In front of the museum is the fossillised trunk of Oman's oldest tree. The cells of this tree – estimated to be 260 million years old – are filled with various minerals including silica.

The Omani-French Museum, housed in Bait Fransa, documents the strong relations between the Oman and France, which date from the beginning of the 18th century. Following Sultan Qaboos bin Said's visit to France in May 1989, His Majesty decided the Muscat building that once housed the French Consulate should be dedicated to this historic relationship. The Museum, inaugurated by Sultan Qaboos and the late French President Francois Mitterand on 29th January 1992, contains historic pictures and documents about Oman and France, as well as examples of Omani and French ships, traditional clothing and personal ornaments and a collection of old postage stamps from both nations.

The Children's Science Museum, opened in 1990 to provide simplified, easy-to-follow demonstrations of science and technology and to illustrate how these ideas developed over the ages. Other exhibits include examples of modern inventions and discoveries, enabling the visitor to un-



The Museum of Omani Heritage contains a display called the 'cycle of life' with photographs taken by Dr Alice van der Zwaag in the 1960s and 1970s

derstand the role of science in people's daily lives. While aimed at capturing the imagination of children, the displays at the museum are guaranteed to appeal to all age groups. This museum has been updated and modernized on several occasions.

The Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum, which opened at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in 2008, contains a permanent exhibition of traditional weapons used in Oman from the Stone Age through to the Second World War. One room is devoted to defensive Omani architecture and can also accommodate temporary exhibitions on themes ranging from history and archaeology to science and the arts.

Sohar Fort museum. This was established on 17th November 1993 to showcase the city's history from the early and Islamic periods to the present, focusing on its architecture and archaeology and its cultural and trade relations with other nations. Other exhibits are devoted to contemporary Sohar, its role in Oman's seafaring heritage and the role played by Omanis in propagating Islam in different parts of the world.

Nahkl Fort Historical Arms Museum. The first phase opened in February 2002. It contains a fine collection of historic arms of both international and national interest from the 17th century to the present.

The Office of the Adviser to HM The Sultan for Cultural Affairs is responsible for:

The Land of Frankincense Museum in Salalah which opened in



The Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Museum in Qurm. In 2008 Oman's museums received over 75,000 visitors

2007 in the Al Baleed Archaeological Park. It has two halls – the History of Frankincense being one, and the Maritime Hall the other. The latter has seven sections displaying Oman's maritime heritage.

Muscat Municipality is responsible for a number of historic and cultural venues, including:

The Bait Al Baranda Visitors Centre which regularly receives tourist groups, including passengers from visiting cruise ships berthing at Port Sultan Qaboos. With its historical and cultural programmes and exhibitions featuring both local and overseas artists, the Centre has become one of Muscat's major landmarks and records the history of the capital city from earliest geological epochs to the present day. In 2009 the Centre has staged a number of exhibitions including the drawings of the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, and another of the paintings and sculptures of Pablo Picasso, Georges Washington and Pierre-Auguste Renoir among others.

The Muscat Gate Museum, is located on Muscat Gate's upper floor and is devoted to the city's history, development and growth.

The Ministry of Defence has responsibility for:

The Sultan's Armed Forces Museum, located in Bait Al Falaj fort in Ruwi, was the original garrison headquarters for the Sultan's Armed Forces. Oman's military history is explored using weapons, uniforms, motor vehicles and defence systems. The facility reopened after renovation in September 2007.



The Jewel of Muscat, a seagoing vessel modelled on a 9th century Arab sailing ship. It will embark on a voyage from Oman to Singapore in early 2010, using 9th century navigation techniques

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) oversees :

The Currency Museum, housed in the beautiful CBO building in the Central Business District in Ruwi. It boasts an interesting collection of coins and notes from Oman through the ages.

Privately-run museums in the Sultanate include:

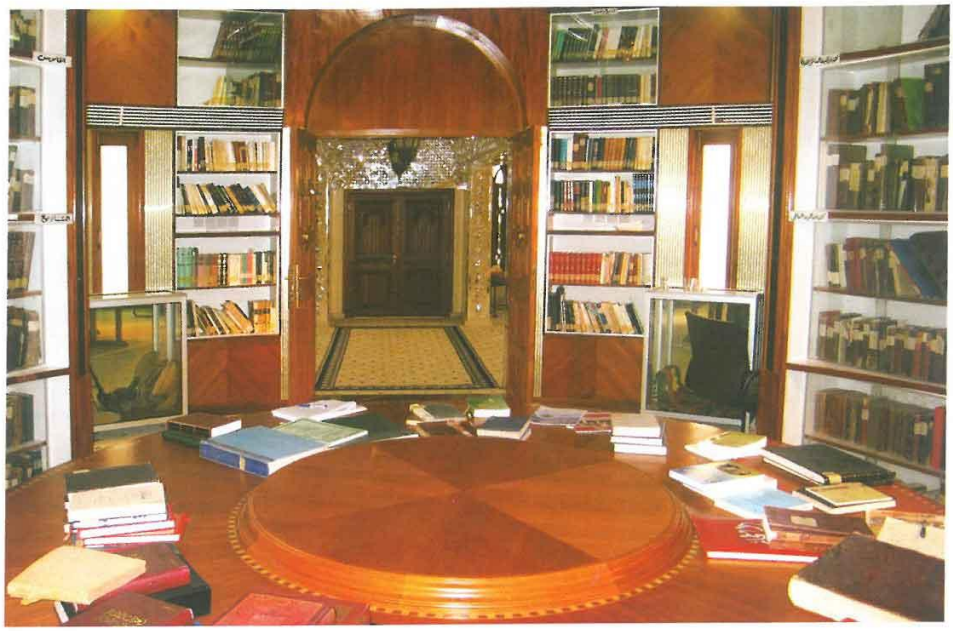
Bait Al Zubair in old Muscat celebrated its 10th anniversary in March 2008 with the opening of four new galleries in a new three-storey wing called 'Bait Al Oud' – these contain furniture, rare prints, maps, charts and historic photographs. It is privately run.

Bait Adam in Qurm has a good collection of Oman's postal history.

The Maritime Museum in Sur in the Sharqiyah region displays items of nautical interest.

Jewel of Muscat

A valuable living example of Oman's proud seafaring history will come with completion, in late 2009, of the 'Jewel of Muscat', a seagoing vessel modelled on a 9th century Arab sailing ship being built in the village of Qantab, Muscat. The 18-metre ship will be built, as was the custom, without nails, its wooden planks sewn together with coconut fibre, and protected by a layer of goat fat mixed with lime. The vessel will embark on an historic voyage from Oman to Singapore in early 2010, using 9th century navigation techniques. The project is being jointly funded



The Al Salmi Library, located in the Sharqiyah region, was established in 1905

by the governments of Oman and Singapore, and is being overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Libraries

The Library of Public Knowledge is based in Qurm, Muscat, and run by the Diwan of the Royal Court. It invites the public to make use of its information services including the latest books, periodicals and internet services.

Al Salmi Library

The Al Salmi Library was established by Imam Nur Al Din Abdullah bin Humaid Al Salmi (1886-1914) after his return from the Haj in 1905, to collect manuscripts and printed scientific materials from Oman and the Arab and Islamic world and making these scientific books available in a public library. The Library is located in Mintirib, near Bidiya in the Sharqiyah region. For a month in August/September 2009 it hosted an exhibition of 100 original engravings of the 17th century Dutch artist Rembrandt in one of Muscat's leading hotels. The event marked the first time the works of the world famous Dutch artist had been publicly displayed in the Arab world. The engravings were brought to the Sultanate by the Al Salmi Library, in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and private sponsorship. A book



of the engravings was published with proceeds from its sale going to local charities.

Oman's manuscripts are available to anyone wishing to peruse, or obtain copies of them

Omani manuscripts

Omani manuscripts in the Ministry of Heritage and Culture's Manuscripts Department embody the country's intellectual and cultural heritage; some of which contain stunning examples of old illuminated Islamic ornamentation and Arabic calligraphy.

The Manuscripts Department preserves, restores, binds, photocopies and catalogues all the manuscripts, which are then checked by specialists and published (or reprinted where necessary), for the benefit of libraries at home and abroad. They frequently feature at international book fairs and exhibitions.

The Department's services are available for anyone wishing to peruse the manuscripts or obtain copies of them. Numerous scholars and post-graduate students use material on a wide range of topics including language, literature, religion, history, medicine, chemistry, astronomy and marine sciences. The manuscript text of "Al Saheefah Al Qahtaaniyah" (The Book of Qahtan) by the Omani historian Ibn Ruzaiq, which was printed and published recently, has proved to be a popular and useful source for students of Omani history.

Details of the Department's manuscript titles, authors, with names and



Omani theatre is venturing into groundbreaking and experimental ideas to deliver its message

dates of the transcribers, can be found in a comprehensive index. A catalogue of manuscripts can also be accessed online.

Theatre groups and the arts

Omani theatre, which once had a tendency to rely on heritage and legend as a vehicle for portraying contemporary Omani society, has since ventured into groundbreaking and experimental ideas to deliver its message.

The Ministry is responsible for 17 non-government theatre groups in different parts of the country, as well as seven youth groups, which stage performances for the general public.

The Ministry's Plastic Arts Division supports and promotes the plastic arts - which are seen as pivotal to Oman's artistic movement – and through its Youth Art Studio it endeavours to cater for every level, age group and interest. Alongside the Studio, the Oman Society for Fine Arts – established in 1993 - also plays an important role through its range of activities, which include one-person and group art exhibitions. It also hosts Arab and foreign exhibitions. Some of the OSFA's members have won Arab and international prizes, and during its last season it staged several exhibitions as well as other events highlighting the dynamism and creativity of Oman's artists.

The Photography Club, which is affiliated to the Oman Society for

Fine Arts, has made impressive progress since its inauguration in 1993. It was awarded a bronze medal at the 29th International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP)'s Black and White Biennial, in which some 46 states took part. The awards were presented at a ceremony held in Slovakia in August 2008.

Cultural relations

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, joined UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage for the period 2008-2012. It attended its 2nd session in Sofia in February and its 3rd session in Istanbul in November 2008. It also attended the 2nd session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Paris in June 2008. It joined the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in March 2007, and in 2005 took part in the World Intellectual Property Organisation's Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore held in Geneva. The Ministry also attended meetings and various other events relevant to Omani culture, both in the Arab world and beyond, during the year under review.

The Sultanate took part in book fairs in Cairo, Casablanca, Riyadh, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, London, Tunis, Tehran, Syria, Sana'a, Amman, Frankfurt, Algiers, Kuwait, Sharjah, Beirut and Doha. The 14th Muscat International Book Fair, held from 24th February to 6th March 2009, exhibited the latest Omani and Arab publications. Several hundred local, Arab and international publishing companies took part in this major cultural event.

The Oman Encyclopaedia

The Oman Encyclopaedia is a national cultural project aimed at publishing a comprehensive reference work on Oman and its people. On completion it will cover every aspect of life in Oman, including society, history, religion, economy, politics, arts and literature, as well as details of wildlife, flora, fauna, climate, terrestrial and marine environment and other features.

The Oman Encyclopaedia is targeted at the general reader interested in facts and figures on Oman, including students, other scholars, and interested members of the public.

The project has been planned in three main stages: preparation, implementation and production. The preparatory stage, which began in mid-2004 and was completed at the end of 2005, included a survey of the topics for possible inclusion. The operation entailed extensive use of published reference works and studies on Oman and during this period the Encyclopaedia Committee held discussions with numerous experts to decide which topics to include in the final version; they eventually agreed on over 8,000 entries.

Compiling the Encyclopaedia's entries took place during the implemen-

tation stage, which began in 2006. A large number of scholars and specialist writers were recruited from within the Sultanate and abroad, as well as research assistants to produce the draft entries, as well as photographs, maps, tables and diagrams.

Expert editors with specialist knowledge in a wide range of fields are currently checking facts and figures before production specialists design its final format. The first impression of the Oman Encyclopaedia is due to appear in November 2010.

Journal of Oman Studies

Volume XV of this Journal was the first to be issued in Arabic in 2008, with Volume XVI expected in both English and Arabic editions in November 2009. The JOS was launched in 1975 as a vehicle for archaeologists and historians to publish academic articles on Oman and its neighbours.

The Royal Opera House

The Royal Opera House, which is being built on His Majesty the Sultan's instructions in Qurm in the Governorate of Muscat, is currently under construction by the Diwan of Royal Court (Royal Buildings). It will eventually cover an area of 80,000 square metres. This hi-tech project is due for completion in 2010 and will have state-of-the-art architectural design features, lighting and sound systems. The seating in the auditorium will be adjustable according to the type of performance (i.e. opera, play or concert) and the stage and orchestra pit will be expandable depending on the number of performers. It will be possible to extend the seating area to accommodate an audience of up to 1,100, while plays or operas requiring a bigger stage will have a seating capacity of 800. The Royal Opera House will also have a 32 metres high tower capable of facilitating all manner of theatrical wizardry to enhance performances.

The Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture

Since opening in 2001 the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture, which is situated alongside the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, has promoted Islamic culture and religious education, while seeking to keep abreast of the modern age by developing an Islamic intellectual approach based on modern interpretations which – while remaining true to the principles of the Islamic religion – are capable of finding appropriate solutions to questions that might arise in the daily life of society today. The Centre also teaches Islamic sciences and general subjects and trains imams and preachers for its mosques. It draws up curricula and prepares studies on topics relevant to its field, issues books and periodicals – including "Al Majallah Al Thaqafiyyah" (The Cultural Magazine) – hosts leading intellectuals and holds lectures to promote its message of religious tolerance.*(Also, see page 87)*



Participation in the Arabesque Festival, held at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, brought together Omani and American dancers

Sultan Qaboos University's Cultural Centre

During a visit to Sultan Qaboos University in 2000, His Majesty announced plans to set up a major cultural centre with a multi-purpose auditorium with seating accommodation for up to 5,000 people. Other features of the project include an Oman Studies Centre with a second auditorium capable of seating 200 people and a number of specialist libraries. The Centre will also have a main library with over 600,000 titles that can accommodate 2,000 visitors at any one time. It will be the largest library in Oman, offering services to the general public.

Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre

The SQCC was established in 2005 by Sultan Qaboos to provide educational resources and outreach programmes that promote greater public understanding and awareness of the heritage of Oman and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. It is a program of the Middle East Institute (MEI) which is based in Washington. In 2009 the SQCC worked with the John F. Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts which commissioned a dance production entitled 'Oman…O Man!' for their Arabesque: Arts of the Arab World Festival. This portrayed a group of young Omani and American dancers who performed during the last four days of the Festival which was held from 23rd February to 15th March 2009.



Al Feleij Castle theatre, having reopened after extensive renovation works, staged several productions in 2009

Al Feleij Castle Theatre

Al Feleij Castle Theatre in the wilayat of Barka – which has reopened after the completion of major renovation work –staged several productions in 2009, including the all-female Argentinian modern tango band "Black Roses." The theatre, which originally opened in 1999 and comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism, also presented the Irish ballet "Celtic Feet" – performed by one of Ireland's leading touring groups dedicated to preserving the country's musical heritage but in a modern form. A concert in memory of the late singer Abdel Halim Hafez was staged by the al Hafni Arab Music Group (from the Al Hafni Centre for Musical Studies). Other events included Beijing Opera and Chinese Folklore – a dazzling performance featuring daring acrobatic stunts, songs and dances.

The Literary Association and the Cultural Club

The Literary Association, inaugurated in 1988, runs a widely varied programme of activities, most of which are not limited to the Governorate of Muscat but cover the entire country. In 2008 it held five poetry recitals and staged an event in honour of the poet Bashir bin Amer Al Fazari, born in the wilayat of Izki in the 1030s AH. In commemorating Al Fazari, the Association added a new name to its roll of honour of distinguished scholars, intellectuals and men of letters (which it adds to annually), bringing the latest total up to thirty.

Since it was first opened the Association has held fifteen seminars on Omani towns and cities which have been published in book form. The latest of these was "Shinas through History."

The Cultural Club promotes cultural activities in the Sultanate through the programmes it presents during its annual season. It has revived the idea of opening the Cultural Council, while the creation of the Monday Council has introduced a new player onto the cultural scene which presents debates, lectures, discussion papers and other cultural activities.

Royal Decree No. 15/2008 restructured the Club and stipulated that it should come under the supervision of the Minister of Heritage and Culture, who would issue its constitution. The Decree defined the Cultural Club's aims as including the fostering of cultural ties between intellectuals and creative writers and artists, promoting cultural awareness through events such as lectures and seminars, and staging art exhibitions and cultural evenings. Other activities include recitals and readings by classical poets and short story writers, and literary criticism. In 2009 the Cultural Club printed ten books by Omani poets, story writers and scholars, while the Monday Council has raised the possibility of producing 100 Omani publications at a cost of RO100,000. It is hoped that this project will see the light of day and that Omani scholars, academics and creative writers will be able to fulfill their dream of seeing their works in print.

Cultural Associations

Several art and cultural associations have been set up in recent years, including the Oud Hobbyists' Association and the Oman Writers' Association. The Oud Hobbyists' Association, which comes under the jurisdiction of the Diwan of Royal Court and was set up on His Majesty the Sultan's instructions on 28th November 2005, is the first association of its kind in the Arab world and was officially inaugurated on 2nd November 2008. The Association's premises in Seeb include a lecture hall, a music room and a library with books on the oud and art in general, as well as on cultural topics and general subjects. The library also stocks government publications and periodicals, as well as audio and video tapes featuring performances by world-class musicians.

The Oman Cinema Association, formed in 2002, holds a biennial festival at which it screens the best local, Arab and foreign films. The latest of these was held in March 2009.

The Oman Journalists' Association, established in 2004, regularly holds courses and lectures. According to its constitution, it aims to improve the quality of Omani journalism, safeguard journalists' rights, defend their interests so that they can carry out their mission, and promote the principles of a free press within the context of social norms and professional ethics.

Events staged by the Oman Writers' Association, inaugurated on 8th October 2006, include literary evenings, ceremonies to mark literary occasions and the printing and publication of literary works, and workshops, seminars



The "razhah" is performed here at the Muscat Festival. This is a traditional form of dance designed to demonstrate courage, swordsmanship and poetry

The "barah" is the tradition of dance and music representing exuberance in the Dhofar governorate. It is performed by two persons who move in harmony with each other

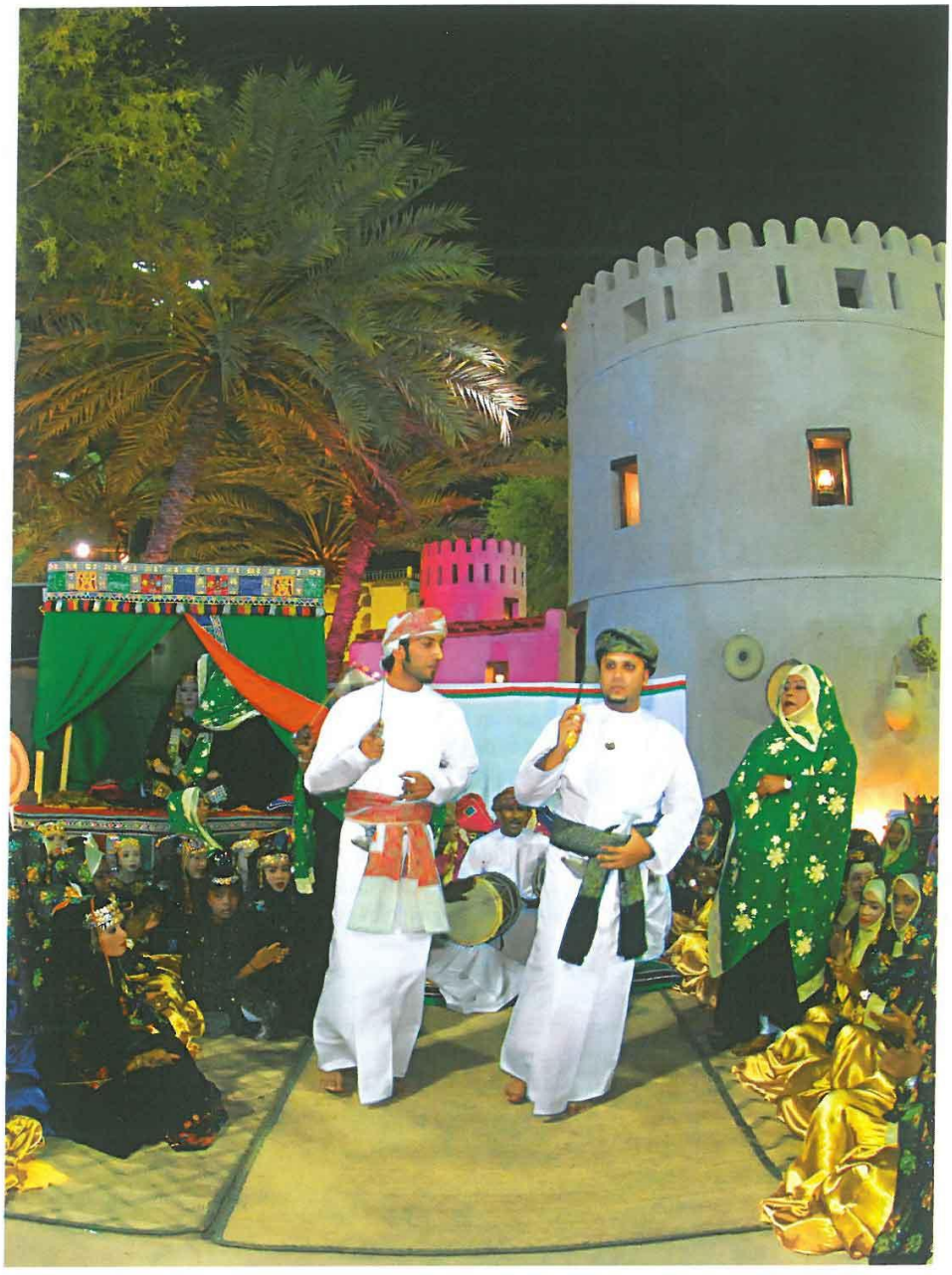
and competitions.

