

Emir urges 'serious will for reform' in the region

FIFTH FORUM ON DEMOCRACY OPENS

By Arvind Nair

THE countdown to the birth of a democratic era has already begun but it needs thinkers and experts to continue and promote the process, HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani said yesterday.

HH the Emir was addressing the fifth Doha Forum on Democracy and Free Trade at Ritz-Carlton.

The opening ceremony was also attended by HE the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, speaker of the Advisory Council, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa, sheikhs, ministers, former crown prince of Jordan Prince Talal, ambassadors and senior state officials.

HH the Emir recalled that a year ago he had indicated that the slow pace of democratisation was not due to the frustration on account of the Palestinian problem. Now, the Palestinians themselves are resorting to democratic methods.

It proved that "the quest for

reform and peace in the region can go side by side without contradiction or clash", HH the Emir said.

The move towards democracy and free economy could never be achieved unless it is matched by a "serious will for reform that is aware of its importance and is not content with introducing partial amendments to avert criticism".

"Such process should meet the requirements of political and economic progress by accepting different opinions and adopt a constitutional framework that reflects the popular will and recognise the right to participation through suitable regulatory framework".

While transition to democracy and the market economy has gained some momentum in the region, it has not achieved the desired pace because the political progress and economic liberation are hindered by problems.

During the past years, Qatar faced some of these challenges and was confronted with problems. The country tried to overcome these problems "so that the reform experience in our



HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani with HE the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani, Prince Talal and Amr Moussa.

country could reach its desired end".

While the economic march is continuing, the country's legal system is watchful against any transgressions that are in con-

flict with the country's traditions, or other violations.

"It is not permissible at any time, nor at this time when our economy is heading to prove its capability, regionally as well as

internationally, to turn a blind eye to any deviations or violations resulting from ignorance or committed unintentionally or on any other pretext".

HH the Emir noted that the

country was trying to build an integrated culture for change by improving the educational institutions and finalising the basic legislation.

PICTURE: J Hamid