

Oman national day

A 'success story' still going strong

Khalid Al-Muslahi
AMBASSADOR OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nov. 18 is the National Day of the Sultanate of Oman, and on this happy occasion of the 41st National Day celebrations, 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 to the government and the great people of Japan.



Let me also congratulate H.E. Yoshihiko Noda on his election as the 95th prime minister of Japan, and wish him success in his significant task of providing leadership to the government and people of Japan. It is the desire of the government and people of Oman that under his leadership, the partnership between our two countries will be further strengthened, particularly in our aspirations for global peace, prosperity, justice and the eradication of poverty and disease.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate Oman's solidarity with Japan on the March 11 disaster. Oman was among the first nations to express its sincere condolences and sympathy on the deaths, injuries and the devastation caused by the earthquake and tsunami. The government of Oman offered its readiness to

provide whatever assistance Japan may need at that difficult time and made a donation of \$10 million to Japanese Red Cross Society to help the victims. Numerous fundraising events were organized in Oman that raised nearly \$2 million from Omanis wishing to express solidarity with Japan.

The Embassy of Oman in Tokyo had also organized and taken part in various charity events to raise funds to support the people of the devastated areas, and organized in July a trip for six students from the affected areas to Oman.

Progress over 41 years

As Oman commemorates its 41st National Day, the people of Oman celebrate this significant occasion in the nation's modern history with a great deal of pride and joy. The nation conveys its heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos for his visionary guidance and nation-building efforts. During the past 41 years of the blessed renaissance, the development and prosperity seen by the sultanate has been absolutely astounding.

This year has been a year of historic significance for Oman and the empowerment of the Omani citizen, characterized by a succession of landmark royal decrees that culminated recently in the further empowerment and strengthening of Oman's parliament, the Majlis Oman.

The inauguration of the fifth term of the reconstituted Majlis Oman is seen by many as a new beginning for Oman and a milestone in its gradual political advancement. The revitalized Majlis Oman is set to play a vital national role, given the enlarge-



His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said

ment of its mandate encompassing legislative and auditing powers, to contribute effectively in the decision-making process and work jointly and closely with the government in advancing the nation's development and prosperity, and for the higher interest of the country and its citizens.

The historic Royal Decree surpassed even popular expectations of the nature and magnitude of these parliamentary legislative and auditing powers. In a demonstration of His Majesty's true intent to empower his people, through their elected representatives, the Royal Decree co-opts the chairpersons of the two Majlises (lower and upper houses) in procedures stipulated

for the selection of a successor to the royal throne.

The royal decrees and directives of His Majesty this year to establish a government university of science and technology, governorates in all regions, municipal councils in all governorates, Islamic banking and expansion of technical colleges are based on the realistic assessment of the nation's requirements and are crucial at the current stage of Oman's development.

His Majesty devoted a key part of his address at the opening session of the Majlis Oman to reaffirming the government's commitment to the continued development of the Omani youth and the nation's human

capital. In his address, His Majesty also pledged to ensure that the youth, both boys and girls, of Oman get all the support and assistance they need in order to develop their collective ability to contribute to the nation's comprehensive development. In this regard, His Majesty underlined the need for a "comprehensive assessment" of the country's educational sector, with a view to ensure that it is capable of meeting the aspirations of Omanis with regard to their career goals.

On the international and regional arenas, Oman is widely seen as a model of political stability, the enduring product of His Majesty's enlightened foreign policy that advocates friendship, reconciliation and mutual cooperation. His Majesty has always believed that respecting the other's differences can nourish the cultural understanding among nations.

On the domestic front, Oman is a haven of harmony nurtured by policies that engender equity, harmony and social stability. Without a doubt, the remarkable achievement of the last four decades of continuous progress and stability are held very dear by the Omani people. Not surprisingly, four decades of far-sighted governance and the prudent socioeconomic policies were vindicated last year by the United Nation's landmark report ranking Oman at the very top of the list of nations with the fastest progress in the Human Development Index (HDI).

In acknowledging Oman's achievements, the U.N. report describes the sultanate as a "success story" and thus a model for other nations to emulate. Through the sensible utilization



Magnificent architecture: Inaugurated in 2001 after six years of construction, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat is the largest in the nation, with a capacity of 20,000. OMANI EMBASSY

of its hydrocarbon resources, Oman made the "evolution from a very poor to a very rich country, showing a quadrupling of gross enrollment and literacy rates and a 27-year increase in life expectancy," says the U.N. report.

For the fifth consecutive year, Oman was placed in the top tier of nations deemed the most peaceful around the world. The prestigious Global Peace Index 2011 ranked Oman as the fourth most peaceful Arab country in its ranking of 149 countries. In recent years, a host of other organizations, notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF have also issued praiseworthy appraisals of the robust improvements being witnessed in Oman across a wide

socioeconomic spectrum. These appraisals cite the sultanate's laudatory achievements in the areas of domestic tranquility, economic competitiveness, quality of health care, governance, and so on.