The Association has published ten issues of the book "The Omanis" and has run a competition for the best published poetry, short story, novel, play and work of literary criticism or scholarship, as well as an 'open' category. In 2008 the Oman Journalists' Association, the Oman Cinema Association and the Oman Writers' Association received Royal grants to build premises that would enable them to be housed under one roof.

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music (OCTM)

The Oman Centre for Traditional Music (OCTM) at the Ministry of Information was established in 1984. The Centre collects oral recordings of traditional Omani songs and hosts international gatherings of distinguished Omani, Arab and international musical performers. In 2008 the OCTM held two musical evenings at the Higher College of Technology's theatre in Al Khuwair, as well as performances in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Khasab which featured local musicians and were recorded as examples of the traditional folklore of those areas.

The OCTM also staged the first event to combine traditional music and the plastic arts, in which Omani artists painted pictures of traditional musical instruments and dances performed by men and women while the performances were ongoing. These were later put on display. This event was significant because it highlighted the importance of integrating different



art forms and using the art of painting to document, promote and preserve Oman's musical heritage.

The OCTM took part in the Festival of Popular Music and Arts at Sultan Qaboos University. It publishes books and research papers on these topics, as well as CDs of musical performances, which it presents to visitors to the Centre as well as to scholars and interested members of the public.

Folklore

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture's Folklore Arts Department is responsible for overseeing, safeguarding and developing Oman's folklore and boosting its profile at home and abroad, as well as for protecting the non-material side of the Sultanate's heritage. In 2008 it staged musical and singing performances on more than one national occasion and held training courses to teach young people to play various musical instruments, read music and sing. The Department also took part in Omani Cultural Days in Damascus, Tripoli and Sharjah.

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA)

The NRAA has been setting up its records and archives system for human and financial resources in collaboration with five ministries and this year they are expected to be joined by a further six to create a comprehensive records structure. So far 50 students have been sent on scholarships to study abroad under the Authority's university training programme and others will follow. Meanwhile, at home, others will graduate with degrees and diplomas, after satisfying the requirements of their respective examining boards. The NRAA has begun registering privately owned records and it has drawn up a series of programmes aimed at raising awareness of the importance of such records throughout the community. It has also offered to purchase such documents from members of the public for the national archive. This year the Authority will sign joint co-operation agreements with the archves departments of several countries.*(Also, see page 75)*

Craft Industries

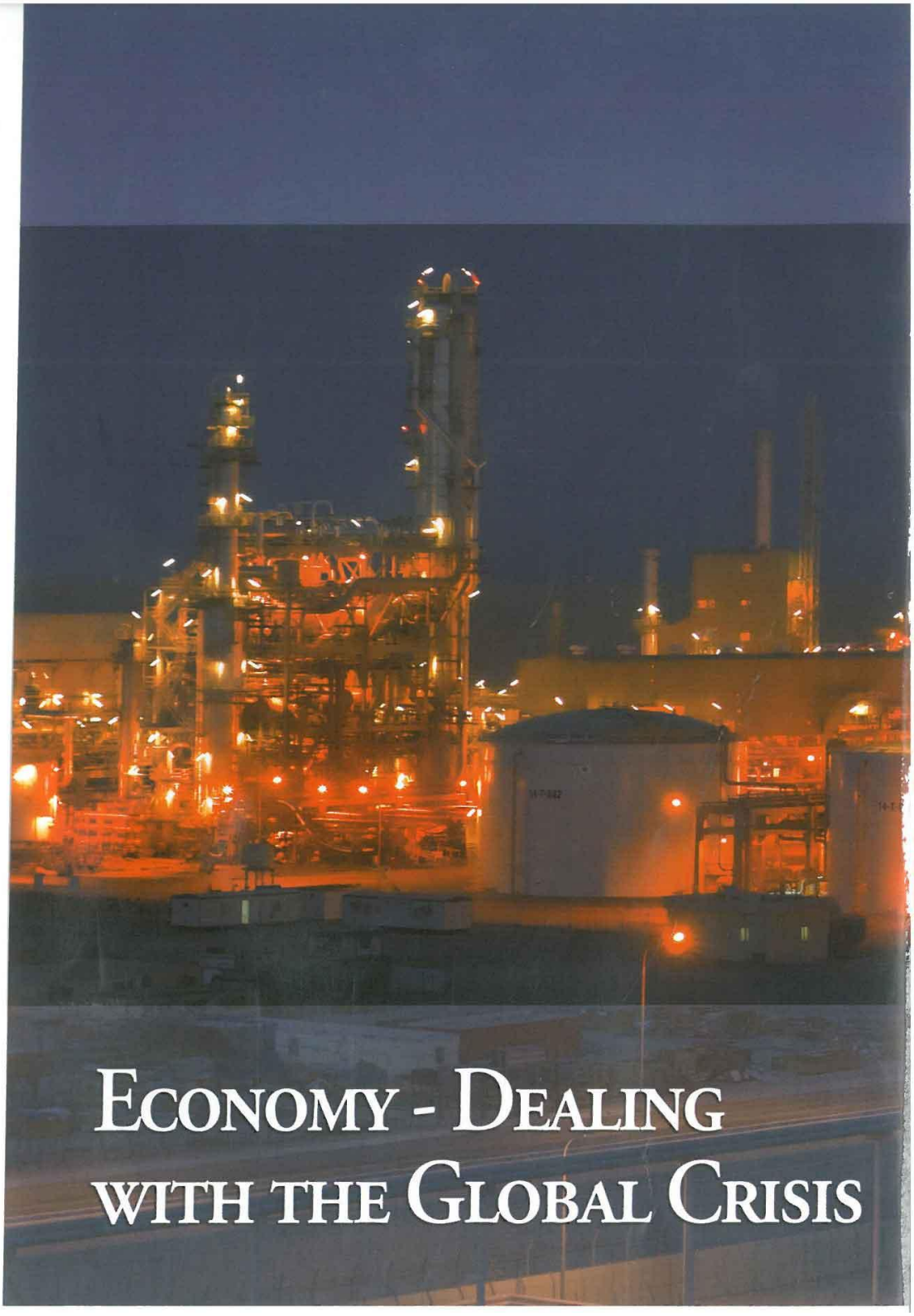
The Public Authority for Craft Industries (PACI) is stepping up its training programmes in carpet weaving, palm-weave products, the making of shepherd's crooks, carving on bone, distillation, leather products, yarn spinning, copperware, making traditional jirz axes, cotton, wool and silk weaving, pottery, ceramics and silverware. PACI has joined several international conventions and signed Memoranda of Understanding with various regional organisations. It was awarded shields in Paris and Beirut in recognition of its outstanding performance.

The Sultanate –represented by PACI – has joined the Arab Union of Traditional Industries, an organisation which helps draw up development policies for the craft sector, publishes periodicals and helps open up new markets for traditional Arab products.

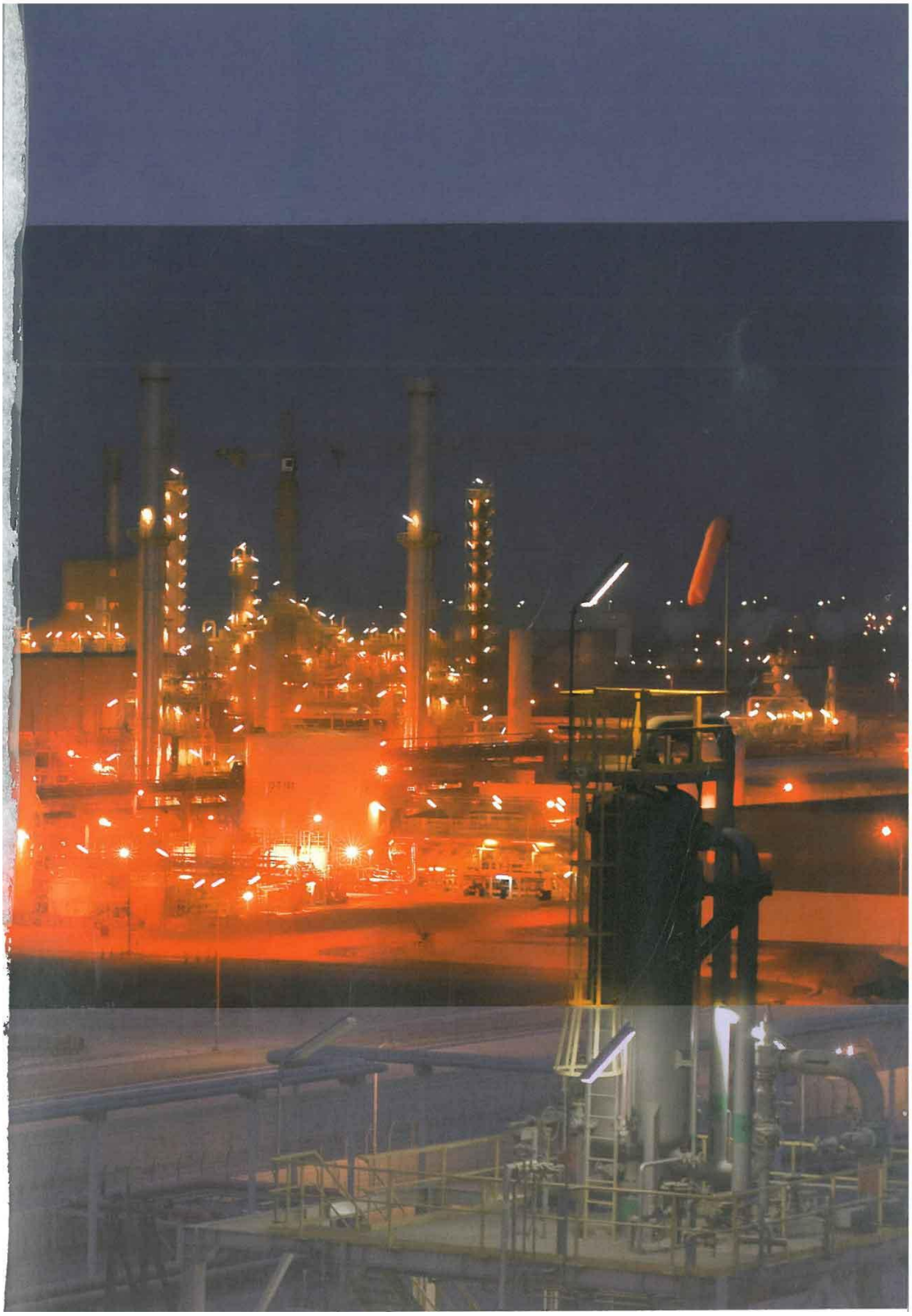
During the year under review PACI has participated in various festivals around the world.*(Also, see page 74)*

This young lady makes hand-made trimmings to adorn ladies and children's clothing





ECONOMY - DEALING WITH THE GLOBAL CRISIS



ECONOMY – DEALING WITH THE GLOBAL CRISIS

Since mid-2008, the world financial and economic crisis has been the most serious challenge facing the Omani economy. After the Muscat Securities Market (MSM)'s main index achieved a record high of 12,100 points on 11th June 2008, it entered a period of decline. At year's end it stood at 5,400, a 55% fall from June, and a slide of 39% compared with the earliest days of 2008.

Entering 2009 Oman was confident it could maintain the stability of the national economy despite share price falls on MSM, the recession in the property sector, the fall in demand for services and industrial products and, most significant of all, the slump in the price of oil in the world markets, following which the government adjusted the projected price of oil in the 2009 Budget from US$55 to US$45 per barrel.

The 2009 Budget

The government raised overall spending in the 2009 Budget to RO6.424 billion – up from RO5.8 billion in 2008 – as a means of maintaining economic buoyancy and confirmed that work on nationwide development projects would continue.

The 2009 Budget predicted government revenues would total RO5.614 billion, and estimated a budget deficit of RO810 million. Of total revenues, oil and gas were projected to account for 75% of the total, with current and capital revenues making up the remaining 25%.

Estimated 2009 expenditure by ministries and civil government departments was put at RO2.17 billion – an increase of RO245 million over 2008 estimates. The education and health sectors came top of the list, accounting for 49% of total expenditure. Education sector allocations totalled RO791 million, while development expenditure amounted to RO58 million. Allocations for the health sector totalled RO271 million – 12% of total current expenditure by the civil ministries. Some RO36 million was allocated for Social Security commitments, covering around 50,000 cases.

Economic performance in 2008

Over the course of 2008, the Omani economy continued to maintain steady growth.

Thanks to the sharp rise in the price of oil – by 51.4% compared with the 2007 price – and a 6.6% increase in production, the oil sector recorded a 55.7% rise. At the same time, the non-oil sectors showed a rise of around 26.7 % as a result of strong domestic demand and improved export levels.

Gross government revenues in 2008 rose to RO7.984 billion – up


Government Revenues & Expenditure (Mn. R.O)
Total Revenues
Total Expediture
4936.1
4979.9
5880.4
=
5920.6
6403.4
7984.5
2006
2007
2008

from RO5.92 billion in 2007, while public spending over the same period increased from RO5.88 billion to RO6.403 billion.

Inflation rates

The last quarter of 2008 saw a relative fall in world inflation rates, following the huge drop in the price of oil and various goods and raw materials. This fall in the prices of goods and raw materials, which continued into 2009, led to corresponding falls in inflation rates in Oman – from 12.4% in December 2008 to 6.2% in March 2009 and 4.9% in April 2009.

National per capita income

The per capita share of the country's gross national income rose to RO5,702 in 2007 compared with RO5,354 in 2006 – a 6.5% increase. This was due to the rise in gross national income to RO15.6 billion in 2007 – up from RO13.7 billion the previous year.

The Five Year Plans

Omani policy has been to develop its economy and generate prosperity through a series of Five Year Plans.

The current Seventh Five-year Plan was launched in 2006. The largest and most expensive in Oman's history, it is the third "link" in the approved long-term development strategy as envisaged in the 2020 Vision for Oman's Economic Future.

Under the current Plan (2006-2010) the Sultanate is aiming for growth rates (at fixed prices) averaging not less than 3% per annum, while also working to improve living standards and maintain low rates of inflation.

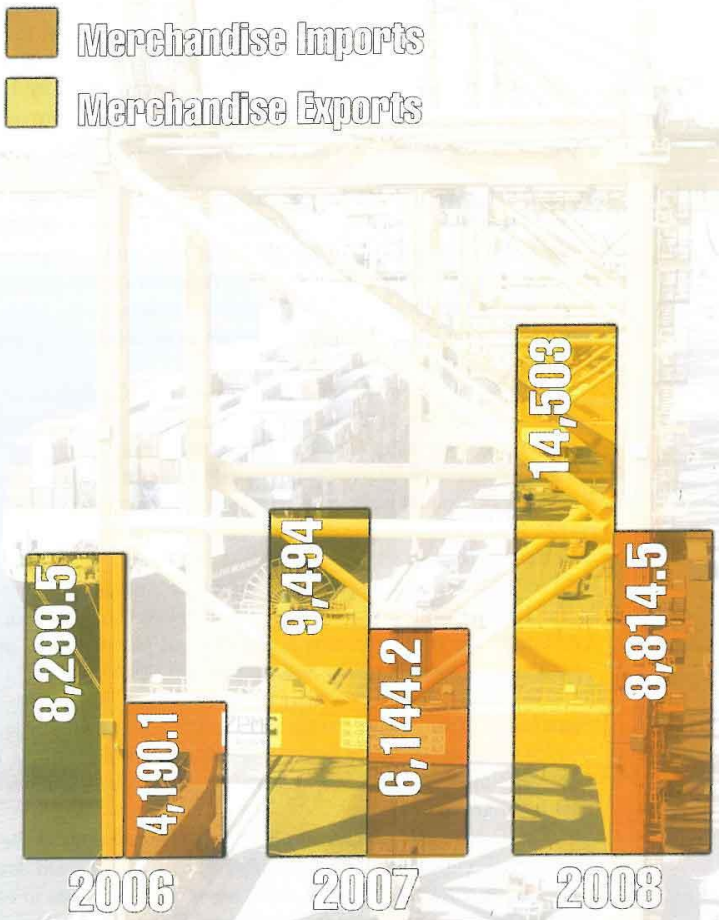
The Plan's main economic focus is on the control of public spending to ensure it remains at sustainable levels. Top priority has been given to increasing the productivity of all economic sectors, particularly oil and gas, with the focus directed towards increased exploration activity.

Over the years of the Plan, national manpower is accorded maximum priority through a programme to employ nationals, improve the quality of graduates from the general education system, and upgrade and provide greater opportunities for higher education.

The Plan also makes provision for growth in the tourist, fishing and industrial sectors, as well as intensified efforts to encourage exports and promote Omani products in global markets. In this connection, schemes are ongoing to continue modernising the infrastructure of export related facilities at seaports and airports. A drive is underway to promote bilateral partnership agreements with economic blocs around the world, encourage domestic and foreign private sector investment, and encourage privatisation strategies and programmes.

Money from the sale of various government assets has been ear-

Merchandise Exports & Imports (Mn. R.O)



marked for the financing of a number of new projects and an investment fund will be established to finance and support vehicles of economic diversification, particularly new small and medium enterprises.

The civil ministries' development programme

The development programme for Oman's civil ministries is the driving force behind the Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010). From the start of the Plan to the end of November 2008 a number of additional projects were approved at the direction of Sultan Qaboos during his Royal Tours of the country. A ministerial committee - set up at His Majesty's instruction - approved additional sums of RO4.7 billion, raising the amount approved for the development programme by 156% to around RO7.7 billion, compared with RO3.016 billion approved at the start of the Plan.

Economic freedom and transparency

In recent years several reputable international organisations and agencies have recognised Oman's financial credibility as a global player. A report by the authoritative Oxford Business Group noted that, in 2008, the Sultanate scored considerable successes in the oil and gas sector, while maintaining its commitment to economic diversification and higher standards of education.

In 2009, Moody's global credit report gave Oman an A2 rating alongside South Korea, Chile and Botswana and rated the Sultanate's economic outlook as stable. The report attributed the country's economic strength to its relatively high GDP, its ability to honour its debt commitments and its individual per capita GDP in terms of purchasing power, estimated to be US$22,000 by the International Monetary Fund, which ranked Oman 36th in its survey of 181 countries.

