

# The Peninsula

## Be steadfast in reforms, says Emir

THREE-DAY GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND FREE TRADE OPENS

**DOHA** • Qatar said yesterday the reform process in the region which was launched with so much fanfare had slackened and the pretext being cited is that conditions are not conducive.

The situation in the Middle East is indeed sensitive but that does not justify putting political reforms on the backburner, the Emir, H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, said while opening a three-day global conference on democracy, development and free trade.

The convention is being attended by a large number of delegates from all over the world, including the United Nations Secretary-General and Finland's President.

The reform process was sidelined in the region previously under different pretexts, so the mistake should not be repeated, the Emir cautioned in a speech which was critical of the forces that were dictating terms and trying to impose democracy in the region from without.

Threats and dangers are mounting in the region, underlining the need for peace and stability. Security and stability must return to Iraq and it should be left to its citizens to resolve the problems the country faces.

The Iran nuclear issue is a sensitive one and it can be solved only through peaceful means, reiterated the Emir.

If some in the West have reduced or given up their support for democratisation in the region, that will not dissuade its people to press ahead with the reform process. "We should not forget that some in our region have paid a very high price to launch political and social reforms, and given all that was dear and precious to them long before the outside world showed



The Emir, H H Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, speaking at the opening ceremony of the three-day global conference on democracy, development and free trade, in Doha yesterday. RIGHT: Dignitaries at the session.



interest in the issue."

It is, therefore, wrong to believe that reforms move only under foreign influence. The Mauritanian example amply demonstrates this.

"I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our brothers in Mauritania on the success of the military

council for justice and democracy in transferring power in a democratic way to a civilian government through free elections that respected the will of the people and their right to participation," said the Emir.

"The main reason for the democratic incapacity, in my view, ladies and

gentlemen, is due to the lack of correct understanding of reform, which must be comprehensive and deep and not partial or intermittent. There can be no economic reform without political reform, which must be supported and guided by social reform.

We focus in particular on education

as an effective means for sound social upbringing that makes way for creative thinking and dialogue, collective work, and sharing responsibility and indispensable course to decision making.

"While consolidating this new social system needs time and effort, yet it is a

prerequisite for the political reform to bear fruit. We in Qatar are proud that our first legislative elections, for which we are getting ready, will take place under a social system that is aware of the value of participation and its benefit for the present and future of the country."