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OMAN - YEAR IN REVIEW - 2000

As the new year begins, GulfWire has asked Dr. John Duke Anthony to look back over 2000 and summarize what he regards as significant developments in Oman.

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By

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Domestically, Oman held the first direct elections for its parliament (Majlis ash-Shura), increased the number of district representatives from 82 to 83, and doubled the turnout of voters since the previous election. In a first among Oman's fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member-states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - two women were elected. In addition, on National Day in November, marking the 30th anniversary of his accession to the rulership, Sultan Qabus addressed a joint session of the parliament and the appointed council of state with international media present for the first time.

Economically, the Sultanate benefited immensely from the year's significantly higher international oil prices and the conclusion of lucrative long-term contracts by which it will export substantial quantities of natural gas to India, Japan, South Korea, and Spain. Construction work also progressed on the multi-billion dollar seaport and industrial zone being built at Sohar on the Gulf of Oman. The latter development will further strengthen the Sultanate's already vital strategic and geo-political importance in terms of the Hormuz Strait, whose maritime routes Oman controls, and through which the lion's share of the oil traded on international markets is shipped.

By far the greatest breakthrough for Oman's future economic growth, and for its prospects for increasing the level of its international trade and inward foreign direct investment, was its accession to the 138-member World Trade Organization. Achievement of this long-sought objective, and possession of the requisite energy resources to enable it to further the country's industrialization, combined to give Oman a much brighter prospect for the near-term future than in quite some time. Together with widespread admiration for the country's stability and its visionary leadership, they helped explain the continuing renaissance in what is one of the Arab world's oldest countries.