

Oman national day

Strong Oman-Japan relations of great mutual benefit

Khalid Al-Muslahi
AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND
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OMAN



On the happy occasion of the 39th National Day celebrations of the Sultanate of Oman, I have the honor on behalf of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, his government, and the people of Oman, to convey the greetings and best wishes of good health, success, peace and prosperity to their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and to the members of the Imperial family, as well as the government and the friendly people of Japan.

As Oman enters its 40th year of renaissance, the people of Oman celebrate this occasion with pride and joy as they pay tribute to the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan for having secured his people a peaceful and prosperous future. In fact, due to the wisdom of His Majesty, the Sultanate of Oman is making great headway in the development process as well as expanding its friendly relations with the countries and people of the world.

Since 1970, and through the wise and compassionate leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, the government has implemented successive five-year plans, including the current seventh five-year plan (2006-2010), as well as the Vision 2020 economic charter that strives for progress and development in all spheres, notably security, agriculture and fisheries, commerce and industry, transport and communications, hospitality and tourism, civil services and human resources, women and child affairs, shura consultation and social advancement. At the same time, His Majesty has always believed that respecting others' differences can nourish cultural understanding among nations, the enduring product of His Majesty's enlightened foreign policy that advocates friendship, reconciliation and mutual cooperation. I think this is one of the reasons why the Sultanate of Oman is widely seen as a paradigm of political stability.

On the domestic front, Oman is an oasis of tranquility nurtured by policies that ensure justice, harmony and social stability. Not surprisingly, for the third consecutive year, Oman placed in the top tier of nations deemed the most peaceful around the

world. The prestigious Global Peace Index 2009 ranked Oman as the second-most peaceful Arab country and the 21st overall in its rankings of 144 nations. In recent years, a host of other organizations, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and UNICEF have also issued praiseworthy appraisals of the robust improvements being witnessed in Oman across a wide socio-economic spectrum. These appraisals cite the Sultanate's achievements in the areas of domestic tranquility, economic competitiveness, quality of health care and government, for example.

Health indicators attest to the comprehensive and well-developed standards of Oman's health care system. Health expectancy at birth is pegged at a remarkable 75 years, placing Oman on par with many advanced Western nations. With a current under-5 mortality rate of 11.1 per 1,000 live births, Oman has realized the Millennium Development Goal 4, having reduced this rate by two-thirds of its 1990 rate, estimated then at 35 per 1,000 live births, according to UNICEF.

The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of 29 per 1,000 live births in 1990 has declined to 10.3 per 1,000 — very close to the 2015 target. The current immunization coverage rate of infants against the leading childhood diseases is 99 percent. Equally commendable are the strides made by the government in developing educational services, an area that has benefited immensely as a result of sustained investment over four decades of Oman's modern renaissance.

The gross domestic product growth rate at current prices rose by 44 percent in 2008 compared to the previous year. Non-oil GDP surged 32.6 percent to \$32.9 billion last year from \$24.7 billion in 2007. In large part, this growth is attributable to the accelerated pace of the government's economic diversification program, which is key to achieving sustainable development.

The Oman-Japan Relations
Contacts between Japan and Oman go a long way back in history. However, our diplomatic relations were formally established in 1972, and the interaction and cooperation between the countries have since been growing on many levels, most notably in trade and investment.

The commercial partnerships between Japan and Oman have laid the foundation for greater future success, most notably in the business arena, where trade and investment between the countries has been rising rapidly. In 2008, bilateral trade rose to \$9.4 billion, an increase of 330 percent from the total amount of bilateral trade in 2004, which was \$2.4 billion, according to the statistics of Japan's External Trade Organization (JETRO). As a result, Japan became the third-largest im-



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

porter of Oman's crude oil and the second-largest importer of Oman's liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the last year.

For Japan, Oman has always been a reliable and stable source of energy supplies. In 2008, Oman was the ninth-largest crude oil supplier to Japan, which imported 5.12 million kiloliters of Omani crude. Furthermore, Oman also was the seventh-largest LNG supplier to Japan in 2008. Oman's exports of LNG to Japan reached 3 metric tons.

At the same time, Japan's exports to Oman jumped from about \$1 billion in 2004 to \$4 billion in 2008. This has made the Omani market one of the most important markets for Japanese exporters in the Middle East.

