

Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on the occasion of the 28th National Day

18/11/1998

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

We thank God, the One who hears and knows.

*Prayer and Peace be upon Him, who has brought us to the Right Path.
His Family, His Companions and upon those who have taken this Path.*

Dear Citizens,

EVERY year, we meet on this blessed day, to celebrate this anniversary of our glorious National Day. The Omani Renaissance has spread its light over this wonderful land for the past 28 years. This Renaissance has given to our country new life, full of hope, and the prospect of a better tomorrow - a beautiful future.

It was God's gift to us, and to our valuable country that the vision was very clear from the beginning. This vision has helped us to formulate ideas for the building of a new society, an authentic society with its own methods of thought, and economic views based upon diversification in the exploitation of its resources, and the building of a capable and dynamic human society.

This will give the economy strength and solidity, ensuring healthy growth, natural integration and dynamic interaction in order to accomplish comprehensive development in accordance with the contemporary situation and a clear perception of the future.

Yes, it was God's blessing to us that the hope was accompanied by hard work, firm resolution and strong determination. Here we are, today, praise be to God, reaping the harvest of all this: the progress in all fields - politically, economically, socially and culturally and the wide experience gained. This experience has proved to us that our planning has been soundly based, and has protected our progress from the folly of irrational decisions.

If things are to be judged by results, we can say that what has been achieved, with the help of God, is a great achievement. History will testify that you, Sons of Oman, patiently faced the challenges, and overcame all problems. God has blessed your progress and has granted you your success. Thanks be to God for His blessings.

"Such is the Bounty of God, which He bestows on whom He will, and God is the Lord of the highest Bounty."

Esteemed Citizens,

We all know that the global economy is passing through an unhealthy period, which it is feared may get worse. It is imperative that nations should recognise that their economies and interests are inter-dependent, affecting each other. Due to the economic recession, that is being felt by the energy-consuming countries, the demand for energy from these countries has declined. As we have said, several times, oil, in addition to being a finite resource, is exposed to the fluctuations and instability of the market. It is not wise, nor good policy, to be dependent on oil as a sole resource to finance our development. Today, we are witnessing a retreat and decline in oil prices which certainly has its impact on the State income, because oil is the major source of that income, although it is less so than before. As you know, we have always called in past years, for the diversification of the economy, to protect us from the dangers of being dependent on one product and its fluctuations. We have noted this situation from the beginning and adopted co-ordinated policies in order to establish our development on a strong, firm basis that will ensure that the national economy is fully diversified with balanced growth. On this basis the State has subsidised industry, agriculture, commerce and tourism, and encouraged investment in these fields and stimulated their development, creating an appropriate atmosphere for their progress. This has had an obvious effect on what has been achieved. However, you realise that these sectors in themselves will not immediately provide an income equal to that of oil. More time will be needed, including finance and care, before these sectors become sufficiently fruitful to play their designated role in the national economy. If we see what has been achieved in these sectors is satisfactory, in spite of the prevailing circumstances, we can also see that this diversification is more necessary now than ever before in the light of the global situation. Thus, before us, is the challenge which faces the Private Sector and the Government in pressing on with our national development without pause. The private sector now, more than at any time in the past, is required to redouble and accelerate its efforts, with confidence, and utilising all opportunities in promisingly productive avenues. This will lead, with God's permission, to

positive, tangible effects in the economic and social life in the coming years. Beside that, it is required to be fully aware of the international contemporary circumstances, which are based upon the freedom of trade and investment. This necessitates that our economic enterprises should be on the highest level of efficient administration, productivity and marketing in order to have the strength to compete, especially since we are entering the World Trade Organisation.

