



HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani at the opening ceremony of the Sixth Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade.

PICTURE: J Hamid

Emir urges continued debate over reforms

Staff Reporter

THE success of democracy in the region will have a tangible strategic impact on a wide geographical circle extending to the East and to the West, HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani has said.

He was delivering the opening address yesterday at the Sixth Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade, a three-day event, taking place at the Sheraton.

"The success of the democratic process is essential for addressing the manifestations of tyranny and corruption that still devour the people's fortunes, deprive them of their rights and push some of them to extremism and alienation," he said.

HH the Emir recalled that the region had been witnessing, over the past five years, a debate over the issue of democracy, with reactions ranging from acceptance to rejection, and from enthusiasm to disinterest.

"It is necessary that this debate continues until the reform message reaches its culmination, so that the citizens of this region get their due share of political and economic freedom," he said.

"Of no less significance is the role of free media, and media organisations have to be encouraged because they contribute to rectifying the democratic process and practice."

The Emir stated that the challenges facing the transition towards democracy in the region had not prevented lately the birth of a unique experience, in practising democracy, that deserves all commendation and respect.

"The Palestinian people, despite their sufferings under the grip of occupation, insisted on exercising their legitimate right to choose their government, and their National Authority was also keen on providing guarantees for exercising this fundamental right by its people," he observed.

So, the parliamentary elections were held and all those who followed it, including those who could not so far tolerate its results or accept the will of the Palestinian people, have acknowledged its transparency and fairness.

The civilised way in which the Palestinian political forces have dealt with the results of these elections reflects a commitment to what is decided by the collective will and acceptance of the free choices of its citizens.

"This calls upon advocates of democracy



HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and his wife HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad receiving a senior delegate at the Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade.

all over the world to respect the decision of the Palestinian people," urged the Emir.

He was of the view that this important Arab experience should be supported and encouraged rather than putting pressure on it or interfering with the right of the people to choose their leaders or threaten to withhold aid to them.

"Challenging the choices of peoples will only result in fuelling the feelings of despair and generate waves of wrath. Moreover, opposing the popular will contradicts the spirit of democratic option that calls for compliance with what the majority decides."

The Emir pointed out that establishing regional security could not be completed unless democratic practice made progress, because security was not just military arrangements agreed upon by states.

"It requires internal political measures which enable the citizen to participate in the affairs of his country and shoulder his responsibilities," he maintained.

"In fact, the participant citizen is a secure citizen because he knows his rights and duties, and builds a secure homeland, which in turn establishes a regional system enjoying security and stability.

"Therefore, the desired security cannot be attained without the progress of democracy, and within this conviction, Qatar has been keen on supporting efforts exerted to help the area improve and reform its affairs."

The Emir recalled that Qatar had recently contributed \$10mn to the UN Fund for Democracy. Qatar also offered a similar sum and expressed full willingness to host the main office of the Foundation for the Future, concerned with promoting democratic practice and reform efforts in the area, and bear all relevant responsibilities and commitments.

"This region is in a pressing need to finalise a major, ongoing process, which is also in the interest of the world as well."