

# GCC to speed up customs union

## LEADERS HAIL ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

**RIYADH** • GCC leaders decided at their 9th consultative meeting here yesterday to speed up steps to finalise the projected GCC customs union before the 28th session of the GCC summit scheduled to be held in Muscat.

In a press conference after the conclusion of the 9th consultative session of the GCC leaders, GCC chief H E Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah said the leaders underlined the need to complete requirements for the establishment of the GCC common market before the end of the current year to achieve the cherished economic integration among GCC member states. The creation of the GCC common market is expected to be declared at the next GCC summit, Al Attiyah said.

The leaders have entrusted the GCC general secretariat to complete the studies on the GCC water network in order to be forwarded to the coming summit, the GCC chief added. The GCC leaders have also decided to follow up on primary studies held on the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes in the light of decisions taken at the Riyadh summit.

Reading the final statement, Al At-

tiyah said the leaders reviewed the latest developments in the region and also in the international arena, including the regrettable incidents in the Palestinian territory, and called on the Palestinian leaders to commit themselves to the Makkah agreement, to halt violence and bring to justice all those who are behind Palestinian infighting in order to bolster unity among the Palestinian ranks.

The statement highlighted the Arab League efforts and the positive response from the regional and international parties towards the relaunched Arab peace plan and expressed hope that the international response would be translated into action to advance the peace process at the earliest possible time.

The leaders expressed regret over the escalation in sectarian strife and terrorists acts in Iraq, calling on the Iraqi government to accelerate efforts for achieving national reconciliation, amendment of the constitution and to work for fair distribution of the Iraqi wealth and disarm militia and introduce political and economic reforms.

The leaders called on the Lebanese leaders to end the internal crisis and



The Emir H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani with other GCC leaders at the 9th consultative meeting at Al Dara'ia Palace in Riyadh, yesterday. The Emir later left for Syria.

unite the Lebanese ranks to serve first the higher interests of Lebanon and secure the stability of the country.

On relations with Iran, the leaders reaffirmed the GCC stance concerning the right of the UAE to its three islands held by Iran, calling on the latter to solve the problem through direct negotiations or refer the issue

to the International Court of Justice, the statements said.

On the Iranian nuclear issue, the GCC leaders called for the need to arrive at a peaceful solution in order to save Iran and other countries in the region from further tension.

The leaders hailed the historic visit by the Iranian president to the UAE

and hoped it would help solve the islands crisis.

The leaders reviewed the GCC cooperation drive and expressed their determination to continue their march towards progress and work for the welfare and other aspirations of the people of the GCC countries.

**QNA**

## 15 Palestinians die in clashes

**GAZA** • At least 15 Palestinians were killed yesterday — eight in one incident — in the deadliest fighting between Hamas and Fatah since the rivals formed a unity government to end bloodshed threatening to spill into civil war.

Gunbattles raged into the night as masked fighters vied for control of the Gaza streets. Hamas fully deployed its armed wing in a sign it was preparing for wider conflict.

## 'Gulf, Nato face common threats'

**BY RABIN GUPTA**

**DOHA** • Threats of concern are the same in the Gulf region as those that bother Nato. The areas of concern include terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and instability. General Ray Henault, Nato's top soldier and chairman of its military committee, told *The Peninsula* that all these factors require a common approach to secu-

urity. Henault was in Doha to attend meetings involving senior officers attached to 'Operation Eagle Resolve', a two-day conflagration of senior officers that concluded yesterday.

This is the first time that Nato has been invited to attend the meetings. Other than officers from the US Central Command and the GCC states, military personnel were also present from countries like Japan, New Zealand, Aus-

tralia, S Korea and Singapore.

Henault, however, clarified that Nato was involved only in the discussions and did not take part in any military exercises. "Qatar has shown good leadership and is important in the region. The prime objective here was to increase cooperation and at the same time, to establish contacts to be intra-operable," Henault said.

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General Ray Henault