The Year of the Private Sector must be the base of a greater role to be played by this Sector in supporting and diversifying the national economy. This should be done in concert and harmony with the efforts exerted by the Government to stimulate domestic and foreign investment. It is to be done by establishing a new infrastructure, continuing to maintain the existing foundations on which we have built, providing a wide range of services, improving the atmosphere of general investments, and instituting a programme of privatisation based on scientific and realistic principles. This programme will help towards the continuation of economic growth, increase the efficiency of productivity and avoid monopolisation. In addition, there should be a continual review of relevant legislation, in order to protect private economic business, ensuring its freedom, and diversifying the ways of supporting and encouraging it. It will apply especially to facilitating and simplifying bureaucratic procedures, and eliminating unnecessary elements of these procedures, as we mentioned in our National Day speech last year. Moreover, policies for education and vocational training plans should be kept under constant review, in order to enable them to produce the technical and vocational skills needed by the private sector, especially in the industrial field. We are determined that the industrial sector shall become the major source of the national income, or at least generate the equivalent of that of oil. Taking into consideration the other sources of the national income, such as commerce, agriculture, tourism and services, this will result in reducing dependence on oil revenues to a reasonable level, thus lessening the vulnerability of the State Budget to the fluctuations of oil prices.

This is the role of the Government in pursuing the policy of diversifying the economy. All Government departments must co-ordinate their efforts in enabling investors to obtain the full and prompt services they need. Legal procedures should be reduced to the minimum necessary to ensure that investors are encouraged to enter the sectors which we aim to develop. These conditions avoid investments being directed to speculative ventures which would result in financial and economic instability.

We want positive investments which will yield attractive returns to the

investor while, at the same time, contributing to the development of the country, and enabling the citizens to acquire technical expertise and skills in all fields. These investments must be characterised by stability; they must not be vulnerable to market sensitivity either domestically or abroad, thus avoiding any possibility of negative conditions arising to affect the financial, economic and social climate through the movements of the market.

This being the role of the Government and of the private sector in facing the economic challenges and countering the adverse conditions that may confront the national economy as a result of the global situation, citizens are required to play their part in this confrontation. They must exercise restraint and responsibility in the management of their financial affairs. Unnecessary and excessive expenditure should be avoided. The habit of saving should be cultivated, and prudent investments be made.

The Youth of Oman, who have the spirit of initiative and the desire to embark upon their own businesses, should make use of the Fund for Youth Projects in financing them once they have assured themselves of their feasibility. They should avail themselves not only of the financial assistance offered but the experienced advice extended to them in marketing, administration, organisation, techniques and in economy. The main aim of this Fund is to encourage the Omani Youth to establish and own small and medium projects that will provide them and other citizens with career opportunities, thus contributing to the creation of a potent sector of these industries - industries which have become major factors in the growth of the global economy.

Dear Citizens,

The human being is the main instrument in the creation of progress, and he is the beneficiary of this progress. As far as this progress can provide an honourable life for the individual and for society, all involved in it can take pride in its good and fruitful results.

This is what we believe in, and is what we have always worked to achieve. We have often referred to this in past years, but we wish to emphasise today, on the occasion of the Year of the Private Sector, that the success of any development and the achievement of its goals must be the combined work of three parties: the Government, the private sector and the Citizen. Each of them must bear their duties in the spirit of responsibility, without which nations cannot realise their aspirations for their progress, and avoid backwardness.

We are not here to dwell upon the Government's past efforts to provide Omani society with an honourable life, education, training, health and social care. These are obvious to everyone who can see. But we wish to renew our call to the private sector to intensify its support for the Government in the development of human resources, by creating more employment opportunities for Omanis, qualifying them, training them, honing their skills in all fields needed by their Sector. This will provide the national workforce with a stable and honourable life and reduce dependence on expatriates to the minimum possible level. It is obvious that this will bring positive results economically and socially for the country and its Citizens.

In addition, we assert that it is important that Citizens should be aware of their vital role in working for the success of the Government's plan for private sector employment, and for the gradual replacement by Omanis of skilled and unskilled expatriates. There are abundant opportunities for honourable work in this Sector. All Omani Youth should accept this work unhesitatingly and without false pride. They should also devote themselves to the training and qualifying programmes which are organised by the Government and the private sector for the purpose of honing the skills they possess, and acquiring new skills that will enhance their performance. The improvement of the employee's standards of education, vocational and technical abilities, efficiency and discipline will enable him to be successful in his career.

