

## YEAR IN REVIEW - QATAR

As the new year begins, GulfWire has asked Dr. John Duke Anthony to look back over 1999 and summarize what he regards as significant developments in individual GCC countries overlooked or down-played by the general media.

### John Duke Anthony

In 1999, Qatar's Emir, HH Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa, in elaborating on his vision for the country's future, declared that Qatar's path of development would continue to proceed along three main lines.

First, Qatar will continue its production and export of the world's most prodigious offshore natural gas deposits in order to improve the economic well-being of its citizens, whose incomes per capita will soon surpass the Sultanate of Brunei's as the world's highest.

Simultaneously, Qatar will seek to consolidate its position as the nexus of exceptionally low-cost energy in support of regional economic integration. For more than a decade, efforts have been underway to strengthen the economic ties between Qatar and its five fellow member-states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Of related importance, Qatar's Minister of Finance, Trade, and Economy announced that he fully expected Qatar to be able in 1999, for the first time in twelve years, to remove the country's budgetary deficit.

Second, using the revenues from its natural gas exports to countries elsewhere in the GCC region, the Indian subcontinent, and East Asia, Qatar continues to make major investments in education.

The Emir's wife, HH Shaikha Muza, remains the driving force behind the move to open the branch of a prominent American university in Qatar. The university's primary mission would be to educate and train Qataris to assume responsibility for running the country's burgeoning economy overall and to be able to develop and manage its export-oriented natural gas industry in particular.

Third, the Emir has appointed a 32-member committee to draft a permanent constitution in which the delineation of authority among the administrative, legislative, and judicial branches of government, as well as provision for a broad range of civil and human rights, is envisioned.

Independent of these developments, Qatar continued to make waves internationally through its media which regularly addressed some of the region's most challenging public policy issues, through its ongoing proactive implementation of defense cooperation agreements with the U.S. and most of the four other Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, and through the further opening of its economy to foreign investment in equity-sharing arrangements with most of the world's leading multinational oil and gas firms.

Not least in these regards, Qatar attracted ongoing attention regionally and further afield through its continuing commitment to increase the level of popular participation in the national development process. The latter

phenomenon took a significant step forward in the form of elections in February for the capital's municipal council. In what was a first for the Arabian Peninsula countries as a whole, women voted and ran as candidates.

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