The 2009 Economic Freedom of the World Annual Report, released by the International Research Foundation ranked Oman 36th out of 141 assessed in the study, marking a rise of eight places on the previous year's ranking, which put the Sultanate in 44th place.

On 5th June 2009, in a study entitled 'Vision of Humanity - Global Peace Index', published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Oman was listed 21st in the world out of 144 countries, and 2nd in the Middle East and North Africa region, with data compiled by the UK's Economist Intelligence Unit.

The Global Competitiveness Report 2009, released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) on September 8th noted that Oman developed significantly through 2008 to a place where improvements in competitiveness need to come more from increased innovation and business sophistication. The Report shows that the Sultanate's relative strengths are in the Basic Requirements of Competitiveness - here it ranked 25th in the world. Overall, it is ranked 41st this year, compared with 38th last year.

Meanwhile, the 'Ease of Doing Business Index' which covered 182 countries over the period April 2008 - June 2009, as per the findings of the International Financial Corporation/World Bank Doing Business 2010 Report, put the Sultanate in 65th position worldwide and 6th in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region.

The Sultanate was ranked third in the Arab world and 41st globally in Transparency International's annual report, issued in November 2008. The report highlighted the significant improvement in Oman's transparency rankings, both in comparison with other Arab countries and within the context of the 180 nations on its list. In the Arab rankings, the Sultanate moved up from 4th in 2007 to 3rd in 2008, and – internationally - from 53rd in 2007 to 41st in 2008.

Attracting investment

Oman is working to attract foreign investment that will, in turn, create new job opportunities and enable the use of home grown expertise and technology across a range of fields, while expanding and diversifying the country's productive base. The Ministry of National Economy is involved in a programme to create a 'friendly' legal framework for foreign investors and is signing reciprocal agreements with various global partners to help encourage and protect investment.

In 2007 foreign investment in the Sultanate rose to RO9.4 billion – up 51.6% from RO6.2 billion the previous year. Direct foreign investment grew by 54.6%, from RO2.2 billion in 2006 to RO3.4 billion in 2007. Direct foreign investment was mainly channelled into oil and gas operations as well as industry and financial brokerage. The United Kingdom was the leading player in this field with direct investments totalling RO835 million.

Oman Shipping Company (OSC)

In a further official move to bolster investment in the transport of crude oil, oil derivatives and methanol, a marine transport fleet has been established to carry Omani crude to seaports around the world. Several carriers were added to the fleet in 2007 and 2008; in July 2009, OSC signed an agreement with a Chinese company to build four additional vessels, with a total capacity of 400,000 tonnes, to transport iron ore from Brazil to Omani ports. Two will join the OSC fleet in November 2011 and the remaining two by February 2012.

The Tender Board

The Tender Board, established in 1973, is the body responsible for inviting, opening and analysing bids and awarding all government tenders with a cost in excess of RO250,000.

In 2008 the Tender Board invited bids for 288 tenders with an estimated value of RO2.935 billion, while 454 tenders with a value of

around RO2.5 billion were awarded for projects in sectors including seaports, roads, education, health and culture *(Also, see page 72)*.

Oil and natural gas

Oil and gas provide the largest chunk of the General State Budget revenues. The 2009 Budget estimated the financial contribution of oil at around RO3.522 billion - or some 63% of the total Budget revenue. Oil revenues were calculated on the basis of an average production figure of 805,000 barrels per day (bpd) and a price of US$45 per barrel. Estimated gas revenues were RO670 million, representing 12 % of total revenues

The Oil Sector

The Sultanate first began exporting oil in 1967. The Ministry of Oil and Gas predicts that Oman's daily oil production in 2009 will range from 805,000 to 810,000 barrels.

The government increases its investment in oil and gas every year. Estimated expenditure on the production of both these resources in the 2009 Budget is around RO1.37 billion or 21.3 % of overall public spending. The government has earmarked RO1.098 billion for investment expenditure in the oil and gas sectors in the 2009 Budget and RO272 million for current expenditure.

A gas exploration agreement was signed in 2008 for concession area No. 62, which covers an area of 2,269 square kilometres. Investment is expected to reach around US$500 million (R0192 million). Further oil and gas agreements were inked with a number of international oil companies in 2008 and 2009.

Exploratory operations in 2008 yielded positive results for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), which discovered two oil fields – Taliah and Malaan. Preliminary well test results for the Rabab South East Field, discovered in 2007, have proved to be positive and production is expected to start at the end of 2009.

In 2008 the Sultanate produced some 277 million barrels of crude at an average production rate of 756,800 bpd, a rise of 6.5% on the 2007 figure of 710,400 bpd.

In 2008 Oman exported around 216.7 million barrels of crude oil and oil condensates, compared with 221.9 million barrels the previous year – a fall of 2.4%. China, which purchased 105.9 million barrels, or 48.9% of the country's total oil exports, was the main customer, followed by Japan with 30.3 million barrels (14%).

In 2008 the average price per barrel of Omani crude rose to US$101.06, compared with US$65.15 in 2007.

The Sultanate currently has two crude oil refineries, operated by Oman Refineries and Petrochemicals Company. The Mina al Fahal Refinery, opened in 1982, produces 106,000 bpd mainly for domestic con-



Drilling for new oil continues

sumption, while the Sohar Refinery, which began operations in April 2007, produces 116,000 bpd, around 80 % of which is exported.

In 2008 the Mina al Fahal Refinery produced around 28.5 million barrels and exported 2.9 million barrels, while the Sohar Refinery produced 37.4 million barrels, some 26.6 million barrels of which were exported.

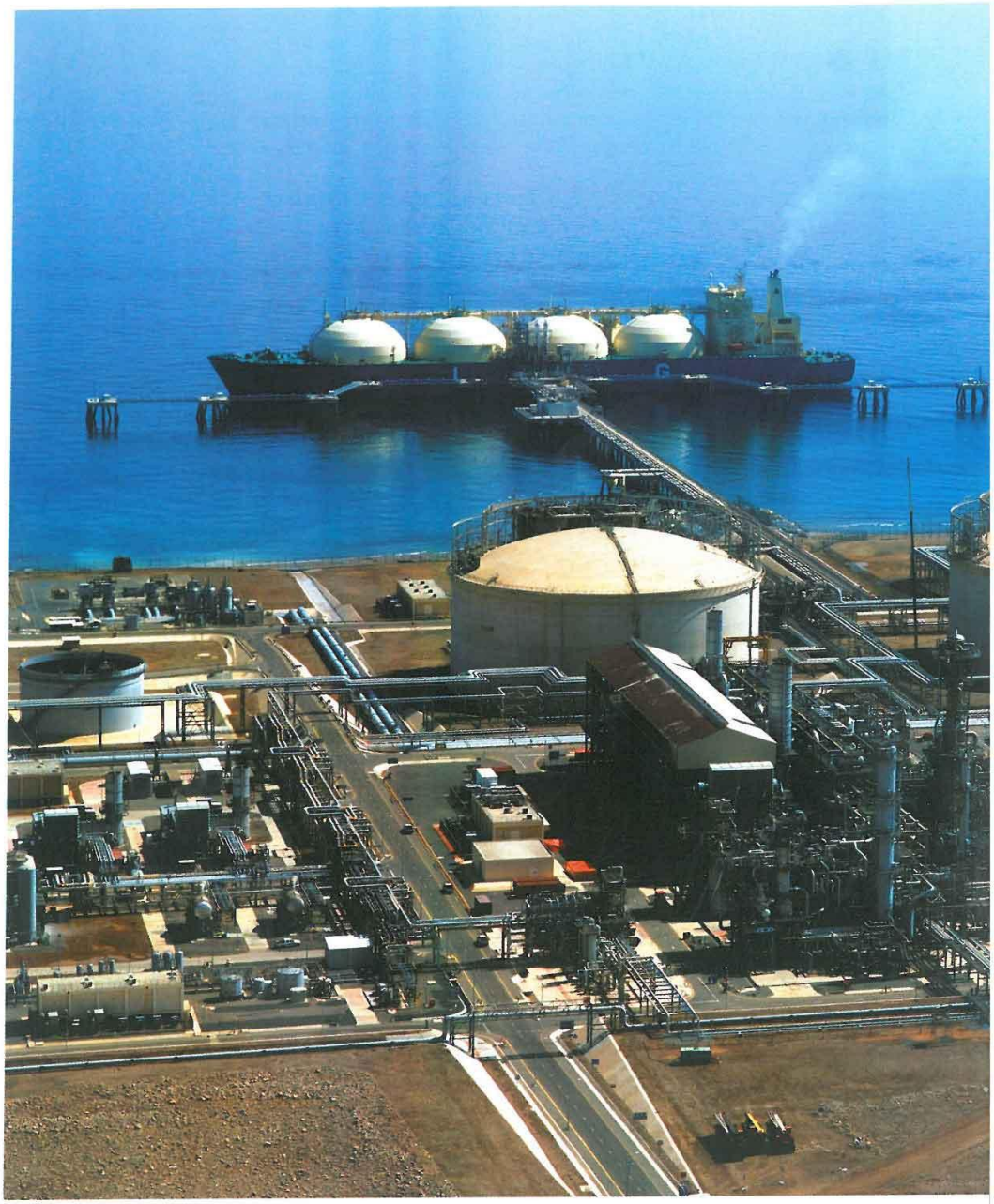
Royal Decree No. 99/2007, issued on 23rd September 2007, merged the Sohar Refinery Company and the Oman Oil Refinery Company under the name Oman Refineries and Petrochemicals Company. In February 2008 the new company completed all the legal, financial and administrative procedures related to the merger.

The Gas Sector

The 2009 Budget allocated RO495 million for expenditure on gas production, compared with RO500 million the previous year.

In 2008 Oman produced around 30.2 billion cubic metres of natural gas, including 6.2 billion cubic metres of associated gas and 24 billion cubic metres of non-associated gas. Average daily production of natural gas totalled 82.6 million cubic metres – a 0.1% fall compared with the previous year.

In November 2008 Oman began importing 5.6 million cubic metres per day of natural gas from Abu Dhabi's Dolphin Energy for a 25-year period, to be added to its domestic gas supply network.





Qalhat, near Sur in the Sharqiyah region, is the port from which Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG export gas

The Banking Sector

Oman's banking sector has managed to weather the global financial and economic crisis with the minimum degree of risk, largely because it did not invest funds in derivatives - which are high-risk financial products - or in any of the international financial institutions that crashed. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) followed a cautious, conservative policy and provided the country's commercial banks with liquidity in US Dollars under a clearly defined regulatory system.

There are 17 commercial banks operating in the Sultanate – including 7 national banks and 10 branches of foreign banks with a total of 395 branches – as well as two specialised banks: the Oman Development Bank (ODB) and Oman Housing Bank (OHB). The ODB and OHB have 22 branches between them. Twelve commercial banks are licenced by the CBO to engage in specific investment banking activities. There are 39 licenced money exchange companies, of which 16 operate under the licence of money changing and draft issuance business. The CBO has also licensed six companies to provide non-banking financial services such as consumer financing, hire purchase and sale, debt collection and other facilities.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO)

The Central Bank of Oman, established in December 1974 by the Banking Law of 1974 (later amended in 2000), began exercising its full powers from 1st April 1975, with an initial capital base of one million Omani Rials (RO). This sum increased to reach RO300 million in April 2002. In March 2007, the CBO's Board of Governors approved a further increase in capital from RO 300 million to RO 400 million, through transfer from its special reserves.

At the end of 2008, CBO's assets stood at RO4.629 billion (US$12.039 billion). The Bank has its headquarters in Muscat and two branches – in Salalah and Sohar.

The CBO plays an active role in developing and strengthening confidence in the Sultanate's banking sector. Mergers have been encouraged between the national banks in order to boost capacity and efficiency. The entry level minimum capital requirement was enhanced to RO100 million for national banks and RO20 million for foreign commercial banks.

At the end of 2008 around 92.2% of commercial and specialised bank personnel were Omanis – 87% employed at upper and middle-level administrative positions; 99.8% as clerical staff and 100% of non-clerical staff. In the exchange and finance companies licensed by the CBO, Omani employees accounted for 50.8% and 59.5% respectively.

The Commercial Banks

At the end of 2008, the main indicators of commercial banks oper-

ating in Oman showed positive growth. Their combined assets/liabilities had risen to RO13.8 billion – a 33.3% increase on the total at the end of 2007, while over the same period credit advanced by commercial banks to the private sector, individuals, institutions and the government had risen by 42.3% to RO9.3 billion, up from RO6.5 billion in 2007.

At the end of 2008 the commercial banks' total deposits stood at around RO8.6 billion – up from RO6.5 billion the previous year, while their combined capital, reserves and undistributed profits totalled RO1.8 billion.

The specialised banks

The Omani government established specialised banks in the early 1970s to bolster development efforts in certain economically and socially important sectors such as housing, industry, agriculture and fisheries. However, in view of the Sultanate's development on the ground, it became necessary to review bank operations and upgrade their functions.

Currently the country's two specialised banks: the Oman Housing Bank and Oman Development Bank are both government banks. At the end of 2007, the Alliance Housing Bank changed from being a bank specialised in providing housing loans to a fully commercial bank now known as Al Ahli Bank.

The Oman Housing Bank (OHB)

Since its establishment in 1977 the Oman Housing Bank (OHB) has been providing housing loans to enable nationals to purchase, build or complete their homes. The bank's capital stands at RO30 million and at the end of 2008 it held assets valued at around RO180.3 million. OHB has advanced loans with a value of RO156.3 million.

The Oman Development Bank (ODB)

The ODB was established under Royal Decree No. 18/97, issued on 9th April 1997 in a merger between the Development Bank of Oman (established in 1979) and the Oman Bank for Agriculture and Fisheries (established in 1981). ODB is primarily engaged in providing loans for development projects, including activities related to agriculture and fisheries, health, tourism, professional activities and traditional craftsmanship in Oman. As at the end of 2008, the total net loans and advances including staff loans stood at RO58.3 million compared to RO33.2 million a year ago, registering a significant rise of 75.6%. The share capital of ODB stood at RO40 million.

Financial regulatory bodies

In response to new developments in domestic and international financial markets, particularly in securities, it was agreed that existing legislation and regulations should be amended, allowing the regulatory



The Greater Muttrah Business District where banks and offices can be found. Over the course of 2008 Oman's economy continued to maintain steady growth

side of the market to be separated from its executive functions, in order to improve the monitoring process and ensure greater protection for investors.

Accordingly, Royal Decrees Nos. 80/98 and 82/98 restructured the securities market by establishing three separate bodies – the CMA, MSM and Muscat Depository and Securities Registration Company (MDSRC).

The Capital Market (CMA)

The CMA regulates, licences and monitors the issue and trading of securities within Oman and oversees Muscat Securities Market (MSM) and all companies listed.

In January 2008 the CMA decided to form a corporate governance committee. The committee's remit was to implement a corporate governance plan for companies operating in Oman. The committee disseminates information and encourages the adoption of best standards and practices at domestic and international levels *(Also, see page 73).*

Muscat Securities Market (MSM)

Muscat Securities Market (MSM) - part of the capital market sector overseen by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) - was set up by Royal Decree No. 53/88, issued on 21st June 1988. MSM lists and trades secu-

rities and operates as a stock exchange.

After a decade of steady growth, in 2008 and early 2009 the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) suffered a downturn caused by the global financial crisis and reactions to it. At the final close of business in 2008 the index ended down 3,594.36 points – or 39.78 % – at 5,441.12 points, registering the biggest drop over the course of a year since 1998. However, over the ensuing months, confidence was gradually restored and by close of business at the end of April 2009 the Market's main index had risen by 10.8% to 5,128.88 points, while the market value of listed companies was up from RO7.2 billion to RO7.6 billion.

The volume of trading in 2008 was around RO3.6 billion – a 37.6% rise compared with the RO2.6 billion traded in 2007. However, overall market value fell from RO10.2 billion at the end of 2007 to RO7.9 billion by the end of 2008.

Muscat Depository and Securities Registration Company (MDSRC)

MDSRC holds shareholders' registers, and deposits; registers and holds securities, sale and purchase contracts and proof of ownership transfers, and issues statements to shareholders. It is electronically linked to MSM.

The insurance sector

The insurance sector is regulated by the Insurance Companies Law promulgated under Royal Decree No. 12/79 of 21st March 1979 and various other laws.

Royal Decree No. 90/2004, issued on 3rd August 2004, transferred responsibility for the sector from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to the Capital Market Authority (CMA). This significant move enabled the sector to improve its performance to attain international standards.

In May 2008 the CMA approved the establishment of the first Omani reinsurance company in the Sultanate with a capital of RO30 million. Founding contributors include the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and several private sector institutions involved in the banking, insurance, services and investment sectors. The company will be listed on Muscat Securities Market (MSM) within five years.

The company will increase the volume of insurance premiums retained in the Sultanate, thereby boosting GDP, increasing revenues, creating greater liquidity for funding investment, and raising the Sultanate's profile as a regional insurance centre.

In May 2008 an agreement was signed to set up a joint insurance database to operate as a central record of information on drivers, vehicles and accidents; electronically linked to the Royal Oman Police (ROP) headquarters, it will be continually updated.



Muscat Securities Market lists and trades securities as well as operating as a stock exchange

The introduction of the regulations on minor traffic accidents has played a major part in reducing traffic congestion, simplifying procedures for dealing with those accidents and saving a significant amount of time and effort. The regulations are the result of close co-operation between the CMA, the insurance companies and the ROP.

Trade

The Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010) seeks to increase the trade sector's contribution to the national economy.

The Investor Services Department is a "one-stop shop" in which several government departments work together to provide investors with prompt, efficient, low-cost services from a single location.

The Sultanate's foreign trade in 2008 showed a 49.3% increase to RO23.3 billion from RO15.6 billion the previous year.

Commodity exports in 2008 rose to RO14.5 billion, up from RO9.4 billion in 2007 – an increase of 52.8%– as a result of the 53.1% increase in the price of oil and gas exports from RO7.2 billion in 2007 to RO11 billion in 2008. These sectors accounted for 76% of Oman's commodity exports. Non-oil exports rose 52.1% from around RO1.3 billion to RO1.9 billion. Meanwhile, re-exports soared by over 50% above 2007 levels.

Non-oil exports included metal and minerals, chemical industry

products, machinery, electrical equipment and other items.

Commodity imports rose by 43.5% in 2008 to RO8.8 billion, up from around RO6.2 billion in 2007.

The Free Trade Agreement between the Sultanate and the United States, signed in February 2006, came into effect from 1st January 2009. The agreement is one of a series of measures aimed at boosting trade freedom and merging the Omani economy with the global economy following the Sultanate's accession to the World Trade Organisation. It aims to stimulate bilateral trade between the two countries by removing restrictions and obstacles and will also provide a secure and reassuring legal framework for investors from both nations.

In 2008 the national initiative "Origin Oman" campaign was launched to promote Omani products and enhance their image with consumers.

Industry

The industrial sector is an important element of Oman's long-term development strategy (2006-2020). By 2020 it is expected to contribute 15% to the country's GDP.

Under the Seventh Five-year Plan, the country aims to maintain an annual added value growth rate of 14% in the manufacturing industry sector

The main focus of the Sultanate's industrial strategy is on setting up mega-projects which depend on natural gas, such as those in Sohar and Sur, and establish further knowledge-based enterprises and privatisation projects.

The Industrial Sector Innovation Support Centre has been set up to meet industry's research, development and creativity needs. By helping to establish strong ties between industry and local universities and research centres, it seeks to serve local industry and encourage industrial enterprise.

There are several industrial estates in Oman, all of which aim to attract quality industries which depend – as far as possible – on locally available raw materials. In addition to the Rusayl Industrial Estate in Muscat, the first to be set up in the country, there are now estates in Sohar, Sur, Salalah, Nizwa and Buraimi, as well as at Port Sohar, where many of the country's heavy and petrochemicals industries are based.

The Sultan's Cup, first instituted in 1991, is awarded to the top five Omani factories in an annual competition which reflects the goals of the government's strategy for the industrial sector.