Intense co-operation between the Government, the private sector and the Citizen in the training, qualifying and employment of the national workforce is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in the realisation of the basic goals of our development plans, which aim at building the human being, and improving his capabilities and experience, in order to provide society with prosperity and stability. On this subject, we would like to refer to the fact that the Omanisation policies and programmes have commenced to bear fruit. It is to be hoped that, with everyone's co-operation, this progress will maintain its momentum towards achieving its great goals, God willing.

Esteemed Citizens,

The process of the Gulf Co-operation Council commenced 18 years ago. During this period the region has witnessed colossal, and dangerous events, against which the Council was able firmly to stand against the storms and to go forward with determination, in co-operation and co-ordinated policies in all matters pertaining to the present and future. There is political, military, and security co-ordination, in addition to the economic,

social and cultural one. This will help achieve increased contacts and integrated interests, bringing the Gulf peoples closer, and consolidate the progress, stability and security of the Gulf. All this will lead us to the great goal for which the Council was created.

We look forward to the meeting with our brothers, the Leaders of the GCC, next month in the hospitality of our dear Brother, His Highness Sheikh Zaid bin Sultan Al Nahyan, at the 19th Summit, which will be held, God willing, in Abu Dhabi. We call upon Almighty God to grant the Co-operation Council and the coming Summit success in achieving new steps on the road of solidarity and co-operation, for a happier and richer life, in a shining future, God willing.

Dear Citizens,

The Basic Statute of the State has stated the principle that directs our policy. Since this Statute encapsulates our experience that Oman has lived, since the dawn of our Blessed Renaissance, it is natural that it defines the principle that we have always adopted in our attitude towards various regional and international issues. This principle confirms our ties of friendship with all countries and peoples on the basis of mutual respect and interests, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and observance of international and regional pacts and treaties, and the norms of international law, which lead to the prevailing of peace and security between countries and peoples.

It is our belief that adherence to these principles by all countries will create stronger co-operation and deepen ties between all nations regardless of their political, economic, intellectual and cultural complexions. This will lessen the chances of international crises and disputes, and limit the possibilities of racial, religious and other conflicts occurring between groups within countries. It will also lead to just solutions of many of the problems that break out in the world which jeopardise civilisations and humanity, destroying their achievements.

In our view, it is one of the utmost duties, as we enter this new century, that all countries should work to fight tyranny and despotism, confront the policies of ethnic cleansing and the humiliation of human dignity. They should work, as well, to oppose the occupation of others' lands and denial of legitimate rights. Also, they should strive to balance the scales of justice so that security, peace and tranquillity shall be established throughout the world.

As we call for this, we ask everyone to stand firmly in support of the

rights of the Palestinian people in the creation of an independent state on Palestinian national soil, and with the rights of our brothers in Syria and Lebanon to regain their occupied territories. This is the only way in which security can be assured, good relations of neighbourliness be consolidated, and prosperity and development be achieved for all peoples of the region.

Esteemed Citizens,

Peace is the goal of the State. This is one of the principles that direct our external and internal policies. It is a strategic goal we strive to achieve and maintain for the sake of security, stability, growth and prosperity. The peace in which we believe is not the peace of those who are weak and cannot face aggression, or maintain the independence, sovereignty and the entity of the State. It is the peace of those who are strong, and who are prepared, and well-equipped as God ordains. On this understanding, we work to develop our diligent Armed Forces and Security Services and equip them with everything possible to carry out their tasks in protecting the State and the integrity of its land, and in ensuring the security of the citizens and all in our country. As we express our pride in them, and our great appreciation of their services, we confirm the continuation of our care for them. We take the opportunity of this happy occasion to particularly salute and praise them. We ask God's help in serving our ancient country, and we call upon the Almighty on this glorious day to give us success and bless our path. We ask Him to bestow upon us more progress in an atmosphere of brotherhood, co-operation and love.

"He is the best to protect, the best to help".

We congratulate you all on our National Day. We ask God to allow us to meet again next year in the city of Ibri to celebrate the 29th Anniversary of our Renaissance, and achievements throughout Oman.

