**Oman Celebrates 51st National Day of the Renaissance**

Muscat, 17 Nov (ONA) --- The Sultanate of Oman will tomorrow (Thursday) mark the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, the 18th of November Anniversary. The event comes around at a time when Omanis ponder about the achievements made so far and brace for further accomplishments, with firm resolve, under the astute leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik who pledged to hold high the banner of Renewed Renaissance, since he assumed power in the country on 11 January 2020.

The Renewed Renaissance kicked off on a high note when His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik called upon the people of Oman to do their best to enrich domestic development and foster progress in all fields. This is considered one of the major principles of Renewed Renaissance in its quest to attain the supreme national objective of “making Oman the central point in all that we strive to achieve”—an objective whose salient features already materialized in terms of updated laws and refurbished programmes of action across all sectors.

In the beginning of this year, a Royal Decree No. 6/2021, promulgated the (updated) Basic Law of the State to serve as a basic pillar of continuous efforts to shape a better future for Oman and its citizens and to build a solid ground for their Renewed Renaissance.

The Basic Law of the State comprises 98 articles “enhancing the institutions of the State, safeguarding its territorial unity and its social texture, protecting its cultural foundations and consolidating public rights, liberties and duties”.

The Basic Law of the State lays down a stable mechanism of transfer of rule, which reflects positively on political and economic aspects and affirms the principle of sovereignty and independence of the judiciary. It also serves as a basis of rule in the State. It makes education compulsory till the end of the Basic Education stage. It establishes a scholarly method for thought, development of talents and encouragement of innovation—which all conform with Oman Vision 2040.

Articles (5) to (11) of the Basic Law of the State organize the mechanism of entitlement or succession to the throne in the Sultanate of Oman and makes it more clear and straightforward. Article (5) states that “The system of rule is sultani and hereditary within the male descendants of Sultan Turki bin Said bin Sultan, in accordance with the following terms: Rule is handed down from the Sultan to his eldest son, then to the eldest son of the son, and henceforth, layer by layer. If the eldest son dies before assuming power, the rule shall pass down to his eldest son. If the deceased has brothers and in case the one entitled to the throne has no sons, the power shall be transferred to his eldest brother. If he (the deceased) has no brothers, the power to rule shall be transferred to the eldest son of his eldest brother. If the latter has no sons, then the rule shall be transferred to the eldest nephew of his other brothers, in accordance with age of the brothers. If the one entitled to the throne has no brothers or nephews, the rule shall be transferred to the uncles and then to their sons in accordance with the sequence indicated in the Second Clause of this Article. It is a condition that the Crown Prince to assume power shall be a Muslim and the legitimate son of the Omani Muslim parents”.

Article (6) regulates the establishment of a Guardianship Council in case the power to rule is transferred to an heir aged below 21 years. The Guardianship Council exercises the powers of the Sultan provided the Sultan appoints prior to his death. If the Sultan does not appoint a Guardianship Council before he dies, then the Ruling Family’s Council appoints a Guardianship Council comprising one of the brothers of the Sultan and two of (his cousins) sons of his uncles”.

Article (7) provides for the appointment of a Crown Prince under a Royal order in accordance with stipulation of Article (5) of the Basic Law of the State. The Royal order defines the powers and prerogatives of the Crown Prince, as well as the tasks delegated to him. It states that the Crown Prince shall be sworn in before the Sultan before undertaking the powers and tasks delegated to him. The oath shall be taken in accordance with Article (10) of the Basic Law of the State”.

The Sultanate of Oman stands out for its exclusive practice of Shura-based democracy, set up on solid grounds emanating from Omani life realities. Shura practice evolved through various stages till it developed into present-day “Council of Oman”, with its bicameral chambers— the “State Council” and “Shura Council”. Each stage saw the addition of systems and laws that reinforce the tradition of Shura and respond to the expectations of citizens. To this effect, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No. 7/2021 promulgating Council of Oman Law, which comprises 78 articles.

To contain coronavirus (Covid-19) that wreaked havoc in countries of the world, the Sultanate of Oman formed a Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The Supreme Committee has been taking ‘moderate’ decisions and precautionary measures that ensure the safety of citizens and residents, while at the same time catering to social and economic implications on this benign land.

