



An aerial view of Doha, capital of Qatar. — IC

A 16-year-old Qatari influencer born of rapport between China and Arab nations



World Cup merchandise is seen at the Yiwu International Trade Market in Yiwu, east China's Zhejiang Province, a major manufacturing base for World Cup products. — IC

Wan Lixin

Although Chinese soccer players failed to make it to the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the online community's capacity for serendipity remained monumental.

One of the online sensations in China is a 16-year-old Qatari: Abdulrahman Fahad al-Thani.

During the opening match between Qatar and Ecuador, the expressions registered on the face of the doe-eyed youngster — from surprise, suspense to dismay — so amused Chinese netizens that different images of the young man were quickly

turned into interesting memes and icons, with some calling him the real-person edition of La'eeb.

La'eeb, the mascot for the World Cup in Qatar, was inspired by the traditional Qatari headdress called a *ghotra* and *iqal*. The *ghotra* is the square piece of fabric, and the *iqal* is the twisted rope looped into a coil that keeps the *ghotra* in place.

The sudden spotlight subjected to scrutiny the Qatari first dubbed the "Qatar prince." Although the young man explained later that he was not the heir apparent he counts as a member of the royal

family, and when he opened an account with Douyin, China's version of TikTok, he quickly racked up nearly 15 million fans. That is way beyond the entire Qatari population of 2.8 million.

In subsequent livestreaming, he was seen picking up some Chinese or rolling out dumpling wrappers, and it was everyone's guess that before long he would go into livestreaming selling.

It would be unfair to describe such stardom as purely capricious, for the rapport between Arab and Chinese people has been well substantiated.