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Land of the rising sun provides opportunities for Qatar Foundation's solar projects

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Qatar is the globe's leading exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG). And Japan, the world's fourth-largest energy consumer, is importing increasingly vast amounts of the fuel. Last year's Fukushima disaster led to the closure of almost all of the country's nuclear plants, with only two such facilities currently in operation. As a result, Japan has suffered a huge shortfall in its energy supply, 30 percent of which came from nuclear power prior to the disaster.

Qatar has stepped in to help fill this void, recently announcing that it was raising its supply of LNG to Japan to over 20 million tonnes in the short term, more than double the figure of nine million tonnes announced last autumn. The two nations' economic relationship is blossoming, with Japan now the world's biggest importer of Qatari products, amounting to a total value of \$29 billion per annum.

However, Qatar is determined to secure its long-term economic future by lessening its reliance on LNG and moving towards a knowledge-based economy, in line with its National Vision 2030 plan. Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development is committed to helping ensure that this vision becomes reality.

Through partnerships with cutting-edge organisations such as Qatar Solar Technologies (QSTec) and GreenGulf, the Foundation's investment in solar technology research continues to grow. QSTec will soon be producing polysilicon, the key ingredient that goes into making the world's most efficient solar technologies such as cells and modules that convert the power of the sun into energy. This solar energy will help make Qatar's oil and gas reserves go further and for much longer, thereby creating a sustainable energy solution.

Meanwhile, GreenGulf seeks to invest in alternative energy projects across the region and beyond. According to its CEO, Omran Al-Kuwari, "Solar energy has demonstrated massive potential as a renewable energy source that can effectively satisfy our current and future needs. GreenGulf's present focus is on improving the technology to harness this resource to make it a practical long-term complement to fossil fuels. We see many similarities with our

Japanese counterparts and we believe that the clean technology industry is one platform where Japan and Qatar can find many opportunities for collaboration.”

The Qatar Japan ‘Ferjaan’ week, taking place at the end of September in Tokyo, is nominally a celebration marking 40 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. But for Qatar Foundation the event provides an opportunity to promote its green credentials to an ever-more receptive audience in Japan. By nurturing and resourcing relationships with Japanese counterparts, it is hoped that both nations will benefit from ongoing innovations in the renewable energy sector.

The Japanese government is currently considering a U-turn on its previous decision to close down its atomic energy industry, mindful of workers whose livelihoods have been threatened by the nuclear shutdown. But such a move would be hugely controversial, so at the same time the nation is beginning to invest heavily in other sustainable technologies. Japan’s largest solar plant is under construction in Minami Soma city, just 10 kilometres from the stricken Fukushima site. State subsidies are fuelling a rush to buy into the renewable energy sector, which will soon see Japan becoming the world’s second-largest solar power market.

Japan’s post-war ‘economic miracle’ was powered by its technological innovations. Thanks to the ongoing global financial crisis, the miracle is now over. But the nation’s ability to innovate remains unsurpassed, and the Land of the Rising Sun could yet see a second economic miracle, this time powered by solar energy. In this respect, the visit of Qatar Foundation representatives to Tokyo could not be better timed.



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