The Supreme Committee is responsible for cooperation with the departments concerned and regulating social response. It worked for the procurement of internationally approved vaccines and oversaw the implementation of a national immunization campaign. This was commended by His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik when he chaired the Supreme Committee’s meeting on 18 August 2021 at Al Maamoura Palace in Salalah. His Majesty said that, “This improvement could not have happened had it not been for the appropriate decisions taken and the efforts exerted by the departments concerned in the Sultanate of Oman, albeit the health sector.” His Majesty the Sultan lauded the “high sense of responsibility shouldered by all members of society through abidance with the decisions and the measures set by the authorities concerned to safeguard public health—individuals and society at large”.

The decisions resulted in the improvement of Covid-19 indicators in the Sultanate of Oman, which, the reports said, registered great decline in mortality, infection and hospitalization rates, while recovery from the disease reached 98.5%.

Meanwhile, the government accorded special attention to the ensuing economic impacts of Covid-19. The decisions, which took into account the fallouts of the pandemic on establishments and companies, included exemption from fines of some services. Special exemptions were sanctioned to small and medium enterprises and holders of Riyada Card for Entrepreneurs. This is in addition to a package of incentives for borrowers, individuals, banking institutions, financing and leasing firms.

The designation of a Youth Day in Oman (26October) reflects the attention accorded to the young generation by His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik. It asserts the leadership’s deep conviction in the potential of youth in promoting the country’s development. Speaking at a meeting of the Council of Ministers he chaired in October 2021, His Majesty the Sultan underscored the significance of devising a mechanism and for opening channels of communication with youth to explain all the requirements of the development process in all sectors. He gave directives to listen to youth and study their needs and aspirations. He also instructed governors and the authorities concerned to hold regular meetings with youth for this purpose. He advised the officials to raise issues of interest or concern to youth, listen to their opinions and help them perform the role expected of them in contributing to the comprehensive nation-building march.

Meanwhile, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, who presided over the Youth Day celebration last October, said that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth launched a smart portal supplied with the latest techniques that make it a prime website for talented youth, artists and innovators.

The attention accorded by His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik to Youth is also reflected in the Royal support to employment initiatives, a set of which came around in May 2021, when coronavirus pandemic had its greatest toll on local and global economic conditions, leading to the shrinkage of the labour markets. The Royal attention resulted in the launch of an executive plan to provide more than 32,000 jobs.

His Majesty the Sultan also chaired a meeting of the Supervisory Committee of the National Employment Programme (NEP) on 5 July 2021. This placed employment in the realm of national priorities. His Majesty the Sultan reiterated the importance of the NEP when he presided over a Council of Ministers on 15 June 2021, during which he gave directives for “devising suitable solutions to provide jobs in all departments of the State (the public sector) and private sector firms, provide analysis of jobseekers' data and follow them up until they join the labour market”.

Omani women’s affairs take centre stage in the Renewed Renaissance thought of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, who has been keen that women enjoy their rights guaranteed by law and operate alongside men in different fields of national service. Attention to women is one of the “national fundamentals” of the country.

On the occasion of the International Women’s Day, celebrated last March, Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed Al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, commended the great efforts exerted by women in Oman and the rest of the world while building their nations, supporting their families and societies and contributing effectively to the management of human and global issues.”

HH The Honourable Lady addressed women on Omani Women’s Day this year. She said, “On the occasion of Omani Women’s Day, the 17th of October, we would like to express thanks and appreciation for every woman who advocates good deeds and elevates the values of tolerance, amity and benevolence. Our greetings go to every woman who contributes to building this dear country from her position as an active participant delivering her social, national and humanitarian duties in all fields."

To mark the same occasion, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth issued a ministerial decision announcing the establishment of Omani Women’s Sports and Cultural Innovation Club. The move comes in implementation of the basic principles espoused by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of women’s empowerment. It is a symbolic gesture to promote women’s contribution to domestic development and to promote their role in sports and cultural fields.

Oman has been endowed with many bounties and a loyal people bound by bonds of love, collaboration and solidarity. This became crystal clear through public support to the efforts exerted by the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik in the aftermath of the recent tropical cyclone /Shaheen/ that made landfall in Oman on 3 October 2021. His Majesty the Sultan’s response was prompt. He gave orders to form a ministerial committee for the assessment of the damage incurred to citizens’ homes and properties in the governorates that took the brunt of the cyclone. The aim was to provide quick relief to the families and alleviate the impacts of the tropical condition.

Speaking on this occasion last October, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that “the restoration of normalcy to public life and the supply of basic life needs to citizens tops our priorities” and he reiterated that “the ministerial committee comes under our direct supervision” and he pledged that he would follow up the tasks and achievements of the committee to ensure that the panel provides assistance as soon as possible.