Royal Decree No. 19/2007, which established a Directorate-General for Small and Medium-sized Establishments at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, was issued in 2007 to support the Sultanate's small and medium industries in view of their importance to the national economy.



One of many shopping malls in Muscat

Mineral resources

The minerals sector has seen steady growth over recent years. Several Ministry of Commerce and Industry sponsored programmes have carried out detailed mineral and geological exploratory surveys and studies, indicating that attractive investment opportunities exist for a number of large-scale mining projects.

In May 2009 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on collecting, analysing, classifying and preserving Omani meteorites was signed between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Directorate-General of Minerals and Switzerland's Berne Institute of Geological Sciences.

Oman's mineral resources include chromium, limestone, marble, ornamental stones, silica, lead, gypsum, iron and dolomite. The Sultanate works closely with various bodies involved in mineral exploration, including the environmentally concerned Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA).

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)

At the start of its current term (2007-2010) the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) approved a strategy to streamline the work of all its departments and branches.

The Chamber has embarked on a series of initiatives - in coordination with the appropriate bodies and organisations - to rationalise its

activities and the performance of the private sector. From August 2008 it changed its weekend holiday from Thursday and Friday to Friday and Saturday and urged private sector companies to review their own working hours and increase their weekend holiday to two days. Several meetings were held to discuss ways of controlling rising prices during 2008; leading to a number of establishments adopting the "economic package," consisting of ten basic food items offered at a price affordable to people on limited incomes.

The Chamber will continue its involvement with the establishment of Muscat University and also provide some capital for the establishment of Buraimi University and Sharqiyah University. The OCCI also supported the Sultanate's team at the 19th Gulf football championship by setting up a fund to regulate private sector contributions to the team.

The OCCI supports efforts to promote investment in the Sultanate, arranges Omani trade delegation visits abroad and hosts foreign trade delegations to the Sultanate. It arranges lectures and workshops on investment opportunities, incentives and the facilities available in Oman.

Oman Centre for Investment Promotion and Exports Development (OCIPED)

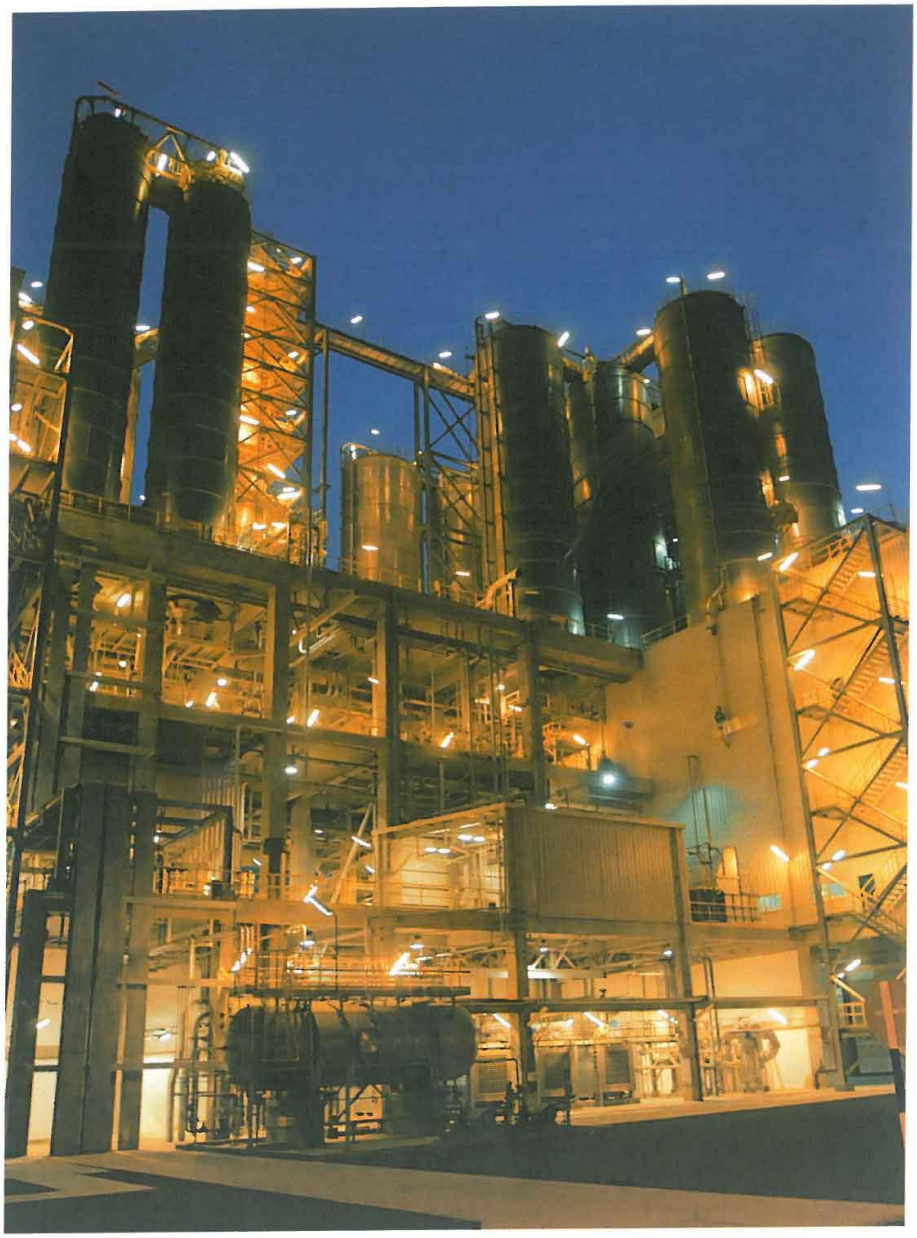
OCIPED is a government establishment, formed by Royal Decree No. 59/96 dated 26th June 1996. The Centre aims at increasing the contribution of the private sector to the investments required for the development plans and promoting the export of Omani products to foreign countries to improve the balance of trade of the Sultanate.

Information technology (IT)

Oman attaches great importance to the knowledge economy and has started establishing the infrastructure for information technology (IT) and telecommunications-based industries. An IT complex – Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) – is operational and beginning to attract investment for developing knowledge-based industries, upgrading the technology of Omani businesses and supporting young creative talent.

The Information Technology Authority (ITA), set up by Royal Decree on 31st May 2006, is a financially and administratively independent legal entity responsible for implementing the Oman Digital Society strategy. It oversees infrastructure projects and all Digital Oman-related operations.

The ITA's goal is to develop an integrated infrastructure for IT, knowledge applications and joint government services portals, link all government departments and bodies to a secure data network and provide e-government data and services through a system of multiple outlets, creating an operational framework for e-administration and laying down the criteria and regulations for the country's IT and telecommuni-





An IT complex – Knowledge Oasis Muscat – is beginning to attract investment for developing knowledge-based industries

cations structure, including the data and network security system. The official eGovernment Services Portal (www.oman.om) and the national awareness campaign, under the umbrella of e.oman, Oman's national IT strategy, was launched on 8th November 2009.

In 2008 the Electronic Transactions Law was promulgated under Royal Decree No. 69/2008.

At the beginning of 2009, the ITA, in collaboration with the Ministries of Civil Service and Education, started a computer and IT training programme leading to the IC3 (Internet Core Computer Certificate) – an international certificate - for 93,000 civil service personnel. This project is part of the Oman Digital Society and e-government strategy and is being carried out over a three-year period across the country's regions.

May 2009 saw the launch of the National Data Centre at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM). The centre provides electronic data backup for the public and private sectors that can be accessed in emergencies.

Also in May 2009, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the ITA and the Ministry of Sports Affairs to set up a knowledge society centre in the sports complex in Sur. Under this project citizens will be trained in the use of the computer and the internet.

The Sultanate was ranked 22nd worldwide in providing advanced IT systems products, 39th in its preparedness for e-government and 45th in the IT users' category at the World Economic Forum *(See page 74)*.

Polypropylene manufacturing plant at the Sohar Industrial Port complex, home to a number of heavy and chemical industries

Fisheries

The strategy for developing the fisheries sector is designed to provide greater food security, upgrade the fisheries-related industries, improve incomes and boost the sector's annual growth rate and its contribution to the country's GDP.

The Seventh Five -year Plan (2006-2010) seeks to reinforce the sector's infrastructure, improve productivity and quality control, develop human resources and increase the number of Omanis working in the industry. Other goals include increasing the average value of fish exports by 5%, developing the fisheries sector and the role of its employees and encouraging private sector investment

In 2007 the Sultanate landed around 152,000 tonnes of fish with a value of around RO69 million. During the same year, farmed prawn production began in the Sultanate and saw production rise to 66 tonnes. The Ministry of Fisheries Wealth has since embarked on a study project on ways of developing abalone farming technology.

Over the five years from 2003 to 2007 the value of fish exports rose from RO52 million to nearly RO59 million, while volumes increased from around 69,000 tonnes to over 74,000 tonnes. Some 50% of the country's fisheries production was exported.

In addition to contributing to the country's GDP, the fisheries sector is also a major provider of employment opportunities, particularly in the coastal regions. There are currently around 35,000 traditional fishermen, as well as some 6,000 jobs in fishing-related fields. The size of the commercial fleet rose from around 50 ships in 2003 to 76 in 2007; of these, 29 were bottom trawlers and 47 were longliners.

In May 2009 the Ministry banned bottom trawling, granting existing licensed businesses and individuals a two-year grace period to wind up their operations. The decision aims to ensure that the fishing sector uses only safe methods which protect the environment and marine life and allow fish stocks to increase and maintain their sustainability.

A laboratory has been set up to monitor metal and mineral pollutants as well as other factors which could impact adversely on fish stocks.

In recent years the government has invested over RO50 million in the construction of 15 fishing harbours in various coastal wilayats. Over RO20 million has been earmarked under the current Five-year Plan (2006-2010) for the construction of similar facilities.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a prime source of income for large numbers of Omanis and the sector produces most of the country's food needs. Goals for the sector, under the current Five- year Plan (2006-2010) include: achieving an average annual growth rate of 2.6%; expand, develop and protect the country's agricultural and animal resources, boost productivity and ensure resources are efficiently exploited. The drive to improve the incomes and living standards

The 7th Five-year Development Plan aims to increase the number of Omanis working in the fisheries sector



of rural farming families and to encourage them to remain in the areas where they live and work is ongoing. Opening up job opportunities in agriculture for nationals, towards achieving an average annual growth rate of 3.5% over the years of the Plan remains a priority, as do schemes to boost agriculture and livestock processing industries, improve the productivity of natural pastures and rationalise national water consumption.

In 2007 Oman had a total of 65,000 hectares of arable land, producing an estimated 1.077 million tonnes of various crops It is estimated that 66% of Oman's population benefit from the agriculture sector in one way or another.

The seminar on the sustainable development of the agricultural sector and the regulation of its labour market, held in 2007 on His Majesty's instructions, marked a significant step forward in the country's agricultural development. The cost of implementing the seminar's recommendations came to over RO33 million.

Modern irrigation systems are being installed on farms to improve the efficiency of the agricultural sector and conserve water resources. Traditional systems on farms using aflaaj (irrigation channels) have been upgraded. A project to erect protective walls has played an effective role in preventing agricultural land from being washed away by wadi flows and floods. Alongside these initiatives the sector has also adopted greenhouse and hydroponics technology to conserve water and make efficient use of the land.

Under the national date palm improvement strategy – and in view of the importance of date palm cultivation – over 30,000 high quality palm seedlings are being distributed for cultivation every year and the productive capacity of the cloning laboratory will be increased to over 40,000 seedlings annually from 2010. Some 86 date packaging units will be set up to improve the Omani date processing industry and increase its competitiveness in the local and foreign markets.

A strategy is currently being drawn up to improve mango cultivation through improved management and by establishing a gene bank of local and imported strains to be propagated and distributed to farmers.

The Sultanate's upgraded pest control programmes have successfully reducing the damage to crops such as dates, limes, coconuts, mangoes, bananas, pomegranates and vegetables.

The annual Agriculture Month Competition highlights the contributions made by farmers and stock breeders to the national economy and the goal of self-sufficiency in food. In the 2008 Competition, the results of which were announced in February 2009, the wilayat of Ibri was the winner in the agriculture category and the livestock category was won by the wilayat of Sohar

Livestock

Livestock plays an important role in helping Oman achieve self-suf-

ficiency in meat and food security. The veterinary infrastructure is now complete; 65 veterinary clinics and 14 agricultural and veterinary quarantine centres have been set up across the country. The upgraded legal and legislative framework for the livestock sector has been brought into line with international standards and systems.

Advice and guidance services are provided to improve the productivity of the livestock sector; programmes – including animal inoculation against a range of epidemic and contagious diseases - have been carried out on over 10,000 stockbreeders' centres nationally.

Water resources

Situated in the world's arid belt with an unstable water situation and rainfall averaging only about 100mm annually, the Sultanate suffers from a chronic water shortage; a problem exacerbated by an increase in pumping from groundwater stocks. Most of Oman's regions have traditionally relied on aflaaj springs and wells for their main water supplies.

Evaluation of the country's water resources is constantly under government review. It maintains the aflaaj systems, maintains dams, operates water exploration schemes, including non-traditional sources and works to raise awareness on the importance of conservation.

The National Water Resources Plan (2000-2020) seeks to improve water resources while reinforcing existing projects for managing demand. The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources is carrying out hydrological studies to evaluate the groundwater stocks and ensure that they are sensibly exploited to guarantee sustainability. Over recent years it has also carried out a number of successful exploratory drilling projects in its search for new, alternative sources.

Exploratory operations for new water sources have led to the discovery of new groundwater stocks, which are currently being evaluated. Applications from the private sector to set up bottling plants, quarries, fuelling stations, agricultural projects and other operations are subjected to close technical scrutiny to ensure that they do not adversely affect precious surface and underground water sources. In 2008, 63 such applications were considered.

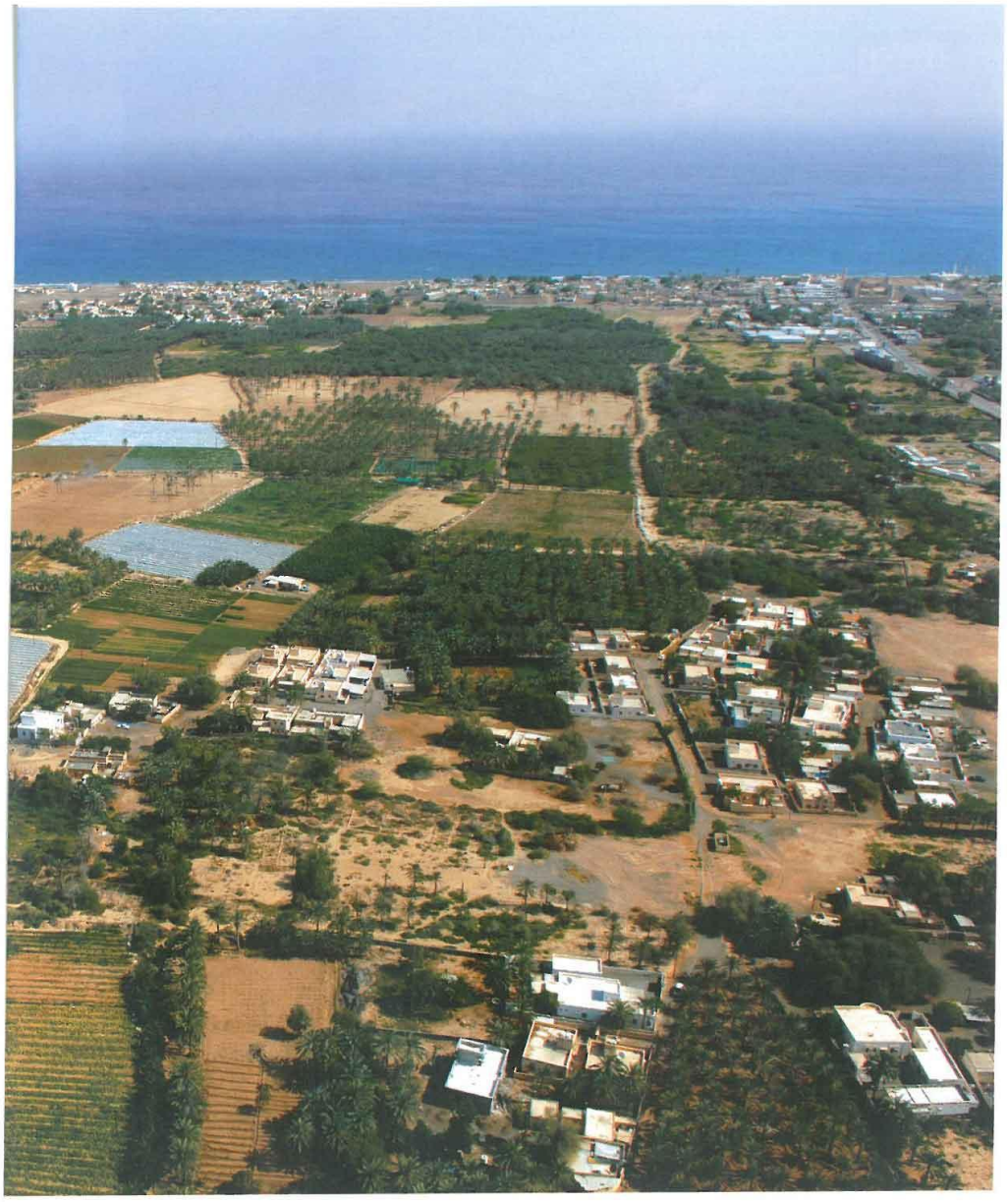
Dams

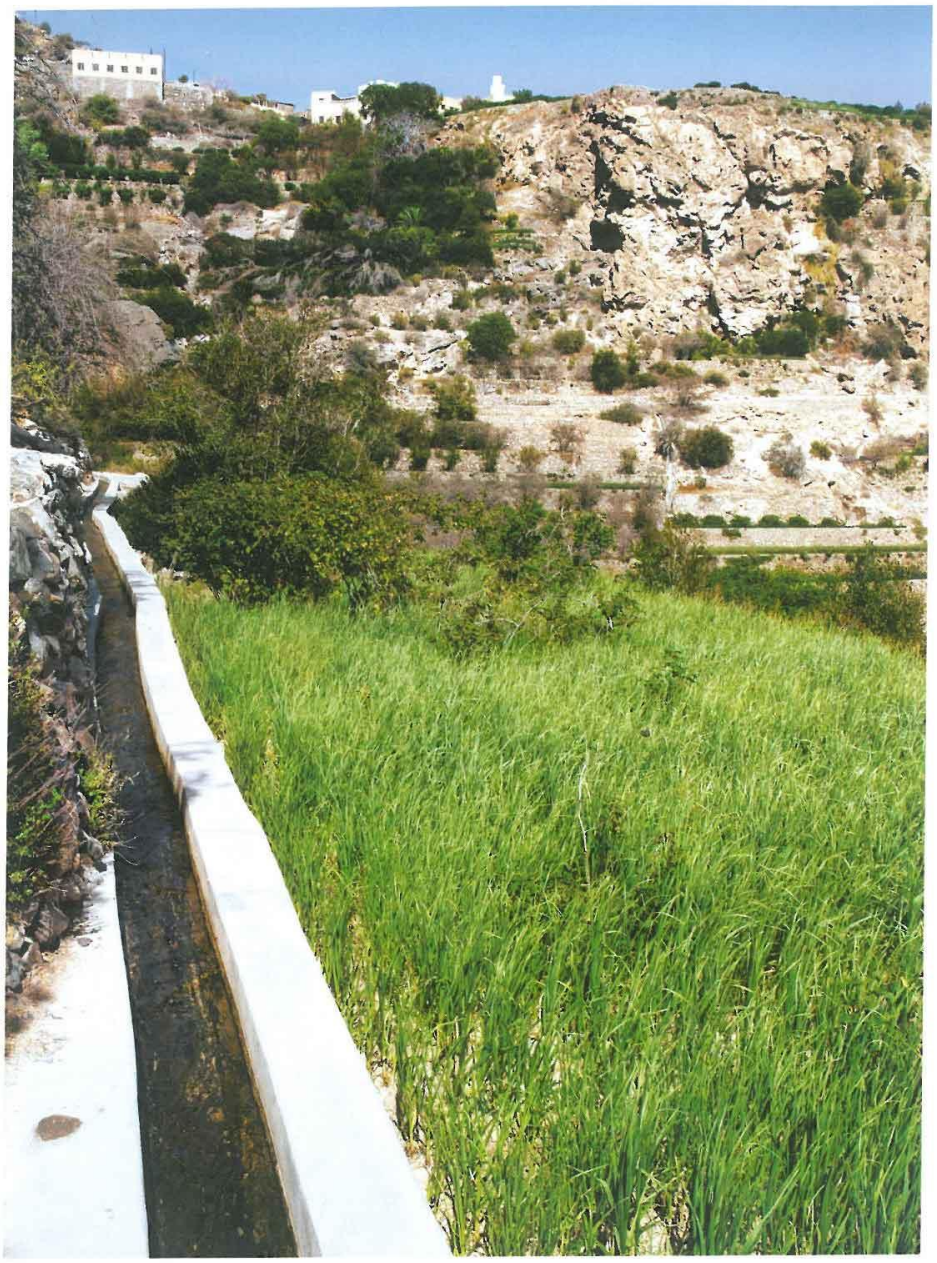
In 2008, contracts were commissioned for 10 dam projects in various parts of the country.

