

Ideal of democracy taking root in the region, says Emir



The Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani with First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, and Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa (right), at the opening of the 5th Doha Forum on Free Trade and Democracy at Hotel Ritz-Carlton yesterday.

DOHA: The Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani has stressed that the prospects of democracy in the region were brighter today than they were earlier.

One can see the changes looming in the horizon and there is a need to help maintain and promote them to ensure that the aspirations of the people of the region to have their natural right to popular participation are fulfilled.

The Emir was addressing the 5th Doha Forum on Free Trade and Democracy after opening the coveted two-day conference at Hotel Ritz Carlton here yesterday.

First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister H E Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor Al Thani, Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, a representative of the French President Jacques Chirac, were among those present.

The forum is being attended by a host of key Congressmen from the US and intellectuals and experts from the US and other countries.

The Emir said that when the first forum of free trade and democracy was held here five years ago, the talk of freedom of trade or democracy in the Middle East was not the same as it was today.

"Yesterday, few voices were betting on the birth of a democratic era in the region. Today, however, there are people who are hopeful that the countdown for the era has actually begun after new supporters joined the march for reforms," he noted.

One can see the changes looming in the horizon. "That need thinkers and experts, many of whom I see here today amongst us, to peruse them and propose adequate means to maintain and promote them to fulfil the aspirations of the people of the region to

have their natural rights to popular participation," he noted.

A year ago, during the fourth forum on free trade and democracy, "I indicated that the lagging behind of democracy in our region and the prevalence of anger and frustration were not born from the womb of the Palestinian cause, which was often used as a screen behind which all those who tried to evade democratic requirements were hiding," he said.

Today, the people of Palestine, by resorting to democratic methods and proceeding with the peaceful settlement, at the same time have proved that the quest for reform and peace in the region can go hand in hand without clash or contradiction, said the Emir.

Talking of reforms in Qatar, he said that were some challenges ahead and stressed that a legal framework compatible with the socio-economic progress was

needed. Deviations from or violations of the law were not something that should be tolerated at any cost, he emphasised.

Earlier, the First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, in his address, while welcoming dignitaries and guests, said the Doha Forum on Free Trade and Democracy had turned into a near-institution. From the very beginning, it is based on the principles of intellectual freedom and social justice, which were key to improving the quality of human life, he said.

The forum has been extremely successful in addressing various issues of regional and international relevance and, more importantly, in initiating a dialogue process on these issues. This would help in identifying the impediments so that they could be removed, he added.

— THE PENINSULA

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