

Speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said on the occasion of the 29th National Day

18/11/1999

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

We thank God, who sent the book to guide the believers. Prayer and peace be upon Him who was mercifully sent to the world, His family and companions, and those who have taken His path until the day of judgement.

Esteemed Countrymen,

WE thank Almighty God that He bade us to meet on this happy day in the auspicious city of Ibri to celebrate the 29th Anniversary of the Omani Renaissance, and renew our determination, with God's continued aid, and the unswerving support of you, the sons of Oman, to carry forward the blessed progress towards more prosperity, stability, and evolution on the broadest front. This will ensure our cherished country's sustained ascent and advancement, God willing.

In the past stage, many of our hopes have materialised, embodying several achievements that enabled Omani society to enter the 20th Century. Thus we are well prepared to face the challenges of the 21st. We are fully confident that this dynamic, youthful society, believing in Almighty God, both individually and collectively, can, through its determination, dedication, knowledge and hard work, keep abreast with the fast progress that this world is witnessing in all fields of life.

Dear Countrymen,

On the same occasion last year, we referred to the unhealthy situation of the world economy and we called for the diversification of our national economy in order to avoid the danger of dependence on one product - oil. Today we reaffirm the fact that we must strive to attain our strategic aim of realising our vision of reaching our clearly defined goal of improving the standard of living of our citizens, ensuring that they benefit from the fruits of our development, preserving and adding to the victories of the Renaissance.

The diversification of the economy, the development of the human skills, the effective exploitation of the available natural resources, and the creation of the suitable conditions to encourage the private sector to perform a greater role in the growth of the national economy - all this will lessen our dependence on oil. We must not forget that oil is a finite resource, with its price at the mercy of external circumstances beyond local control. Therefore, a collapse of oil prices could, if we are solely dependent on this revenue, have the gravest effect on our national budget, balance of payments, economic growth, and on savings and investments.

If we have been able, thanks to God, to overcome the difficult period of the past two years, with the least impact on our economy, we should not rely on this recent improvement in oil prices, but we should continue to follow prudent financial and economic policies, the most important of which are reduction of expenditure, and guidance and awareness in order to encourage saving, and resistance to the inclination to indulge in unnecessary consumption, and also to encourage the individual citizen effectively to contribute to the national economy. Financial institutions must be urged to make their resources available to assist the development of the productive sector, and not to facilitate consumerism. They must also adopt policies that will lead to the increase of savings by citizens. Thereby these institutions will not then necessarily depend on external financial resources since, this dependence can entail a negative impact on our economy, which we must avoid.

Dear Countrymen,

Notwithstanding the difficulties faced by the current Five-Year Development Plan due to various internal and external circumstances, the Plan's performance, thanks to God, has a number of positive elements in many fields. For example, the successful control of inflation to a great extent, the implementation of several projects aiming at economic diversification, the principals of which are: the L.N.G. exploitation which will increase foreign currency earnings and, with God's permission, create wide opportunities for industrialisation, and lead to greater links with the world economy; Salalah Container Port, and the Port of Sohar which is under construction. These latter two projects will help power the wheel of progress and the consolidation of the pillars of the national economy.

Some of the more prominent of the positive achievements of the Five-Year Plan have been the development of human resources in the field of general education and higher and technical education, and vocational training; also in Omanisation, the creation of more job opportunities, and

the improvement of health care. All these fields have witnessed a remarkable improvement throughout Oman, thanks to God.

We are today, O citizens, on the threshold of the preparations for the Sixth Five-Year Plan. There have been many lessons that we have learnt from the current Plan, which we shall use as guidelines for better future performance, and to avoid negative occurrences, therefore ensuring that we shall achieve higher rates of growth and more job opportunities for our people. This will maintain economic, financial and fiscal stability. Our experience of the current Five-Year Plan will enable us to improve our savings and investment policies and in laying down a comprehensive strategy for privatisation. This strategy will have the goal of raising productive efficiency, cutting costs and stimulating local and foreign investors notably to contribute to the overall development process, God willing.

The strengthening of the Sultanate's economic relations with the AGCC, other Arab countries and regional groups, and the positive interaction with the international economic system for the interests and benefit of Oman are very important matters. They will enable us to participate in the huge growth of international trade and investment, and make use of the expanding open markets.

It is essential that Omani society - government and citizens - should realise the extent of the need to be prepared to encounter the challenges of globalisation. We shall do so through the improvement of our national capabilities, basing the economy on the firm foundations of international competitiveness and productivity, enhancing the performance of our institutions, and recognising the value of knowledge, technology and research, which are the keys to progress, and creating the climate which will ensure the sustainable growth of the private sector, and its broad contribution to development plans and economic policies, confirm its ability to practise economic activities with efficiency and flexibility and, with God's permission, enable the private sector to deal with the challenges which will come with our membership of the W.T.O.

If it is necessary to say a final word on the economic field, I reaffirm the necessity to give tourism a priority in the future development programme. This sector has great potential for growth and for making an effective contribution to economic diversification, since our dear country possesses such splendid touristic assets such as its historic heritage, natural beauty, perfect environment, folklore and traditional industries. In addition, there is the security, stability and the spirit of tolerance of the Omani citizens, thanks to God. The tourism industry is well qualified to

offer career opportunities to Omanis. It is well capable of serving the aims of regional development, since its benefits will cover all regions. On this basis we should prepare a new strategy to develop this sector so it can stand on its own feet in a severely competitive, flexible and diversified international market.

Dear Countrymen,

The AGCC is progressively advancing towards its goals, God willing. Co-ordination between its members exists in all fields. We look forward to the brotherly meeting between its leaders at their 20th Summit in Riyadh at the hospitable invitation of our dear brother, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. We call upon the Almighty to grant success to the leaders in serving their people and to confer upon them continued progress, prosperity and growth.

On this occasion we wish to reaffirm - as we always do - that we believe in peace and work invariably for it. We call for the strengthening of bonds of friendship with all, on the basis of comprehensive justice and mutual respect. On this premise we are determined to stand together with all just causes such as that of the Palestinian people who are striving to obtain their rights and establish an independent State, and also the Golan, South Lebanon and other Arab, Islamic international causes. As we wish for the Middle East Peace Process to reach a just settlement for all, we urge the international community to work wholeheartedly to find solutions to all problems that are distressing the world and endangering peace. These solutions must relieve the oppressed from tyranny, establish security and stability, harmony and co-operation among all nations; God will help us.

Esteemed Countrymen,

Our pride in our armed forces and all security services comes from our appreciation of their great role in protecting the achievements of the blessed Renaissance and in maintaining our country's attainments. As we re-affirm our support for them and our active commitment to their further progress, we say to them from this rostrum on this auspicious day that we salute and thank them for their loyalty and devotion in the performance of their duties.

We ask Almighty God to give all of us success in our efforts to carry out His wishes, to surround us with His care and to help us appreciate His blessings. He who is aware of everything and capable of everything, He is the best to protect, the best to help.

As we congratulate you on this glorious occasion we call upon the Almighty to allow us to meet next year in our living, dynamic city of Muscat to celebrate all together the 30th Anniversary of our Oman's splendid Renaissance.