The Wadi Dhaiqah dam in Muscat, currently being built at a cost of RO43 million, will utilise the water flow in Wadi Dhaiqah – estimated to be around 60 million cubic metres a year. According to the feasibility study, the dam will provide 35 million cubic metres a year, of which 10.3 million cubic metres will be utilised for agricultural purposes below the dam and around 4 million cubic metres will be for domestic



Modern irrigation systems are being installed on farms in order to improve the efficiency of the agricultural sector and to conserve precious water





220

consumption in the wilayat of Quriyat. The remaining 20.6 million cubic metres will be piped to Muscat's other wilayats by the end of Phase Two of the project.

The aim of the project is to provide flood protection for the villages below the dam and make better use of the wadis' flood water - which currently flows into the sea – in order to supply water for drinking and other domestic uses in the Muscat governorate.

Work began on Salalah's flood protection dam in August 2007, after technical and geological studies confirmed feasibility of the project. The dam will provide protection against frequent flooding of the area and, by feeding the groundwater stocks, will boost the volume of water reserves available for the city and surrounding areas.

Regular maintenance work is being carried out on a number of groundwater recharge and surface storage dams, and the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources is currently investigating the feasibility of several flood protection dams.

Aflaaj and springs

Aflaaj are an important source of water in Oman . According to the Falaj Inventory Project, there are 4,112 aflaj in the Sultanate. In 2008 the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Water Resources issued orders for maintenance work to be carried out on 334 aflaaj and for 25 projects for auxiliary wells to be dug to feed them.

Tourism

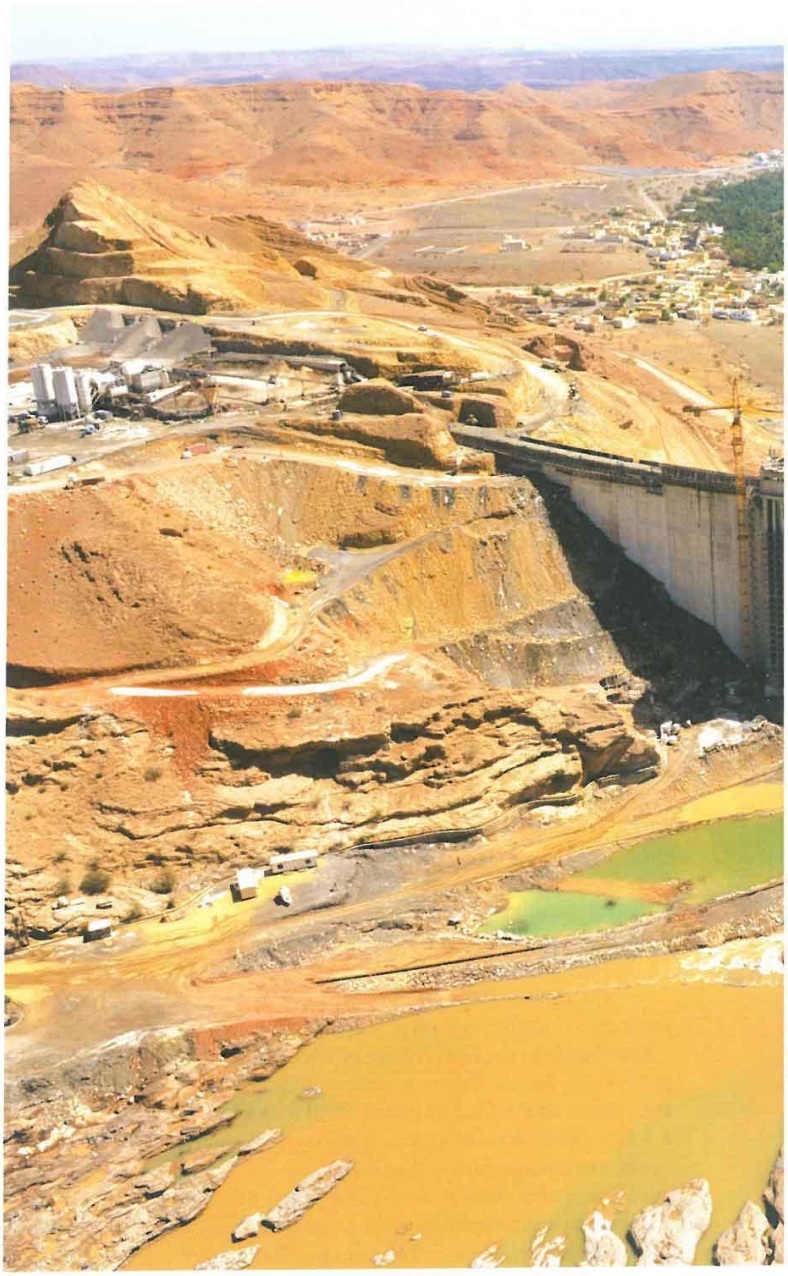
A new phase of growth for the tourist industry was launched with the issue of Royal Decree No. 61/2004 on 9th November 2004, which established the Ministry of Tourism.

The Sultanate has an annual target growth rate of not less than 7% for the tourist sector and aims to boost its contribution to the country's GDP to 1.5% by the beginning of 2010. There are plans to double the number of hotel rooms to 16,000 by 2010 and increase the number of "tourist nights" to over five million by the end of 2020. Oman is currently engaged on a number of huge tourist projects including the construction of more than 12 five-star hotels over the next four years.

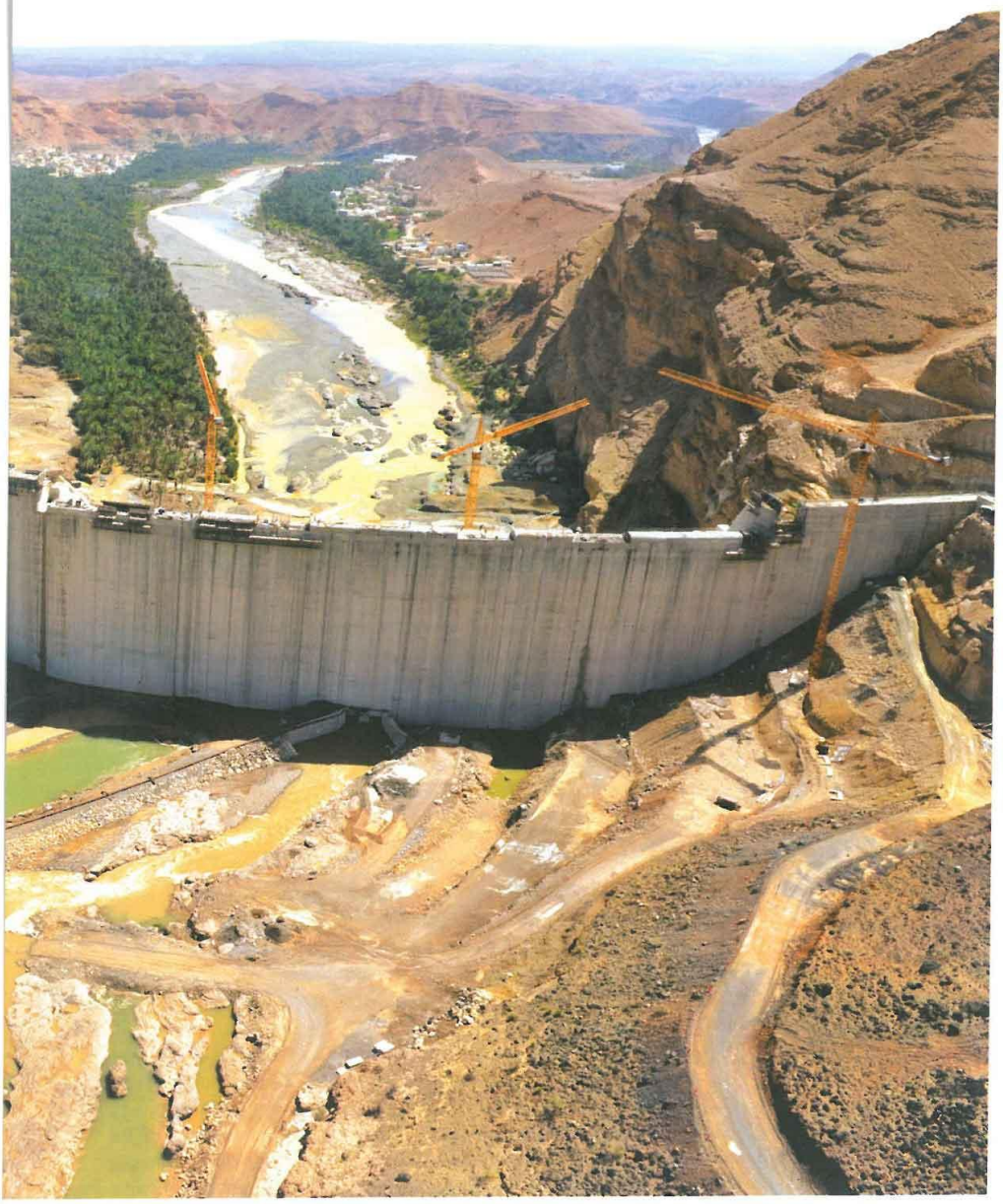
By the end of 2008 several projects had reached their final phase and new agreements had been signed for the construction of – among others – three hotels in the Governorate of Dhofar as part of the Salalah Beach project, the Ras Al Hadd project (with Qatar's al Diyar) and a conference centre on the Muscat International Airport Heights; the latter being a 100% government project, comprising three hotels and a world-class centre to attract conference tourism.

In November 2008 the Six Senses Resort was opened in the wilayat of Daba in the Musandam peninsula. Located in Zighy Bay, it consists of 82 chalets and offers a range of services and facilities.

The falaj – an ancient irrigation channel - being used here on the agricultural terraces of the Jebel al Akdhar



Wadi Dhaiqah Dam aims to make better use of the wadi's flood water





The Salalah Tourist Festival is family-focused

Tourists enjoy Omani hospitality at Bait al Safah, a traditional house in al Hamra, Dakhiliya region

The Hoota Cave has been restored to its former beauty, and new facilities have been added

A semi-submerisible vessel, the Al Khayran, was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in April 2009. The Al Khayran gives passengers the opportunity to explore the ocean bed and observe local marine life.

According to the figures, during the first quarter of 2009 the number of guests staying in four and five-star hotels rose to around 218,000 – a 12.4% increase compared with some 194,000 over the same period the previous year. In 2008 around 679,000 guests stayed in hotels in these categories.

DHOFAR

With its attractive climate, particularly during the khareef, or monsoon season, the Governorate of Dhofar is an important tourist destination. During the khareef, from June to September, the land is draped in a mantle of greenery; clouds obscure the sun on most days and a gentle drizzle falls in temperatures that never top 22°C and may drop even below 15°C in the mountains.

The annual Salalah Tourist Festival, which runs from mid-July till the end of August, is the Sultanate's leading festival. Under its slogan "Family Forum," the Festival has won numerous Arab and regional prizes. At a conference on festival strategy management in Dubai it won an award for being the best family-focused festival in the Middle East, while the annual readers' poll held by the United Arab Emirates tourism and travel maga-







Dhofar in July is draped in a mantle of greenery



zine "Asfaar" voted it the Middle East's best family-oriented festival.

The 2008 Festival offered a wide choice of literary, cultural, intellectual, social, artistic, sporting and recreational activities and events and was a resounding success with visitors, tourists, nationals and residents alike.

During the 2008 khareef season the Governorate of Dhofar received over 450,000 visitors, up 24% from the 364,000 recorded in 2007. The visitors spent nearly RO66 million between them with Omanis accounting for around RO30 million and other nationalities the remaining RO36 million.

In parallel with the growth of its tourist industry, numerous other development projects are being implemented in Dhofar, which boasts numerous tourist attractions and a unique natural beauty. Dhofar is home to several sites of religious and historical importance, including – among others - the region of al Ahqaf (the Rolling Sand Dunes) mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, the tombs of the Prophets Hud, Job and Saleh, the ruins of the city of al Baleed, the port of Sumhuram at Khor Rori, which was famed for the export of frankincense, the ruined city of Wubar, ancient remains at al Mughsail and the citadel of Hamran in the Salalah area.

The open air amphitheatre at Qurm Natural Park attracts a large audience for a show held during the Muscat Festival early in 2009

MUSCAT

With its strategic location on the Oman Seavv and its access to the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman is a city of historical importance and a major trading centre from the early days of the Islamic era. Muscat remains an important maritime hub and communications link between Asia, Africa and Europe.

The Governorate of Muscat has six wilayats: Muscat, Mutrah, Bausher, Seeb, al Amerat and Quriyat.

Projects put out to tender by Muscat Municipality under its building development plan include the reconstruction of old Muscat, which will involve the renovation of seven districts of the old city. The Municipality is currently developing the Hayy al Mina district in Mutrah, where Port Sultan Qaboos is located. This project is part of an integrated, two-stage scheme designed to improve the appearance of the area's existing buildings, modernise its services and facilities and highlight its attractions for tourists, visitors and shoppers and link it to the Sea Road development.

Muscat Festival

The first Muscat Festival was held in February 1998 and it has since become a significant event on the Arab festival calendar. Its extensive programme constantly features new events and activities and is designed to appeal to every section of the community.

With its rich mix of cultural, artistic and recreational attractions the 2009 Muscat Festival, held from 19th January to 12th February in 2009, attracted around two million visitors, created numerous jobs for young Omanis, including some 700 temporary posts and 400 opportunities.

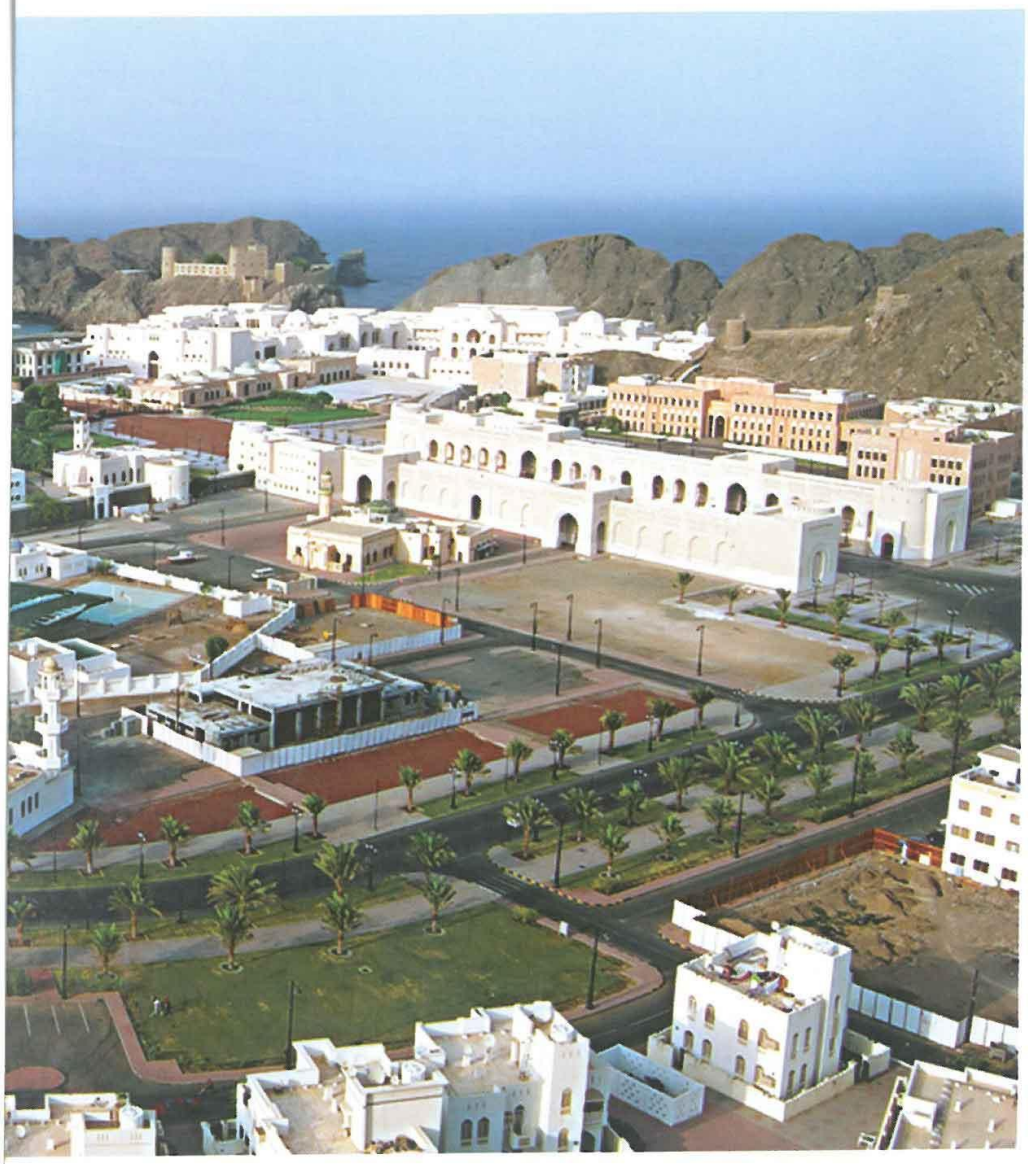
Amusements and rides for the children - something for everyone during the Muscat Festival