This Royal response reflected positively through the persistent action undertaken by the ministerial committee in cooperation with sectors of the National Committee for Emergency Management (NCEM). As a result, the majority of services were restored at a rate of 100%. Tenders were awarded for the maintenance of damaged roads and for building as many as 328 alternative houses for afflicted citizens. In the process, His Majesty the Sultan also gave orders to establish a National Fund for Management of Emergencies to address the aftermath of the recent cyclone and natural disasters that might happen in the future.

Nations attain their prime only through education, and this has been a principle espoused by Omanis since the outset of their blessed renaissance 50 years ago. His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik stressed that “attention to education figures high in the scale of national priorities”. Accordingly, a motivating environment has been furnished for supporting the march of research and innovation. This translates into the allocation of a ministry mandated with higher education, research and innovation and the establishment of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, with branches in governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The university’s articles of association were issued in June 2021. In the same month, the Council of Ministers approved the setting up of a branch for the university in the Governorate of Musandam. It comprises a number of specializations reflecting the Royal attention towards the development of the governorate and the realization of sustainable, comprehensive development there.

In the same context, the College of Duqm was established in September 2021 in the Governorate of Al Wusta at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm. The university is governed by the laws regulating universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman and the hopes attached on the National Research and Development Strategy 2040 in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Royal directives to set up six schools to the tune of RO 8,850,000 will raise the number of scholarly institutions to 2,430 schools, 11 government and private universities and 18 private colleges.

Under its Renewed Renaissance, Oman continued to accord attention to environment protection, both at the local and global levels. To this effect, His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik issued a Royal Decree last August (2021) to establish the Khor Kharfout Nature Reserve in the Governorate of Dhofar, taking the number of such sanctuaries to 21. The Sultanate of Oman also ratified many international agreements related to the environment protection and legislations for the same purpose at the local level.

The decline and fluctuation in oil prices and precautionary measures to address the impacts of Covid-19 affected the economies of many countries of the world. Since Oman is not isolated from the global community, it had to take measures to address the situation. These included the initiation of a medium-term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2023). Last April (2021), His Majesty the Sultan chaired a meeting of the main committee tasked with the National Programme for Fiscal Balance to follow up the progress of the programme in its second year. The programme was designed to bring down the general debt and to secure financial sustainability.

His Majesty the Sultan endorsed the initiatives submitted by the departments concerned in a bid to develop the schema of social protection. This affirms His Majesty the Sultan’s follow-up of the conditions of citizens to ensure the sustenance of decent livelihood for them and to alleviate the fallouts of this challenging stage.

The 10th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), the first leg in the executive plan of Oman Vision 2040, which is based on four axes comprising 14 ‘national priorities’, 88 ‘strategic goals’ and 68 performance indicators.

The Tenth Five-year Plan seeks to achieve a number of goals, among them “activating the economy, upgrading the efficiency of management of public finance, realizing balance among measures for rationalization of public spending, espousing disciplined financial expansion policies, accelerating the rate of implementation of major strategic projects and government-private partnership projects, attracting more direct foreign investments, visualizing growth trends based on expected oil price rate of $48 per barrel during years of the plan and enhancing governorates’ participation in achieving goals of Oman Vision 2040”.

The plan targets average annual growth of 3.2% in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through emphasis on promising economic sectors like converting industries of high technological content, agriculture, fisheries, fish farming, food and agriculture industrialization, transport, warehousing and logistics.

Total estimated revenues of the State Budget 2021 stood at RO 8.64 billion calculated on the basis of oil price rate of $45.

The Governorates Development Programme, which emerged in implementation of Royal directives, will allocate RO 10 million to each governorate during the period of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)—at a rate of RO 2 million a year. The programme envisages the execution of 28 strategic programmes and it will contribute to the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP), endorsed by the Council of Ministers in March 2021 is based on five axes comprising incentives on taxes, fees and incentives for the improvement of the business and investment climate, incentives for small and medium enterprises, incentives for the labour market and recruitment, banking incentives aimed to rally efforts for the alleviation of Covid-19 impacts on the national economy and other incentives to promote economic recovery, back up economic activities and attract foreign investments.

These financial procedures, topped by the medium-term Fiscal Balance Plan, showed positive results, as Oman registered growth in total revenues by 22.6% and a 58% decline in deficit by the end of September 2021.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expected in a report issued in September 2021 that economic activities in the Sultanate of Oman will recover and that Oman will achieve 2.5% GDP growth in 2021 and 4.2% growth by 2023. The IMF also commended the measures undertaken by Oman while addressing the fallouts of Covid-19, as well as the country’s fiscal discipline and enhancement of business environment and support for stricken economic sectors.