In addition, Japanese companies also continue to play major roles in Oman's development of LNG, in the refinery of oil and in shipping. Japan

has currently invested ¥2.6 billion in five Omani projects, one of which will serve to finance the construction of port facilities in the Duqm district, south of the capital city of Muscat. Providing mutual benefit, this project will help Japanese shipping firms reduce maintenance costs and increase the efficiency of vessel operation, particularly in the export of crude oil. Yet Oman, a "booming" economy with various incentives to foreign investors, is calling for more direct investments from Japan.

Furthermore, negotiations are under way toward a Free Trade Agreement between Japan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which comprises Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait. We anticipate and look forward to a successful completion of this agreement to in-

crease the bilateral trade between our countries. We also hope to conclude two key bilateral agreements: the avoidance of double taxation, and the protection and promotion of investments.

Beyond the economic realm, Oman and Japan have recently advanced cooperation in the field of defense affairs. In May 2009, Oman was happy to welcome a training squadron of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force, which joined the Royal Navy of Oman for four days capped by a music concert by the Self-Defense Force Brass Band.

This year has been yet another landmark year for Oman's presence in Japan. The opening of the new building of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, located in Hiroo in the Shibuya area, is a fitting symbol of our expanding bilateral relations. With its ample facilities, the embassy will be better able to partner our Japanese friends and members of the Omani community in promoting economic, social, and cultural ties between our countries.

Throughout the years, Oman and Japan relations have witnessed the exchange of high-ranking official visits, from members of our Royal Families, senior government officials, members of parliament, business and academic leaders, in addition to growing exchanges and cooperation on culture, academia, education, youth and sports. I must say, I am pleased with the level of our relations and look forward to further enhancing it.

To reflect the strong ties between Japan and the Sultanate of Oman, H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Bu Said, the secretary general of the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, paid an official visit in early July through the invitation extended by the government of Japan, where he met with His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince and with H.E. Hirofumi Nakasone, the minister for foreign affairs at that time.

In addition to His Excellency's visit, a number of high-level visits were exchanged between the countries. In April, H.E. Mohammed bin Hamad Al-Rumhi, the minister of oil and gas, partici-

pated in the third Asian Ministerial Energy Roundtable Meeting in Tokyo and in October, H.E. Dr. Rawyah bint Saud Al-busaidi participated in the fifth Science and Technology in Society forum in Kyoto. In December 2008, Dr. Samira bint Mohamed Al-Moosa, a member of the State Council, paid a visit to Japan through the invitation extended by the government of Japan. From the Japanese side, Mr. Yasutoshi Nishimura, the parliamentary vice minister, Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, the former prime minister, and Mr. Toru Izumi, the commander in chief of the SDF, visited Oman in 2009.

On closing, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation and sincere thanks and gratitude to the people of Japan for their kindness and hospitality that they have extended to me and my family since our arrival in this great and beautiful country. I would also like to thank The Japan Times for giving me the opportunity to write about the Sultanate of Oman and the friendship between Oman and Japan, and to express my embassy's warm greetings and appreciation to our many friends in Japan for their marvelous support and assistance in promoting the good relations between our friendly people. I am also indebted to our sponsors, whose generosity has made this supplement possible.

I am confident that our relations in the coming days will see the further enhancement of close bonds of friendship between Oman and Japan, and I sincerely wish to welcome everyone reading my message to the Sultanate of Oman, one of the cleanest, safest and friendliest countries in the world.



History: Rustaq Fort, one of the 500 famous, historic forts, castles and towers in Oman.



Heavy industry: A factory in the Sohar Industrial Zone.

Congratulations
to the People of the Sultanate of Oman
on the Occasion of
the 39th Anniversary of Their National Day

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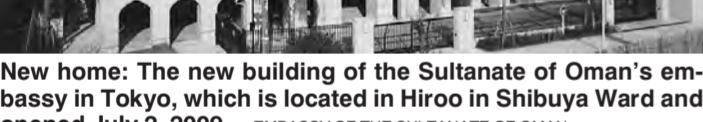
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New home: The new building of the Sultanate of Oman's embassy in Tokyo, which is located in Hiroo in Shibuya Ward and opened July 2, 2009. EMBASSY OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



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Welcoming mix: The inside view of the reception hall in the embassy, which combined Omani historical architecture with modern styles.

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