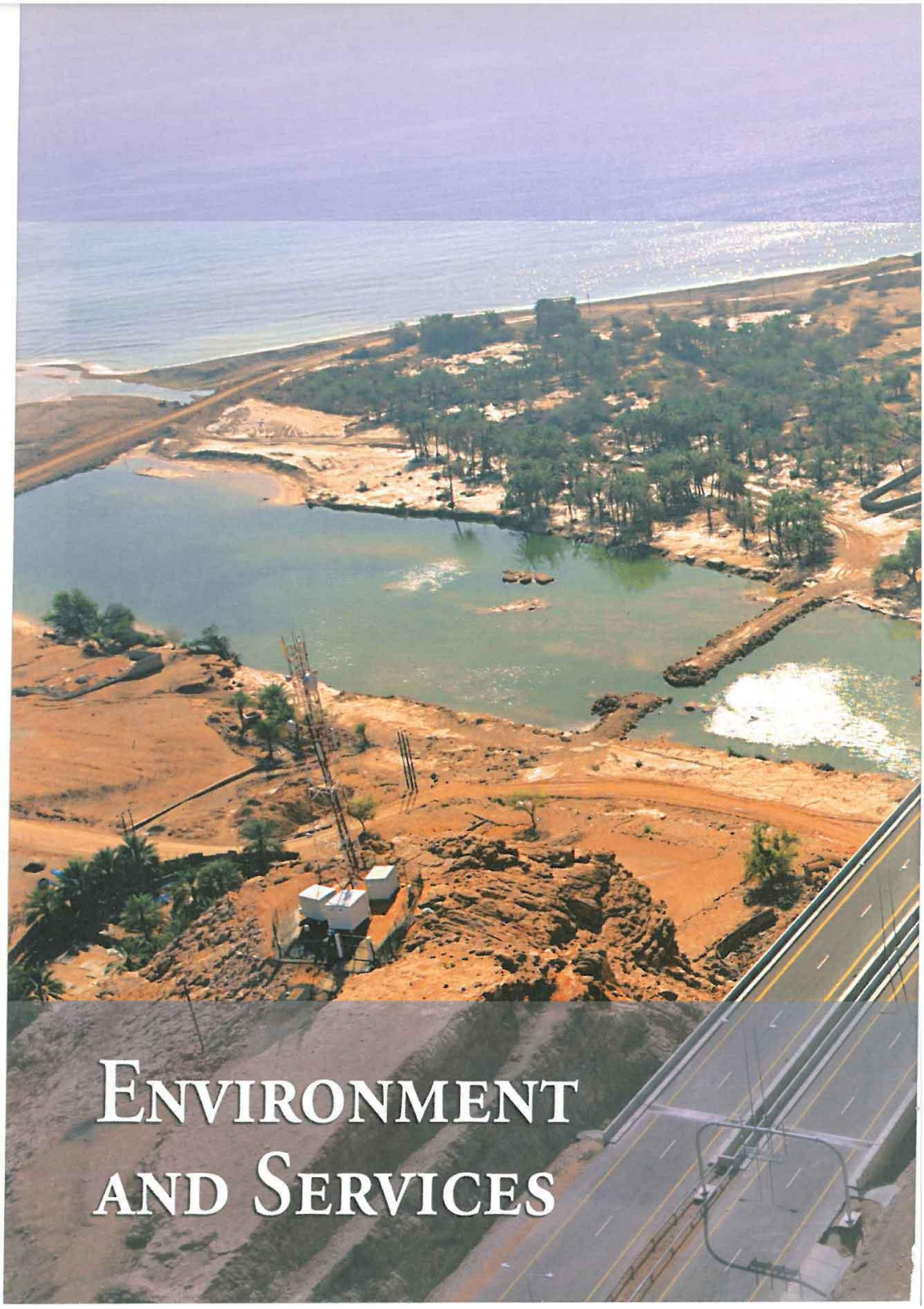




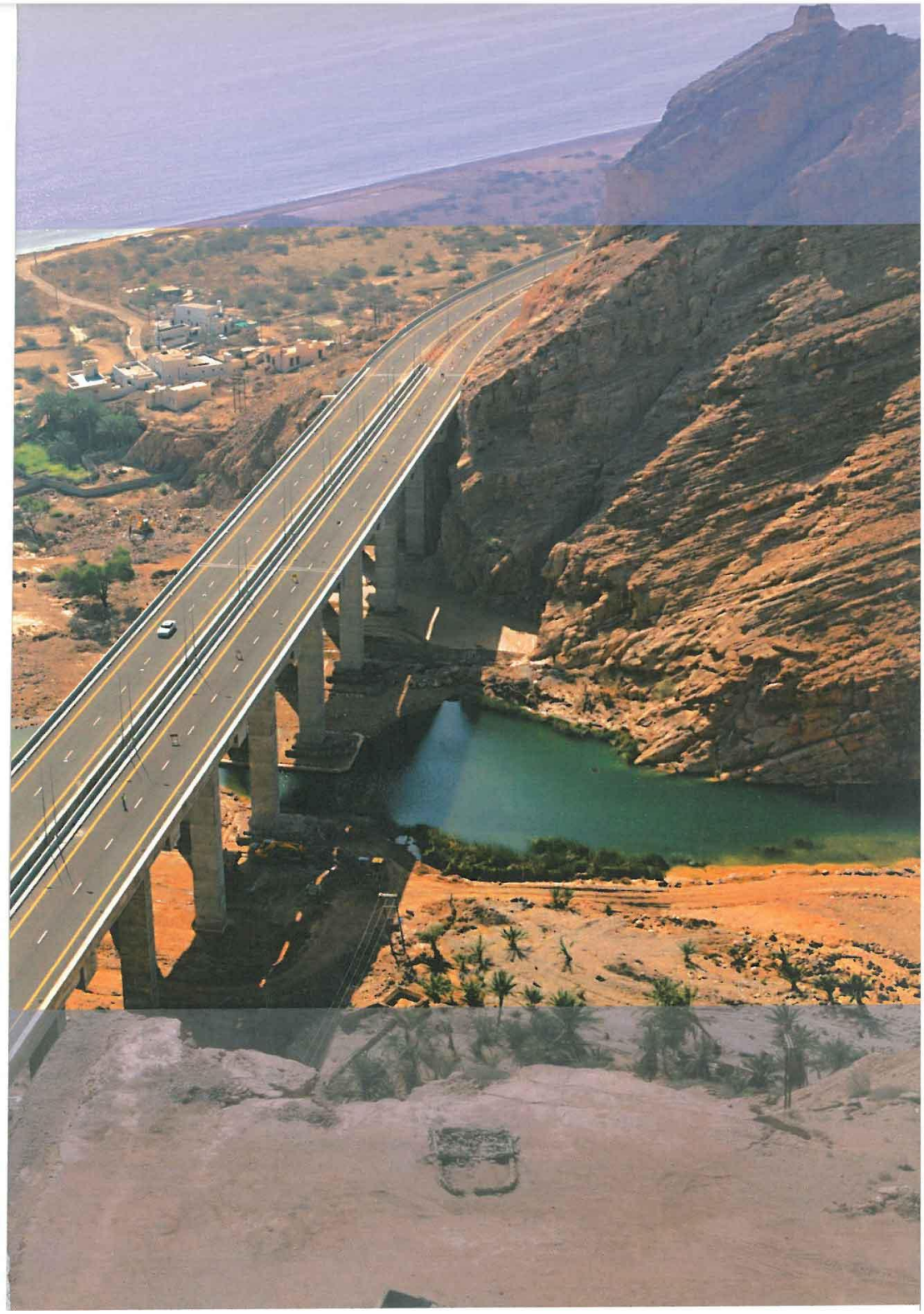


Modern offices and housing blend in well with the historic forts of Mirani and Jelali in the background





Environment and Services



ENVIRONMENT & SERVICES

The national strategy for protecting the environment was inspired by Sultan Qaboos, early in his reign. His Majesty, a keen conservationist, frequently urges his people to make the best possible use of Oman's natural resources, the inheritance of the past and the bounty of future generations.

Protection of the environment has been a major element of Oman's economic development and the principle of eco-management is a fundamental factor in all projects in the country.

Close cooperation and joint action on the environment exists between the government and private sector as well as with regional and international organisations. Royal Decree No. 90/2007, issued on 9th September 2007, established the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs. And on 6th October 2009 Royal Decree No. 54/2009 established the National Centre for Field Research on Conservation of the Environment, to be supervised by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. Oman Environment Day has been celebrated with special events and programmes on 8th January, since its institution by His Majesty in 1996.

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation

The Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation demonstrates the high esteem in which His Majesty holds those around the world involved in the protection of the environment. The Prize was instituted on His Majesty's initiative, during a visit to UNESCO's headquarters in June 1989. It has been awarded by UNESCO every two years since 1991 for the best international contribution to the environment. The winning individual, group, institute or organisation is chosen by the Bureau of the International Co-ordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme and honoured at a ceremony at UNESCO's Paris headquarters.

In October 2009 it was announced that the National Gardens Organisation, supervised by the Rural and Marine Regions of the Spanish Ministry of Environment, had bagged the Prize. The award was in recognition of the achievements it had made in coordinating the public parks network in Spain, as well as its international cooperation programme and improving land and resources utilization.

Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs, in collaboration with other government departments and international experts, has produced a national biodiversity strategy and plan of action to ensure that biological resources are exploited in a sustainable manner. Meanwhile, the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation, promulgated under Royal Decree No. 6/2003, establishes the legal framework for the



The gazelle numbering project is ongoing on the Jiddat al Harasis in the Wusta region

protection and development of these resources on a sustainable scientific basis. In November 2007, the Sultanate joined the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Oman's 15 nature reserves represent some examples of the unique terrestrial and marine biodiversity sustained by the country's varied geography and climate. They include the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary on the Jiddat Al Harasis, near Haima, the Turtle Reserve at Ras al-Jinz, the Daymaniyat Islands Reserve and the khors – or lagoons – on the coast of the Governorate of Dhofar.

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs is engaged on a number of projects aimed at developing the nature reserves for the benefit of tourists. Amenities for tourists have already been installed at the Ras al-Jinz Scientific and Turtle Visitor Centre, and at the Al Saleel Nature Reserve.

The gazelle-numbering project is one of a series of measures introduced by the government to save the country's gazelles from extinction by protecting them from poachers and allowing them to flourish in their natural habitat.

The turtles at Ras Al Hadd and on Masirah Island and the Daymaniyat Islands are being monitored by satellite. A study to protect four species of turtle that nest on Oman's shores at various times of year – the Loggerhead *(Caretta caretta)*, the Green Turtle (*Chelonia*



A study to protect turtles which nest on Oman's shores is part of a wider management plan for sustainable development

mydas), the Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricate)* and the Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), is part of a wider management plan for sustainable development that should maintain the balance of the marine environment and enable the marine and coastal systems in nesting areas to be protected.

Mangroves and Coral Reefs

A project launched in 2001, to restore the mangroves and rehabilitate the khors, is another scheme designed to help maintain the balance of Oman's natural environment. Over the course of the project, which concluded in 2008, some 415,000 mangrove seedlings were transplanted to an area of around eight hectares in selected khors at various coastal regions. Government and private sector bodies and local communities are active in campaigning to encourage the growth of indigenous wild plants, to compensate for those sadly already lost, and steps are being taken to eliminate mesquite trees, since studies revealed their negative impact on the environment.

The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs is currently carrying out a comprehensive survey of Oman's coral reefs to identify and, where possible reverse, or at least halt the damage they have suffered. It has also embarked upon an artificial reef project off Al Fahal Island and the Daymaniyat Islands in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). So far 520 artificial reef blocks have been installed at the sites.

Marine Life

The seas surrounding Oman are home to a multitude of exotic fish species that attract divers from around the world; they are also home to 21 species of whales and dolphins.

Whale and dolphin work continues in Oman

The Environment Society of Oman's whale and dolphin research programme continued last year with a focus on the extremely rare humpback whales, as well as Brydes whales, Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins, and spinner dolphins. The team took part in the first ever Indian Ocean wide symposium on cetaceans in the Maldives in July which discussed the need for more research in the region and especially more conservation efforts due to the high levels of threats to whales and dolphins, especially coastal species, from fisheries, coastal development, shipping traffic, seismic and military surveys and pollution. The meeting in the Maldives provided evidence for the continuation of the Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary which has been in place since 1979.

Work on spinner dolphins has revealed that tourist dolphin watching operations around Muscat may require additional guidance if business is to be sustainable. Dolphins are showing signs of stress that may cause them to move away from the area or disrupt vital breeding patterns. ESO research has shown that during the mornings, which is the peak of dolphin watching operations, dolphins come nearer to shore to rest and socialise. It is at this time that they are most sensitive, and yet this is the time when dolphin watching is most intense. The research showed that following simple guidelines can alleviate the stress to dolphins and allow the tour operations to continue.

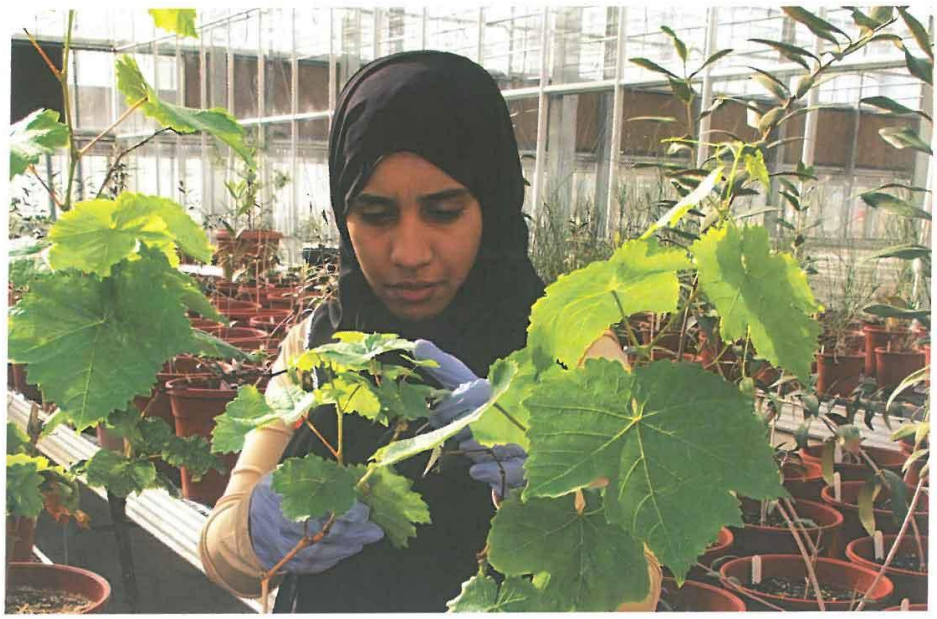
Still most at risk, however, are Oman's humpback whales of which there may be as few as just one hundred individuals remaining. New developments such as Duqm Port and harbour development at Hasik in Dhofar are in the heart of known humpback whale territory and could be a severe threat to the remaining individuals. ESO research on cetaceans, as well as that on turtles, coral reefs and protected areas, are set to continue.

Birds

Approximately 496 species of birds have now been observed in Oman. The website www.BirdsOman.com gives regular updates on sightings. During 2008 two books were published, i.e. 'The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akdhar' by the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research at Sultan Qaboos University and the 'Birdwatching Guide to Oman, 2nd Edition' by Al Roya Publishing.

The Oman Botanic Garden (OBG)

The Oman Botanic Garden (OBG), scheduled to open in 2012, aims to conserve and cherish the plants and plant-related heritage of Oman.



The Oman Botanic Garden is expected to be the largest botanic garden in the Arabian Peninsula when it opens in 2012. At present over 20% of Oman's flora is threatened, due to climate change

Within its 420 hectare site on the outskirts of Muscat, the garden will create naturalistic habitats with the environmental conditions required to support the diverse flora of Oman.

The garden will be the largest botanic garden in the Arabian Peninsula and the first in the world to grow the entire flora of one country. The Sultanate's varied environment is home to 1,200 species of plants, 80 of which are exclusive to Oman. The garden's botanical research team has already made many discoveries of plants new to science in the course of its field work. Over 20% of the Sultanate's flora is threatened, due to various reasons including climate change. OBG will help address these conservation threats, through research and education; hopefully, encouraging visitors to become active in the protection of Oman's botanical heritage.

The garden, with a range of habitats and a range of family friendly activities, will be open to anyone with an interest in the outdoor environment, plants, culture and heritage. The research and education components mean it will be a particularly important resource for university, college and school students. All OBG structures, including a field studies centre, with classrooms, lecture theatres and accommodation for students or visiting professionals and a research centre with laboratories and offices, are to be designed, built and run with the latest energy and water efficient technologies to minimise their impact on the environment.





Public parks are being provided with services as well as new amusements for children

Regional municipalities

Responding to public need and the growth of commercial activity in the wilayats, regional municipality projects in 2008 focused mainly on utilities and services. Other priorities for development included tourist and archaeological heritage sites.

In 2008 tenders worth around RO30.2 million were awarded for 199 projects, included contracts for improving services and amenities, developing souqs, improving public parks and the aesthetic appearance of towns and cities,

Health and hygiene controls continue to be strictly monitored, with impromptu inspections carried out across the food industry, from road-side cafés to vast water bottling plants. Work has begun on the preparation of a manual containing full details of the health and hygiene regulations for all food manufacturing businesses operating in the Sultanate.

In 2008 over 13,800 municipal permits were issued for food shops and foodstuffs factories – up from 11,778 in 2007 - while 16,755 health cards were issued for people working in these sectors, compared to 15,495 in 2007.

The Food and Water Laboratories Centre - with branch laboratories in several regions - plays a vital role in monitoring and analysing food and water samples, and ensuring products conform to standard specifications.

Housing

The Ministry of Housing distributes land under a series of regulatory laws and conditions and applies and monitors standard planning specifications, principles and regulations on housing building and related operations. Town planning strategies are designed to promote balanced development in the governorates and regions, enabling people to live and work in the areas they were born and grew up, should they choose to do so.

Under the Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010) the Ministry of Housing will step up distribution of new plots of housing land across the regions. At the same time, the Ministry will continue with its policy of land grants and housing assistance, as well as soft loans for Omanis on limited incomes and families receiving social security benefits.

Royal Decree No. 125/2008 provides for women to be granted land for housing on the same terms as men. This legislation was interpreted as clear recognition, by His Majesty, of the role Omani women play as effective partners in the country's development. In order to be eligible for a housing land grant, applicants –whether male or female – must be at least 21 if married, 23 if unmarried, or the family's sole breadwinner. In every region or governorate land will be granted when and where it is available, with top priority given to those who have not previously received land from the state and those who do not own any land at the time of submitting their applications. In 2008 the Ministry made around 59,000 plots of land available in different parts of the country for various uses.

With digital data increasingly important in every field, including present and future housing development plans - as official departments move towards e-government – the Ministry of Housing is currently in the process of converting survey maps into digital projections.

Real estate in the Sultanate is registered under the Real Estate Register regulations, (a process similar to the system followed in most countries around the world), for security and ease of transfer, since property ownership is of vital economic and social importance to the state as well as to the individual property owner.

Under Royal Decree No. 21/2004 citizens of the Arab Gulf Co-operation Council (AGCC) states may own land in Oman while to encourage tourism, under Royal Decree No. 12/2006 foreigners from outside the AGCC states have the right to own real estate in "integrated tourist complexes".

In 2008 over RO2.5 billion worth of contracts were signed and more than 102,000 real estate transactions recorded. Over 169,000 title deeds were issued and 109,442 new plots of land registered for the first time for various uses.

The social housing programme

The government offers facilities to enable citizens to own land. It ob-



Assistance is given to families on limited incomes through a number of programmes including social housing, housing assistance and housing loans

tain loans from the Oman Housing Bank and provides suitable housing for people on limited incomes and families receiving social security, through a number of programmes including social housing, housing assistance and housing loans.The social housing programme sets out to ensure suitable housing is made available with all essential services, in or around the beneficiary's home town or village, so that their normal economic and social activities are not disrupted. In 2008 approval was given for the construction of 515 social housing units complete with amenities in several governorates and regions, at a total cost of RO40 million.

The housing assistance programme

The housing assistance programme was devised for families on monthly incomes of not more than RO129 and those covered by the social security system. From 2007 the upper limit for housing assistance – which the recipient is not required to repay - was raised from RO10,000 to RO15,000, in response to the rising price of building materials and the difficult terrain in some areas.

In 2008, 148 families in various parts of the country received aid under this scheme.

The housing loans programme

The housing loans programme is designed to provide interest-free

housing loans for citizens on monthly incomes of between RO130 and RO250, at the time of submitting their applications, and not more than RO400 per month when the loan is approved. In the case of self employed applicants, monthly income is calculated on the basis of a year's earnings.

Loans, which are used for building, house purchase or extending an existing building, are granted up to a maximum value of RO20,000, repayable in monthly instalments not exceeding 25% of the borrower's income. In 2008, 411 families benefited from loans totalling over RO6.5 million under the programme.

Housing project

The Ministry of Housing's home building projects contribute to local community development while enabling members of those communities to enjoy a sense of stability and maintain their ties with their home towns and villages

In 2008, 261 housing units were built in the Wusta region, 230 in the Sharqiyah region and 90 in the Dhahirah region.

