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QATAR - 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 Qatar.

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By

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Domestically, Qatar continued to broaden the base and nature of popular participation in the country's social, economic, and political affairs. HH Shaikha Mawza Al-Thani, wife of the emir, remained the driving force behind a bold and multifaceted effort to increase involvement of women in all facets of Qatar's national development process.

Qatar also continued to make major inroads into the international energy industry as the world's fastest-growing exporter of natural gas. In the course of state visits to China, France, Germany, India, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom, HH the Amir, Shaikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, concluded memoranda of understanding with the governments of each of these major energy-importing countries.

The objective was threefold. First, it was to prepare the ground for boosting Qatar's trade and inward foreign direct investment, as well as the number of Qatari foreign joint commercial ventures. Second, it was to underscore Qatar's rapidly increasing importance to future Asian and European economic growth. Third, coupled to the assets imbedded in its prodigious and extraordinarily low-cost gas reserves, the agreements furthered Qatar's potential, in partnership with some of the world's leading corporations, to become the engine of regional economic integration in the Gulf.

Qatar also played important roles in several high-profile summits of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that addressed the implications of spiraling international oil prices. At the OPEC summit in September, Qatar was a major force in enabling the members to reach agreement on a manageable price range for oil that would satisfy the needs, concerns, and interests of producers as well as consumers.

In November, Qatar succeeded Iran as host of the triennial heads of state summit of the 56-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The summit convened amidst the highly charged atmosphere of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the Palestinian Uprising against the ongoing Israeli military occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. At the 21st Heads of State summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - Qatar served notice that it would field a candidate to succeed the incumbent Secretary General, whose term expires at the end of 2001.

The successful demarcation of the border between Qatar and neighboring Saudi Arabia was an achievement of major international significance. The boundary agreement had a salutary effect region-wide. It moved Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and their fellow member states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates - one step closer to an envisioned customs union and common market as well as a proposed free trade agreement with the 15-member nation European Union.

In a development of no less potential importance, the International Court of Justice neared the final stages of its ruling, set for early in 2001, in the long-standing border dispute between Qatar and Bahrain. Finally, Qatar's Al-Jazeera (The Peninsula) strengthened and expanded its niche as the most popular television news and commentary program in the Arab world.