

A GREAT VISIONARY, NATION BUILDER, STATESMAN AND PEACEMAKER

The beloved leader of the people

DR BABY SAM SAMUEL

“L

eadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” - *Sheryl Sandberg*

This definition of leadership might as well have been a description of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. From the very day of his ascension to the throne until even today, his rule has been about the incremental and sustained transformation of the people and nation of Oman towards betterment.

I am lucky and proud to have been a resident of Oman during that glorious history.

When I first came to Oman in 2004, I brought with me the preconceived notions of how Oman would look and feel, influenced by scarce information about the country and from the flamboyant portrayal of the Arab world as a whole in the media, literature, and movies. These errors in imaginations were quickly corrected by the reality of a silent, earnest city uninterested in any outward show of affluence.

Then and now, Oman has always defied the global preconceptions regarding the Arab world — be it the soft-spoken warmth of Omani hospitality; the tolerance towards multicultural existence or the empowered Omani women who are a visible presence in the private and public sectors.

It did not take me longer than a week to understand how important the Sultan was to his citizens. His presence was everywhere — in office rooms to public spaces to board room discussions. I felt the unabashed love — of the ruler towards his citizens, returned in equal fervour by the love of the citizens for their leader — to be a remarkable and rare achievement in an era of polarised political stances.

Living in the heart of Muscat, what enchanted me the most was the delicate balance of the rural and the urban. The city afforded the convenience and accessibility to global brands and global technologies. Still, at the same time, it kept a conscious, firm grip on itself, never losing the old world charm of scenic beauty or warmth of human interaction that usually gets ends up as the cost of modernisation.

This slow and steady restrained growth has been a trademark of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos throughout the renaissance period of Oman, where the lateral growth of cities and towns often was literally visible on a scale of weeks and months, as the once outskirts turned into city centres.

Some leaders are known for what they say; His Majesty was renowned for the way his silence spoke volumes.



It had such an impact that the world is mourning the loss of a peacemaker. In 2008, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos asserted, “We do not have any conflicts and we do not put fuel on the fire when our opinion does not agree with someone.” In the past decades, while there has been increased conflict in the region, Oman seemed like an oasis of peace, choosing to play mediator than take any sides. It takes courage to fight, but it takes even more courage to take a stand of peace. It is not an exaggeration to say that every citizen and resident could feel this sense of calm pervading the quietness of our daily lives.

It is said that education is the most powerful tool to change the world. His Majesty's strong belief in the power of knowledge-based society could be seen in the support granted to all educational institutions.

The nation that had just three schools 50 years ago, now has around 2,000 schools spread across the length and breadth of the country. With a similar explosion in higher education, this focus on education is reaping benefits with a ruling, vibrant Omani workforce ready once again to break barriers and misconceptions.

Weeks passed quickly into years, and it has now been 15 years of blissful life here in the Sultanate. As an expatriate and as an Indian, Oman opened its arms with a welcome that inspires us to do our bit for the nation in return. Like a mother, she has also witnessed and played an important role in my personal transformation into a man whose pace has fallen in sync with the pace of the nation.

On 10th January 2020, we lost our beloved Majesty, Sultan Qaboos. We lost the light that has guided this nation and all of us for the past five decades. On the day this news broke out, I wrote that very rarely we find a public figure whose passing affects us as much as that of our family. And since then, I understand this sentiment echoed with many like me here. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has been a King of the masses, who touched the lives of every citizen and every resident of Oman. His wisdom, his courage, most of all, his strong stand on peace is precious in today's world and will forever be remembered and cherished.

As one era comes to an end, we also look forward to a new beginning under His Majesty Haitham bin Tareq al Said, with the same set of values and ideals, leading Oman forward.

(The author is chairman of Board of Indian Schools in Oman and vice chairman of Knowledge Oasis)

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HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563, 24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
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NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
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AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444 DIRECT: 24649430/24649437/24649401 Fax: 24649434

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AL OMANEYA for Distribution & Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
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