

PM MEETS OUTGOING ENVOYS: HE the Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani meets outgoing ambassadors Dhair Ajran al-Ajran of Kuwait and (below) Li Jian Ying of China at his Emiri Diwan office yesterday. HH the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani also received the Chinese ambassador.

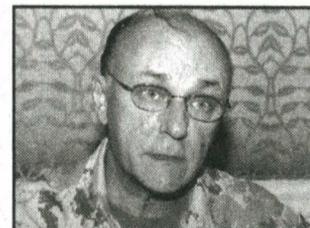


# Gulf to host Nato strategic studies centre

**A DEFENCE college for the Middle East under the aegis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) is to be set up in Rome soon and a Centre for Strategic Studies is to be established in one of the GCC countries, a top Nato official said in Doha yesterday.**

"Although Jordan has made a request to host this centre, no final decision has been taken yet," said General Ray Henault, chairman of Nato's military committee in Istanbul. The Turkish centre is known as the Nato Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (NICI).

"We have come here to listen to what is being said. We do not impose our views on others.



**General Henault .. for closer co-operation with the GCC.**

"Our aim is to evolve a well-knit military network on the basis of which we could participate in military exercises. There could also be exchange of visits with Nato officials," he said.

Henault said he was happy to witness the military exercise code-named Eagle Resolve 2007 that concluded two days ago and to participate in a conference on the possible areas of co-operation with the NICI. He expressed his gratitude to HE Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Atiyah, the chief of staff of the Qatari Armed Forces, for having invited him to witness the joint military exercise.

Henault said that a conference held soon after the event provided the opportunity to meet the military commanders of the GCC countries and discuss the current challenges.

He said: "Many important issues were discussed in the conference such as evolving closer military tie-ups between these countries in order to deal with the Afghanistan issue.

"We on our part would like to remain in Afghanistan as per the wishes of the Afghan government and in keeping with the UN resolutions and with the assistance of the GCC countries to ensure peace and stability in that country.

"We also discussed strengthening the NICI plans of action with GCC countries that have been set in motion since two years. The workshop that was held as part of the conference was useful in highlighting many security issues. The discussions were enriched with the participation of representatives from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and Singapore.

"It emerged from the discus-

sions that the problems faced by the GCC countries and Nato are identical. There is the need to exchange information and expertise on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the possibility of terrorist attacks.

"Nato has a special political relationship with Qatar and with other GCC countries.

"The possibility of co-operation with the NICI in conducting military training was also discussed. The NICI had already decided on this issue in its meeting held in the Latvian capital Riga. It is in this context that we had made arrangements for the training of GCC military officers at the Military College in Rome. Qatari military officers are now undergoing training there."

In answer to a question, he said: "There is much anxiety and worry among the GCC leaders on the question of Iran. We noticed that during our discussion. The main worry is about Iran becoming a nuclear power. However, Nato has no decisions on hand regarding any military action on this issue. The problem has political undercurrents that are being sorted out through discussions in the United Nations.

"We will not embark on any military action in this region unless requested and endorsed by the UN Security Council as has been the case in Afghanistan.

"A team of experts from Nato visited Kuwait recently to review the national programme for protection from radiation.

"We have also signed an agreement with Kuwait on exchange of intelligence information. Bahrain has followed suit.

"We expect to sign similar agreements with Qatar and the UAE very soon," Henault said.