

The UAE is also keen on becoming a regional force in high technology and communications. Its government is determined that the UAE become an international centre for e-commerce. In October 2000, the UAE opened *Dubai Internet City (DIC)*, representing a US \$250 million investment. The project has successfully bucked the global high-tech slump, and has attracted companies such as Hewlett Packard, Microsoft and Cisco systems, as well as many dot.com start-ups.

These developments in the UAE and other Gulf countries underline the immense commercial potential in this region. With the current slow-down in the US economy, the opportunities present in the region gain even greater significance for Canadian firms who are seeking more diversity in their export activities. Many of these opportunities *are* being exploited. The Canadian firm CAE last July entered into a joint venture with Emirates Airlines to construct and operate the new Emirates Aviation Training Centre, and last November announced the launch of the Gulfstream business jet training at the new centre as part of the \$100 million agreement.

One point cannot be overemphasized - in contrast to many other regions of the world where lack of domestic investment resources, or in more stark terms - ability to pay - remains a barrier to trade, the Gulf's financial resources, and increasing willingness to invest in advanced sectors, gives the region a special significance in future global trade and development. This should be better recognized by Canadian exporters.

Societies in Change:

During the last few decades, few areas of the world have undergone the degree of rapid and dramatic change as that undergone by the Arab Gulf. Some of the key Gulf states such as the UAE, did not receive their independence until 1971. Accordingly, their governments and national institutions are barely a generation old. What is of greater significance is the immense societal changes these countries have experienced. Emerging from a bedouin and tribal culture, countries of the Gulf have had to modernize with break-neck speed. In some cases, cities have been built where none existed before, and an entire generation has had to train itself to administer a modern economy.

Massive investments in education has resulted in increased literacy rates and a growing, professionally-trained middle class. In the field of mass communications, satellite television, cellular telephones, and the internet have become omni-present, linking the region to the global media and communications world. Women, who have been constrained by a male-dominated conservative culture, are gradually, albeit slowly, gaining more rights, especially in some of the more progressive Gulf states of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.