The measures undertaken by Oman improved its credit rating in various agencies, including Moody’s, which amended the Sultanate of Oman’s rating from “negative” to “stable” in October 2021 (according it 3Ba rating). Moody’s expected that public debt in Oman vis-à-vis the GDP will decline from 80% in 2020 to 60% in 2024, as well as the decline of the annual government funding needs to GDP from 22% in 202 to 10%. Standard and Poor’s also amended its future outlook for Oman from “stable” to “positive”.

Meanwhile, Fitch pointed out last May that the Fiscal Plan contributed to the improvement of scenarios for Oman’s financial position and expected a 6.1% decline of Budget deficit to GDP this year (2021).  It also expected a 3.3% economic growth for Oman by next year (2022).

The government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik created an investment-encouraging environment through legislations, ports, free zones and logistics, coupled with a unique strategic location in the meeting point of global commercial markets, political stability and security.

The ports of Duqm, Salalah and Sohar boast a range of advanced facilities that enabled them to achieve quick finalization of tasks and cut the distance between world ports. This is in addition to the free zones in Duqm, Al Mazyouna, Salalah and Sohar and upcoming Khazaen hub in the Governorate of South Al Batinah. Investment incentives like tax exemptions extending to more than 30 years and foreigners’ 100% ownership of properties, among other incentives, add another fillip to the Oman’s position.

The political and regional changes that happened during the Renewed Renaissance period proved that the Sultanate of Oman’s foreign policy stands on firm grounds. Oman advocates principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, positive contribution to safeguarding international security, promoting common public interest through dialogue and understanding among countries and nations.

These principles were affirmed by Oman before the 76th UN General Assembly in New York last September. “Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, the Sultanate of Oman pursues its commitment to the basic fundamentals of its foreign policy embodied in good neighbourliness, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, respect for international law and international charters and support for cooperation among countries. Oman considers the settlement of disputes by peaceful means and through harmony and tolerance as a civilized conduct that leads to better and more lasting results than disputes can achieve”.

Oman’s persistent strive to serve global peace stem from its support for many initiatives and issues, like its backing to the positive developments emanating from Al Ula Summit in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Oman hailed the success of the efforts of reconciliation led by the State of Kuwait. In international podiums, Oman continued to reiterate the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause and the demands of Palestinian people. It also supported the settlement of the Yemeni issue through comprehensive political settlement, working in line with initiatives of Saudi Arabia and the UN and US envoys. This is besides Oman’s stand for peaceful handling of the Iranian nuclear file and Oman’s continuous condemnation of all types of terrorism.

Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, the Sultanate of Oman adhered to commitment to truthfulness and objectivity through its political stands enhanced by its original values of moderateness.

His Majesty the Sultan’s visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in July 2021 and his meeting with King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud is a strong evidence about the deep-rooted relations between the two countries. This first visit of its kind culminated in the establishment of the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council and opened wide vistas of cooperation among the two countries in different fields, particularly economic areas.

The Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and other security and military departments earned the attention of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The development of the SAF covered all aspects due to their tangible role in defending this nation, protecting its territories and safeguarding its gains. This Royal attention was symbolically demonstrated by the visits of His Majesty the Sultan to the 11th Infantry Brigade’s command, Thumrait Airbase, the Royal Navy of Oman and the Sultan’s Special Force. The SAF saw major growth in all its military and technical sectors “so that these sectors could continue to be the strong bastions that defend and protect all territories of the country from end to end.”

National days of countries constitute symbols of pride and dignity. In Oman, they are moments of contemplation in the past and the future of the country, a time to remember the Founder of Modern Oman and its Blessed Renaissance, the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Bin Taimour. His memory pulsates in the heart of every Omani, man and woman, who incessantly pray for him in gratitude for his good deeds for the nation and its loyal people over 50 years. The achievements made by the late Sultan Qaboos are stark and manifest in every sphere of life. He sowed and cultivated true faith in the people. From our past experiences, we have to derive new, strong will and firm resolve to work in full cooperation and collaboration—rallying our resources and energies and exhibiting self-denial in performing our duty in a manner that facilitates all difficulties and overcomes all challenges as we embark on accomplishing our national missions for the good of Oman and its noble people.

--- Ends/AB/KH