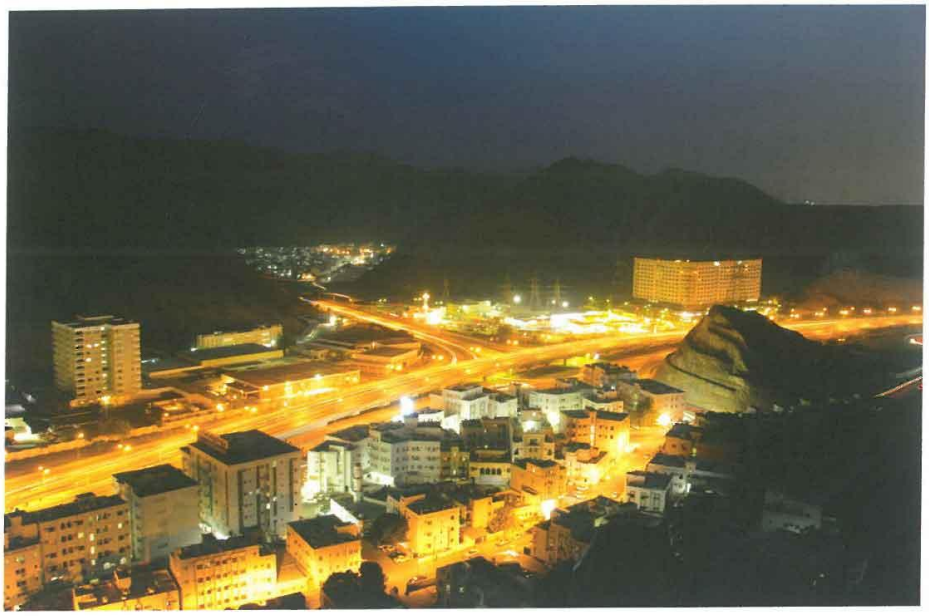
The electricity sector

Privatisation of the electricity sector has been a highly successful component of the government's privatisation programme. Among the organisational changes introduced by Royal Decree No. 78/2004, responsibility for regulating the power industry was placed in the hands of the Electricity Regulatory Authority and a number of government-owned companies were set up to run the sector. From 2005 to 2010 these companies will need to invest some RO330 million in the Sultanate's electricity sector.

Royal Decree No. 92/2007 established the Public Authority for Electricity and Water as the body responsible for the sector. The Authority seeks to develop alternative sources of electric power, including solar and wind power, as well as a range of different fuel sources.

Demand in the main interlinked supply grid (which covers the Governorates of Muscat and Buraimi and the Batinah, Dakhiliyah, Sharqiyah and Dhahirah regions) is expected to grow by 10% annually up to 2012, while demand in the Salalah mains supply system is expected to see a 13% annual rise to the year 2014. Projects to offset this growing demand include the Barka Power Station and Desalination Plant (Phase Two) and a power station and desalination plant in Salalah, with a generating capacity of around 250 megawatts.

A temporary electricity generating station with a 60 megawatt capacity is currently under construction in Al Duqm. The government plans to build a facility with a 1,000-megawatt capacity to cope with construction of the dry dock and other industrial projects due to be established in the area *(Also, see page 75)*.



Aerial view of the Wadi Hatat area of Muscat governorate

Power generation in Oman in 2008 totalled 16,048 gigawatts per hour – a rise of 11.1% compared with the 2007 figure. Supplies in 2008 were around 15,334 gigawatts per hour compared with 13,856 gigawatts per hour the previous year.

In March 2009 the international consultancy firm COWI was appointed to assist with the review and approval of renewable energy pilot projects. The appointment was part of a strategy for implementing the recommendations in the Authority's renewable energy study, which identified significant solar and wind energy potential in the Sultanate and recommended early implementation of small scale renewable energy pilot projects, initially in rural areas, to confirm the performance and efficiency of renewable technologies.

Such pilot projects should also alert local and international investors to the Sultanate's significant renewable energy potential and help pave the way for the implementation of large scale renewable energy projects in Oman.

At the beginning of June 2009, the Public Authority for Electricity and Water launched a campaign to encourage conservation of those resources, coinciding with the summer months when demand is high.

The water sector

Ensuring potable water is available to the greatest possible number

of population centres is among the government's priorities. Tanker filling stations are slowly being replaced by mains water supplies wherever possible, while water from desalination plants is gradually replacing groundwater stocks, which will be held as a strategic reserve.

Current projects in the sector include a number of desalination plants, among them a new desalination plant and power station currently under construction in Salalah and expected to supply 18 million gallons of water a day. A new unit at Al Ghubra is due for completion in 2012, and there are additional plans for a high-speed mobile desalination plant - with a million-gallon capacity - to cope with any shortfall that may occur.

Work is in progress to link the water supply systems of the Batinah and Dakhiliyah regions, and there are additional plans to link the Dhahirah region to the wilayat of Bahla, and the Sharqiyah region to the Dakhiliyah region.

In 2008 water production in the Sultanate rose to 35,167 million gallons per day – an increase of 5.3% from the 34,079 million gallons recorded in 2007.

Oman's ports - extensive development and ongoing modernisation

In recent decades the Sultanate has established a string of modern seaports to handle the growing volume of regional and international trade.

Despite the global financial and economic crisis, in 2008 and 2009 the ports sector continued along the course laid down for it in the Seventh Five-year Plan (2006-2010). Several agreements were signed in September 2008, including a RO335.4 million contract for additional work on Port Duqm marine works. In December that year other contracts were signed for work on the Port Duqm dry dock, design and supervisory consultancy services for jetties 7, 8 and 9 at Port Salalah, and for fast ferry handling facilities at Port Khasab and Port Shinas.

At the beginning of 2009 the Tender Board awarded tenders for another batch of projects, including a RO24.2 million project for the design, manufacture, installation and inspection of the cranes at the dry dock in Al Duqm. Consultancy services for a technical and economic feasibility study, design and supervision contracts, and management and operation studies on the Port Shinas development project were also awarded by the Board, along with works on the construction of jetties, under Phase Three, at Sohar Industrial Port and consultancy services for the management and operation of the dry dock project in Al Duqm.

Port Duqm

The Port Duqm project, launched in 2007, is part of the government's plan to make the most of the economic potential of each of the Sultanate's separate regions. The port, at Al Duqm in the Wusta Region, lies on the Arabian Sea.



Port Duqm, on the Arabian Sea, will have a ship repair dry dock facility as well as a floating dock to enable repair of tankers of more than 100,000-tonne capacity

The speed at which work has proceeded, highlights the importance the government places on its industrial mega-projects. Such schemes are intended to make a major contribution to diversification of the national economy, as well as attracting massive investment and large-scale industries to the country's special economic zones.

Port Duqm's breakwaters have a total length of 8.6 kms. The southern part of the harbour basin will be dredged to a depth of 18 metres and the entrance channel to a depth of 19 metres. The port will have a ship repair dry dock facility 14 metres high and 10 metres deep, two 410 metre long docks, between 80 and 95 metres wide and 14 metres deep, as well as a 2,800-metre-long jetty. It will also have a floating dock, equipped for repair and maintenance work to oil and gas tankers of more than 100,000-tonne capacity.

Oman aims to make Port Duqm one of the world's leading and best equipped harbours. With its location on the open sea and with significant oil storage facilities it will operate as a major channel for Gulf oil exports. Other strategic projects are planned for the port, including facilities for the export of rocks, metals, minerals, petrochemicals and general goods. The dry dock scheme is due for completion at the end of 2010 and the Port Duqm project as a whole by 2012. The cost of current projects is running at around US$2.6/RO1 billion.

Port Sultan Qaboos

The bulk of Oman's imports and exports pass through Port Sultan Qaboos, the country's main seaport since it opened in 1974. The port, in Muscat Governorate, has been extensively developed and modernised to cope with increasing demand. Port Sultan Qaboos began handling container traffic in 1984.

It has 13 jetties – of up to 14 metres deep - including two for cargo vessels, two for container ships, two multi-purpose - for general cargoes including motor vehicles, a jetty for loose cargoes (wheat, clinker), a cruise ship jetty, a jetty for harbour patrol vessels and four government jetties. In 2008, some 2,125 ships berthed at the port, compared to 1,856 in the previous year. Some 13.9 million tonnes of cargo were handled in 2008, compared with 11.5 million tonnes in the preceeding 12 months.

Port Salalah

The Port of Salalah is the largest port in the Sultanate of Oman and has become one of the leading container trans-shipment hubs in the region. The Port is managed and operated by the Salalah Port Services Company SAOG.

The Port of Salalah is a common-user multi-purpose port, with facilities to handle bulk cargo, containers, general and liquid cargoes and in addition offers value added services such as bunkering, container repairs, a container freight station, warehousing and ship repairs. The port is made up of two distinct terminals: a general cargo terminal and a container terminal. Under a 30-year concession agreement which began in late 1998, Phase Two of the port's expansion was completed in 2009; this included the construction of 2 deep water container berths capable of handling the world's largest cargo vessels, dredging the harbour to a depth of 18 metres, construction of a breakwater 2,825 metres long and other superstructure facilities at a total cost of over RO100 million. Today the total length of the container terminal's berths is over 2.5km and the terminal's annual handling capacity is 5.8 million TEU (twenty foot equivalent container units).

The container terminal's superstructure includes 25 Post Panamax Gantry Cranes. 69 rubber-tyred gantry cranes and 4 tugboats. The company has long-term contracts with three major shipping companies – Maersk Line, Mediterranean Shipping Company and APL.

In 2008 Salalah Port Services Company signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Omani government to expand the existing container handling facilities by constructing an additional 3 berths totalling 1,350 metres - this would extend the length of the container terminal's quay to 3,855 metres – and increasing the annual handling capacity to 9 million TEU by 2013. The company also signed an MOU with the government to upgrade and equip the 3 new berths, which will be berths 7, 8 and 9 during the next stage of the port's development.



A string of modern seaports have been built to handle the growing volume of regional and international trade. The Sohar Industrial Port attracts local and foreign investment in heavy industries and petrochemicals

In 2008 the container terminal handled 3.068 million TEU – a 16% increase compared with 2007. The general cargo terminal handled 3.469 million tonnes – up 25% on 2007.

Port Sohar

The Port of Sohar has succeeded in attracting massive amounts of local and foreign investments in heavy industries and petrochemicals such as the Sohar refinery, the polypropylene, urea, methanol, aromatics and polyethylene factories and the gigantic iron and aluminium plants. By the end of 2007 the port had brought in US$14 billion in investments, and was providing direct employment for 6,000 people and indirect employment for another 15,000.

The port has three main terminals – container, general cargo and loose dry cargo, as well as facilities for handling and storing liquid cargo. Sohar is a deep water port with an 18 metres draft. The construction of a deep water 600 metre long jetty with 23 metres draft is about to start.

In 2007 the concession agreement was changed to include 4500 hectares of land, to accommodate Freezone Sohar, in the vicinity of the Port. The first 500 hectares of this area is soon to be launched. The Port together with Freezone Sohar shares an excellent road network with links to the new upcoming expressways to Muscat, Abu Dhabi

and Dubai. The development of this area also includes Sohar Airport, scheduled to commence operations in 2011 and the new Batinah Railway Project link.

Port of Sohar, together with Freezone Sohar, Sohar Airport, Sohar train freight station, and Sohar Industrial Estate will eventually be bundled together as the "Greater Sohar Industrial Zone". The new Zone will benefit from a standardised world-class regime of safety, security, environmental and health protection measures. The Greater Sohar Industrial Zone is expected to be served by interlinked communications systems to and from Muscat as well as neighbouring countries, leading to enhanced business and employment opportunities.

Port Khasab

Port Khasab in the Governorate of Musandam was opened in 1983. Because of its strategic location and a growing demand for its facilities, the port has been expanded to handle cargo vessels and cruise ships, as well as pleasure craft, yachts and fishing boats. Work on the expansion and modernisation project was completed on 9th February 2007.

In 2008 around 109,000 boats and 537 ships berthed at Port Khasab and 1,730 tonnes of general cargoes were loaded there. Some 3,584 tonnes of goods were unloaded, 2,703 tonnes of goods passed through in transit and the port received 230,000 tourists.

Port Shinas

Port Shinas in the Batinah region is a secondary harbour capable of handling commercial and coastal shipping and receiving coastal vessels with a draft of up to a maximum of 3.5 metres. The harbour basin is 4 metres deep with an entrance channel of 4.5 metres in depth. The government has embarked on a plan to upgrade Port Shinas to enable it to handle larger ships, as well as fast ferries as part of its efforts to improve sea transport facilities between the Sultanate's regions.

In 2008, 91 ships berthed at Port Shinas and around 12,000 sheep were imported through it; some 74 tonnes of foodstuffs were also unloaded at the port.

Several new mooring facilities have been established along the coast as part of the government's efforts to improve transport facilities between the regions. One of the main ones - Shannah, which links Masirah Island with the rest of the country - was constructed to provide 24-hour access to Masirah, replacing the old facility which was unable to function at low tide. Work on the new RO10.395 million mooring facility, was completed in 2008.

National Ferries Company SOAC

The state-run NFC operates and manages the Sultanate's high-speed ferry service. It was established on 18th November 2006. In August



A marine transport fleet is being established to bolster investment in the transport of gas, oil derivatives and iron ore


DUQM
TUG



A high-speed ferry service operates between Muscat and Khasab in the Musandam governorate

2008 the Omani government inaugurated a new era in coastal passenger transportation services with the launch of a ferry service between Muscat and Khasab in the Musandam governorate. Two Australian-built catamaran-style ferries *Hormuz* and *Shinas* – billed as the fastest diesel-powered catamarans in the world – have been deployed on the sector. NFC is investing in the development of a network of ferry terminals that will connect key coastal cities and towns across the length of the coastline. In all, 12 ports and coastal locations are proposed to be linked to the high-speed ferry network. Plans are afoot to further expand the ferry service infrastructure to include Salalah, Hasik, Shuwaymiyah and Hallaniyat, along with feasibility studies for links with neighbouring countries.

Roads

Oman's extensive network of modern roads has had an extremely positive impact on its economy and investment potential and by opening up all areas of the country, however rural or remote, has helped promote tourism and greater social interaction between people across the nation.

By the end of 2008 the Ministry of Transport and Communications had built a total of 10,814 kms of asphalted roads, compared with 10,033 kms during 2007.

Highway building, improvement and repair projects are underway and ongoing across the length and breadth of the country, from the capital of Muscat to the smallest village. As Oman's economic development continues to flourish, a comprehensive road network, capable of transporting people, plant and materials swiftly and efficiently, becomes ever more essential. To this end, the government is committed to keeping these vital arteries of communication open and problem free.

Air transport

From 1st February 2008, Seeb International Airport became known as Muscat International Airport helping raise the city of Muscat's profile around the world.

The development of Muscat International Airport is one of the Omani airport sector's biggest projects and is due for completion in 2012. Phase One provides for the construction of a passenger terminal capable of handling up to 12 million passengers a year, as well as a new runway with aircraft slipways and parking bays, overhead bridges to carry passengers to and from aircraft, an air cargo terminal with an annual capacity of 260,000 tonnes, a control tower and numerous other features.

In May 2009 the Tender Board awarded an RO450 million tender for the Muscat International Airport civil works project (Phase One), as part of the development project for Muscat International and Salalah Airports.

The government is planning to expand the airport's annual handling capacity to 48 million passengers by the end of Phase Four of the development project. In 2008 some 4.002 million passengers passed through Muscat International Airport, compared with 4.22 million in 2007.

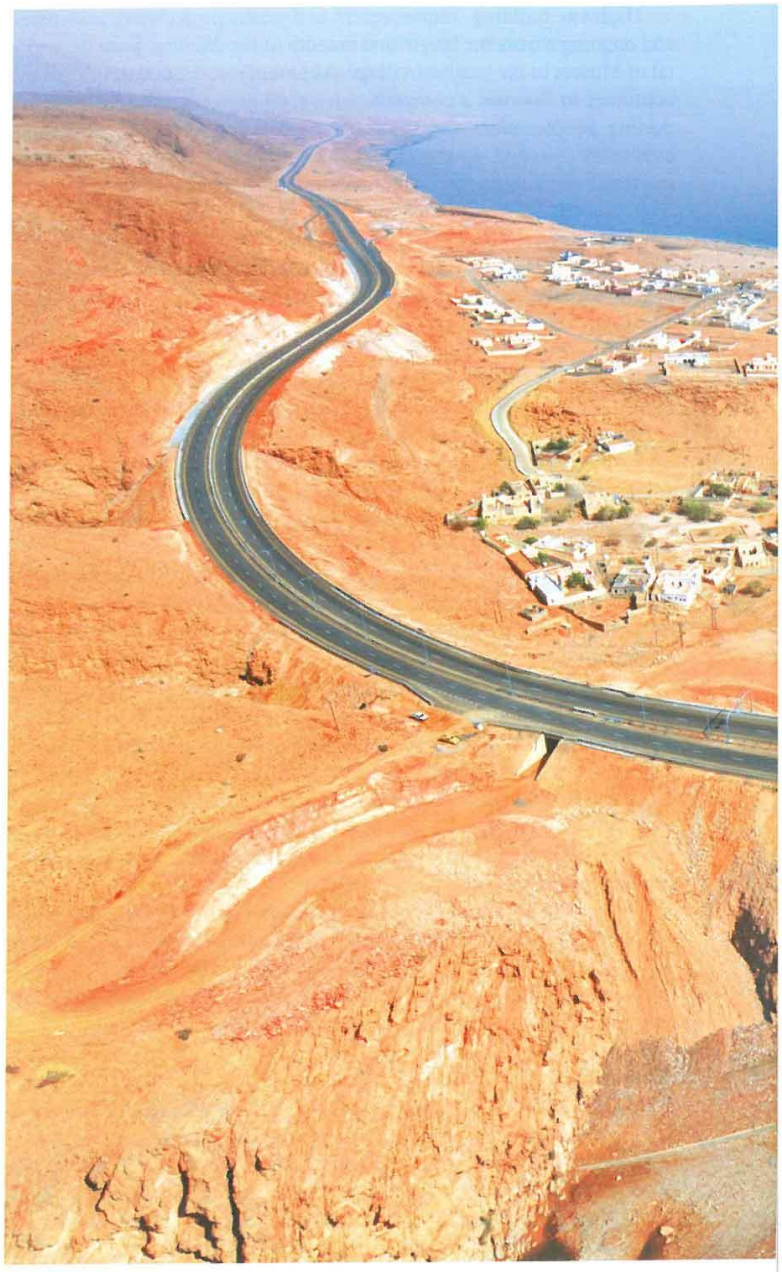
The government is also expanding Salalah Airport to handle up to two million passengers a year and plans to build domestic airports in Sohar, Ras Al Hadd and Al Duqm, as well as an aircraft landing strip in the Dakhiliyah region.

As part of its drive to boost air links between Oman and other countries, the civil aviation sector is keen to encourage more foreign airlines to Oman. The Sultanate has also signed Memoranda of Understanding with several states on regulating air transport services and bolstering co-operation in civil aviation and meteorology.