Since 1970, the Omani government has implemented successive five-year plans, including the current eighth five-year plan (2011-2015), as well as the Vision 2020 economic charter, that strive for progress and development in all spheres, notably in 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.

In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that the

Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development describes Oman as the "most advanced Arab country in the previous 50 years." One reason for such an advanced status among the Arab and Middle Eastern countries is the economic philosophy that has been adopted by the Omani government. This philosophy is based on supporting the private sector and free market to increase the competitiveness of the national economy at the global level.

The sultanate has been diversifying its economy, especially in the field of tourism. Among the Middle East states, Oman has many advantages for developing tourism: its exotic climate, unspoiled nature, archaeological and historical heritage, as well as its high-standard accommodations and superb hospitality. Moreover, the newly unveiled Royal Opera House Muscat equipped with the latest facilities presents sterling performances from Oman, the region, and the world, and attracts art lovers from across the globe.

As a result, Oman became one of the most attractive places in the world for business and tourism.

Indeed, Oman's transformation from a simple less-developed country into a modern, industrializing and knowledge-based economy in the past 41 years is the one of the Middle East region's greatest and most exciting stories.

The achievements made in various spheres are all aimed at realizing one noble goal: the building of the modern Omani who preserves the country's heritage, cultural values and maintains his own identity, while keeping abreast of advances in science and technology for building his country and developing his society.

Oman-Japan relations

Contacts between Japan and Oman are ancient and go back to nearly 400 years ago. However, our modern diplomatic relations were formally established in 1972, one year after Oman joined the United Nations, and the interaction and cooperation between the two countries have since been growing rapidly on many levels, particularly in trade

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Modern venue: Inaugurated in October, the Royal Opera House Muscat is the leading arts and cultural institution in the Sultanate of Oman. OMANI EMBASSY



Historic sites: Oman is home to four UNESCO World Heritage sites and more than 500 forts and castles, including Nakhal Fort in northwest Oman, many of which are popular tourist destinations. OMANI EMBASSY

Congratulations
to the People of the Sultanate of Oman
on the Occasion of
the 41st Anniversary of Their National Day

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Oman national day



Culture: The Al-Ardhah races show the abilities, quality and good temperament of the Arabian Horses of Oman. OMANI EMBASSY

Cooperation grows on all fronts

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and investment. Japan is one of the most important markets for our oil and natural gas exports. Oman is also the third biggest market for Japanese exports in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The commercial partnerships between Oman and Japan have laid the foundation for greater future success. According to the statistics of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Oman is ranked 33rd among Japan's top trading partners in the world. The bilateral trade between the two countries reached \$7.6 billion in 2010, an increase of 34 percent from the total amount of bilateral trade of 2009, which was \$5.7 billion.

Oman has always been a reliable and stable energy supplier to Japan. In 2010, Oman was the seventh largest crude oil supplier to Japan, which imported 44.32 million barrels of Omani crude, an increase of 23.3 percent from 2009. Oman was also the eighth largest LNG supplier to Japan in 2010. Oman's exports of LNG to Japan reached 2.86 million metric tons.

Furthermore, current negotiations are under way toward a free trade agreement between Japan and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. We anticipate and look forward to the successful completion of this agreement to expand the bilateral trade and economic cooperation between our two countries. We also hope to conclude soon two key bilateral agreements: The avoidance of double taxation, and the protection and promotion of investments.

Beyond the economic realm, relations between Oman and Japan have witnessed throughout the years the exchange of high-ranking official visits from members of our Royal and Imperial Families, senior government officials, members of parliament, business and academic leaders, in addition to growing exchanges and cooperation on cultural, academic, education, youth and sports.

Oman and Japan have also advanced their cooperation in the fields of culture, education, tourism, defense and security.

Sultan Qaboos Chair

In October 2010, H.E. Rawiyah

Al Busaidiyah, Oman's minister of higher education, officially inaugurated The Sultan Qaboos bin Said Chair of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Tokyo in a signing ceremony with professor Junichi Hamada, president of the university. This indefinite chair will contribute in further promoting the academic exchanges between Japan and the Middle Eastern countries, and is part of Oman's highest mission to play a constructive role in the dialogue among civilizations and the promotion of cultural exchanges, and the development of enduring ties of friendship and collaboration among nations for world harmony and peace.

40th anniversary of ties

In 2012, Oman and Japan will be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the formal establishment of their diplomatic relations. The Omani Embassy in Tokyo and the Japanese Embassy in Muscat are planning a number of events in celebration of this memorable occasion throughout the year.

In 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 take this opportunity to convey Oman's appreciation to the government and people of Japan for the kind cooperation extended to us for many years, and our profound appreciation to all the members of the Japan-Oman Parliamentary Friendship League, the Japan-Oman Society, the Hiroshima-Oman Friendship Association, the Japan-Oman Club and the Japan-Arab Association.

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 two friendly peoples. 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.

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