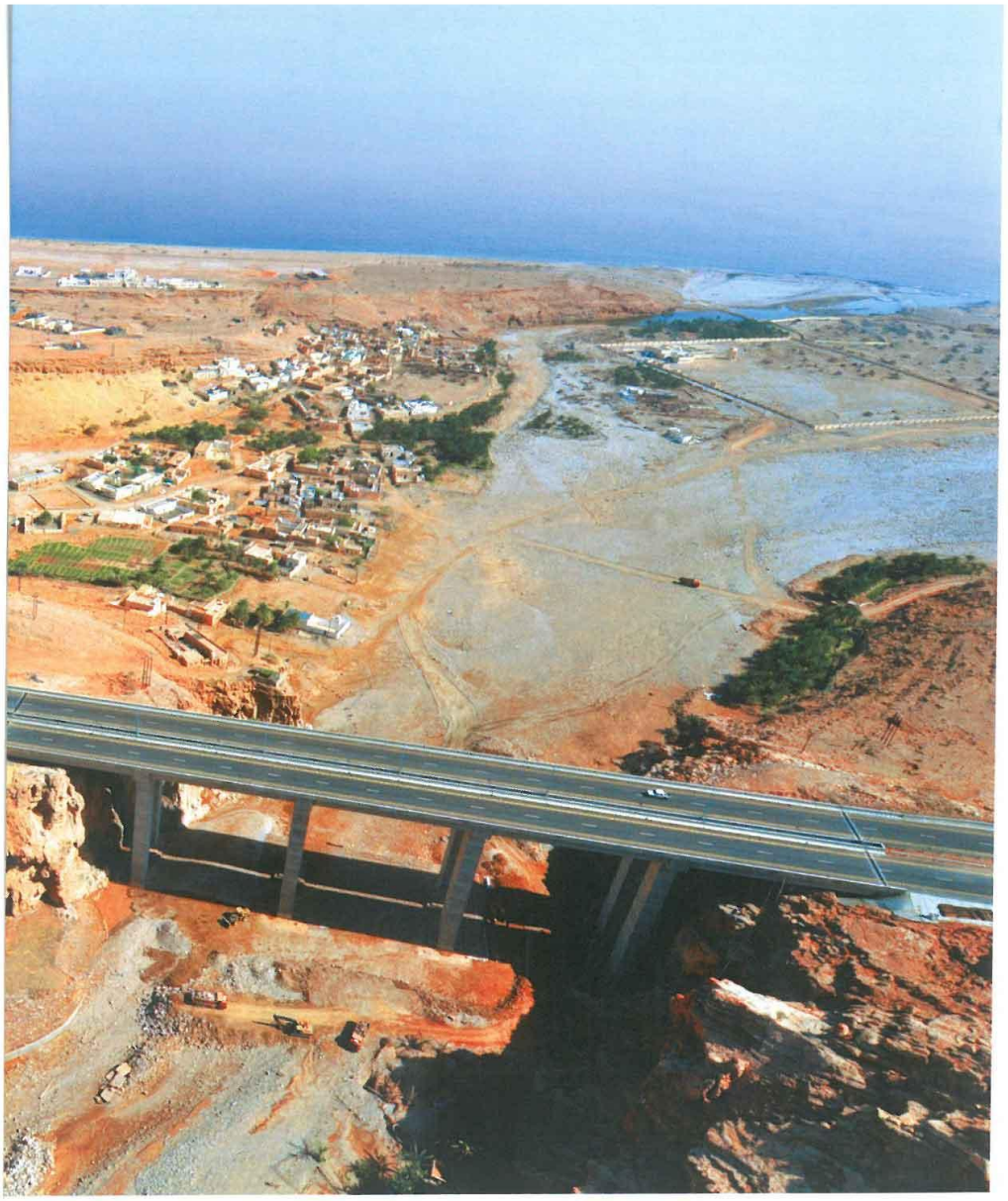
Oman Air

Oman Air is the flag carrier of the Sultanate of Oman. Founded in 1993, the airline has since witnessed massive growth and has played a major role in making Muscat an important traffic hub in the Middle East, supporting the commercial, industrial and tourism sectors.

As well as its domestic flights the airline currently operates direct international flights from Muscat to major Gulf destinations, to 10 des-



Oman's network of roads has had a positive impact on its economy. Here the carriageway linking Quryat with Sur in the Sharqiyah region





An artist's concept drawing of Muscat International Airport due for completion in 2012. Salalah airport is also being expanded

tinations in India, to Jordan, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, the Maldives and in Novembar 2009 added daily flights to Sri Lanka. In Europe Oman Air has daily flights to London, 3 times a week to Frankfurt, and most recently added 4 flights a week to Paris.

At the beginning of 2009 Oman Air unveiled its new, lie-flat Business-class seat which offers greater levels of comfort than many other airlines' First-class products. These are being fitted in all the new Airbus wide body fleet.

Oman Air's fleet consists of Boeing 737-800 and Airbus A330s. At the end of 2009 the fleet strength will be 15 x B737-800s, 2 x A330-200s and 2 x A300-300s. During 2010-2011, 3 additional A330-300s will be delivered, and for the future Oman Air has added 6 Boeing 787 Dreamliners which are scheduled for delivery in 2014.

Telecommunications

The telecommunications sector is one of the country's fastest growing thanks to the changes taking place in the global telecommunications arena and the government's determination to rise to the challenges it presents.

Telecommunications services in the Sultanate are provided by Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), its subsidiary Oman Mobile and the Omani-Qatari Telecommunications Company (Nawras).

Omantel, which became a public joint stock company in 2005, is



one of the leading telecommunications companies in the Sultanate and the Gulf Cooperation Council states and provides fixed line, mobile and internet services. In recent years it has focused on developing its technology and services, keeping abreast of vital new advances in the telecommunications and internet services sector. In October 2007 the government took a number of steps to improve Omantel's performance. A ministerial committee set up for the purpose approved a cut in royalties paid by the company from 10% of revenues for fixed line services and 12% for mobile services to a reduced flat rate of 7%. The committee agreed that this should also apply to Omantel's competitor, Nawras.

The Omani-Qatari Telecommunications Company (Nawras) is the Sultanate's second mobile telephone operator. Since starting operations in early 2005 it has helped bring about major advances in the telecommunications sector. In 2008 it was granted a second licence to provide fixed line and internet services and create an international gateway, thus increasing the competition between Nawras and Omantel to provide subscribers with the best possible services.

At the end of March 2009 the number of subscribers to the fixed line telephone service in Oman had risen to 270,000, up from 267,000 at the end of December 2008. There were over 126,000 internet subscribers, compared with 116,000 at the end of 2008, while the number of mobile telephone subscribers topped 3.355 million, as against 3.219 million at the end of 2008.

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)

The telecommunications sector is overseen by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) established in 2002 by Royal Decree No 30/2002.

In line with its goal to liberalise the sector and to encourage the introduction of new telecom services, the TRA granted six Class II licences to companies as resellers of basic mobile services in the Sultanate. The licensees can resell basic mobile services after buying airtime from operators at bulk rates in accordance with commercial agreements concluded with the operators. These services can then be rebranded and offered to subscribers at retail rates.

FRiENDi Mobile Oman were given an operating licence by the TRA in 2008 and went live on 28th April 2009 as the Sultanate's first mobile reseller. The FRiENDi Group has its headquarters in Dubai. Renna, another mobile reseller, was also given a licence and went live on 6th May 2009. Renna is a solely Omani company, operated by Majan Telecommunications llc.

The TRA is also planning to grant Class III licences (leased lines and private data networks) in order to encourage the use of telecommunications services by private companies that are capable of setting up their own networks. The TRA has also taken the initiative to introduce competition in the fixed lines service and value-added services. In November 2008 the TRA named the Nawras consortium as the winner of its Class I licence for Full Fixed Public Telecommunications Services.

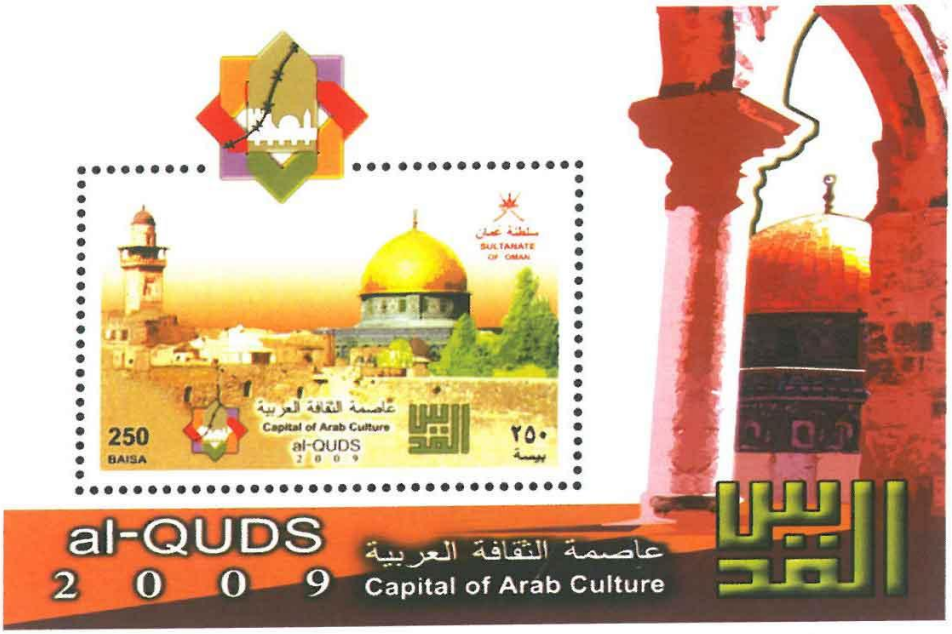
Further, the Authority invited specialists to carry out public consultations to gauge public opinion and feedback on existing and planned telecom services. The public consultation initiatives launched during the past year covered, among other topics, the following issues: Class III licence for the provision of private telecommunications services not connected to the public network; Opening up of the telecom market; Re-evaluating the need for telegram service; Rules and procedures for Class I licence application: Digital Video Broadcasting-Handheld (DVB-H); Technical and organisational requirements of the short range devices and automotive short range radars; Universal service policy and its implementation strategy; and Accounting separation, regulatory accounting and reporting requirements.

Oman Post

Oman Post provides both international and domestic postal services throughout the Sultanate of Oman. With its network of 95 post offices it provides letter, parcel and express services to all the people of Oman. As a member of the Universal Postal Union, Oman Post can connect everyone with an international postal network covering 219 countries. In partnership with private carriers, it can also provide express services to the GCC and beyond.

Oman Post is now providing added value services in addition to the traditional postal services. For example, customers with more fragile parcels can use a new service which provides specialist handling. This is being used successfully to deliver computers. Large volume users can use the Postpaid service which does not require large posters to spend time affixing stamps or putting letters through franking machines. In order to make using postal services more convenient, post boxes have been placed in commercial areas. Customers can now collect their mail when they go shopping and do not have to make a special trip to the post office.

Oman Post also provides government services through its post of-



Special stamps and First Day Covers are issued annually

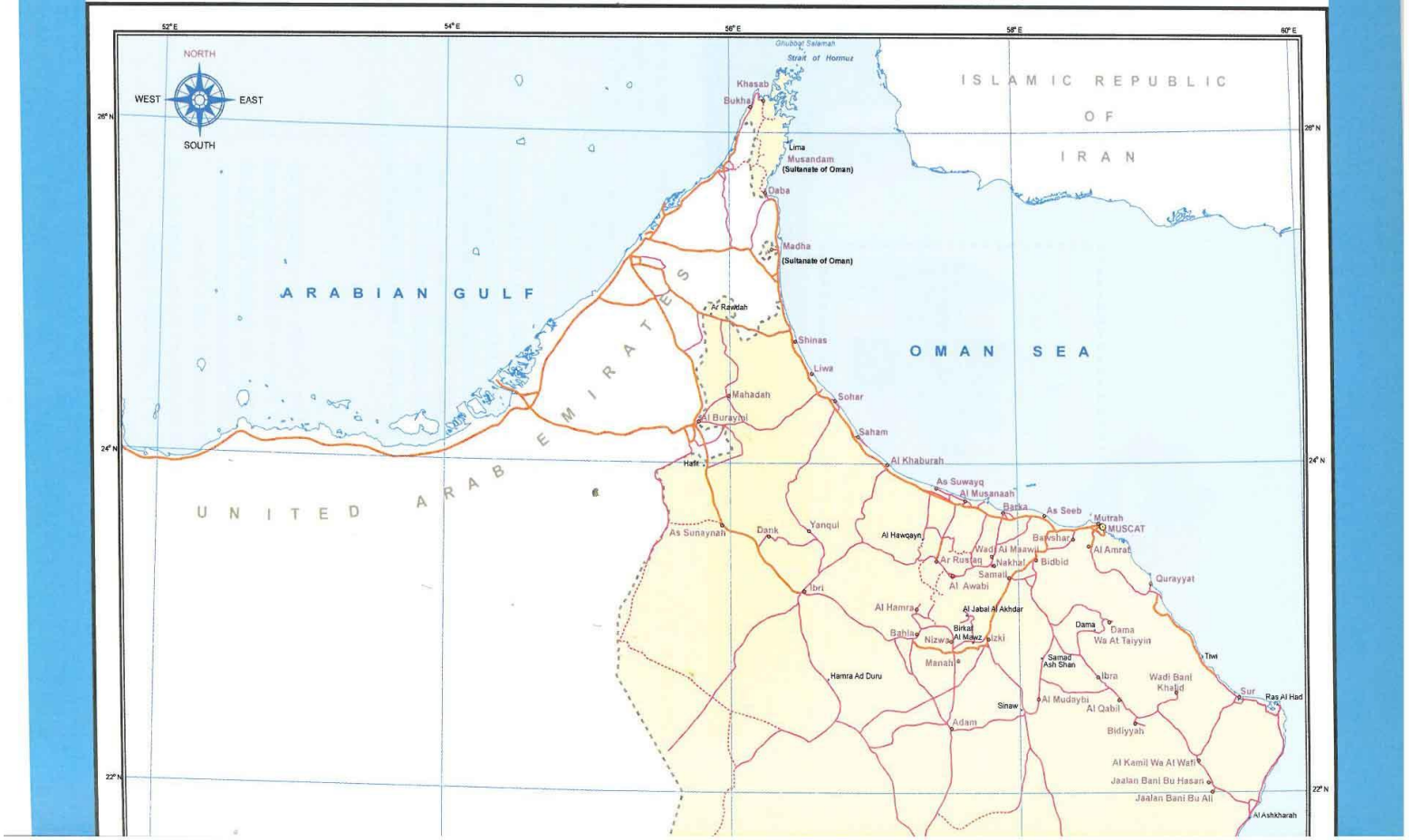
fice outlets. These include the Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Commerce and the ROP. This makes it much more convenient for individuals because they do not have to travel to government offices which are often a considerable distance away. These services are currently being extended and an ambitious e-commerce programme will allow customers to access government services online. Customer requirements are changing fast in the digital world and the network of post offices will allow people who are not connected to access the e-government portals. An ePost service is being developed which will allow customers to receive their mail electronically. Unlike email, the network is secure and data on business documents such as bank statements and bills can be downloaded into various formats for ease of use. Oman Post was set up under Royal Decree No.48/2005.

Postage Stamps

During the year stamps and First Day Covers were issued as follows: 38th National Day 2008, the 29th Session of the GCC Supreme Council, Arab Postal Day on 3lst December, the Arabian Gulf Cup on 4th January and on 12th October 2009 a 250 baiza stamp and commemorative cover to mark Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture.

A GCC Exhibition and auction of the region's stamps, both old and new, will be held in Muscat from 15th to 19th November 2009.

SULTANATE OF OMAN




KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
REPUBLIC OF YEMEN
ARABIAN SEA
20° N
18° N
54° E
56° E
58° E
Muhut
Masirah
Hayma
Ad Duqm
Mandar Adh Dhibyan
Al Mushash
Muqshin
Marsawdaq
Rima
Al Jazir
Al Lakbi
Sawqrah
Shalim Wa Juzor Al Hallaniyyat
Dimit
Ash Shuwaymiyyah
Hasik
Al Hallaniyyat
Milan
Al Hashman
Bilhnah
Ash Shasir
Al Mazyunah
Thumrayt
Dhamkun
Barbazum
Tawsinat
Muday
Halluf Wa Mashaylah
Qayrun Hayriti
Zayk
Jibjat
Hilayf
Madinat Al Haq
Tilam
As San
Tawi Atayr
Ghadu
Harwib
Salalah
Taqah
Mirbat
Sadah
Shahb Asayb
Khadrah
Dalkut
Rakhyut
Produced by the National Survey Authority, Sultanate of Oman October 2009.
Printed by the National Survey Authority, Sultanate of Oman.
This map not an Authority on International Boundaries.
Capital
Wilayah / Town
Nivatin
International Boundry
Dual Carriageway
Main Road
Graded Road
Road under Construction
Metres 2000 0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 Kilometres
SULTANATE OF OMAN

OMAN IN FACTS AND FIGURES

Area	309,500 square Kilometres
Capital	Muscat
Religion	Islam
Official Language	Arabic (English widely spoken in the economic and education sectors)
National Day	18 November
Time	GMT + 4
Currency	Omani Rial= US$ 2.60 (387 baisas= US$ 1)
Climate	Temperate (30°C) from October to March, but hot (up to 50°C) and humid from April to September, except in Dhofar where it rains during the khareef season.

Economic Indicators

	Unit	2008
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices	Million RO	23,049
Total Government Revenue	Million RO	7,984.5
Total Government Expenditure	Million RO	6,403.4
Average Daily Oil Production	Barrels	757,000
Average Price of Oil over the Year (US$/barrel)	US$	101.06
Total Commodity Exports	Million RO	14,503
Non-oil Exports of Omani Origin	Million RO	1,962.9
Total Commodity Imports	Million RO	8,814.5

Source: Ministry of National Economy

Social Indicators

	Unit	2008
Total Population	1,000	2,867
- Omanis	1,000	1,967
- Expatriates	1,000	900
Infant mortality	per 1,000 live births	9.03
Hospitals	No.	58
Health centres, units and clinics	No.	933
Hospital beds	No.	5,473
Doctors per 1,000 population	No.	1.81
Male and female nurses	No.	12,207
Schools	No.	1,283
Students	1,000	623
Students per class	No.	27
Students per teacher	No.	13
Civil service employees	1,000	154
Omanis registered with the Public	1,000	147
Authority for Social Insurance		
Expatriate employees	1,000	795
in the private sector		
Asphalted roads	Km.	23,349
Internet subscribers	No.	80,167
Hotels and accommodation	No.	194
Electricity production	GW/H	15,720
Electricity distribution	GW/H	12,850
Water production	Million gallons	35,168
Water distribution	Million gallons	35,548

WEBSITES

State Council (Majlis A' Dawla)	= www.statecouncil.gov.om
Consultation Council (Majlis A'Shura)	= www.shura.om
Royal Oman Police	= www.rop.gov.om/www.ropoman.net
Diwan of Royal Court	= www.diwan.gov.om

Ministries:	
Agriculture	= www.maf.gov.om
Awqaf and Religious Affairs	= www.maraoman.net
Civil Service	= www.mocs.gov.om
Commerce and Industry	= www.mocioman.gov.om
Education	= www.moe.gov.om
Finance	= www.mof.gov.om
(ditto) State General Reserve Fund	= www.sgrf.gov.om
Fisheries Wealth	= www.mofw.gov.om
Foreign Affairs	= www.mofa.gov.om
Health	= www.moh.gov.om
Heritage and Culture	= www.mhc.gov.om
Higher Education	= www.mohe.gov.om
Housing	= www.housing.gov.om
Information	= www.omanet.om
Interior	= www.moi.gov.om
Justice	= www.moj.gov.om
Manpower	= www.manpower.gov.om
National Economy	= www.mone.gov.om
- Info Technology Authority	= www.ita.gov.om
Oil and Gas	= www.mog.gov.om

Regional Municipalities and Water Resources	= www.mrmwr.gov.om
Social Development	= www.mosd.gov.om
Sports Affairs	= www.sportsoman.com/www.mosa.gov.om
Tourism	= www.omantourism.gov.om
Transport and Communications	= www.comm.gov.om

Other organizations:

Arabian Oryx	= www.oryxoman.com
Asian Beach Games	= www.muscat2010.org.om
Authority for Electricity Regulation, Oman	= www.aer-oman.org
Birds of Oman	= www.birdsoman.com
Blue City	= www.almadinaazarqa.com
Capital Market Authority	= www.omancma.org
Central Bank of Oman	= www.cbo-oman.org
Civil Status Directorate-General	= www.civilstatus.gov.om
Dhow 'Jewel of Muscat'	= www.jewelofmuscat.tv
E- Government Services Portal	= www.oman.om
Environment Society of Oman	= www.environment.org.om
GCC Census 2010 website	= www.omancensus.net
Geological Society of Oman	= www.gso.org.om
HM The Sultan's profile	= www.oman-qaboos.net
Historical Association of Oman	= www.hao.org.om
Information Technology Authority	= www.ita.gov.om
Knowledge Oasis Muscat (IT Park)	= www.kom.om
Knowledge Oman	= www.knowledgeoman.com
Library of Public Knowledge	= www.publiclibrary.gov.om
Meteorological Dept (Muscat Int. Airport)	= www.met.gov.om



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