

Forum on democracy opens today

HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani inaugurates today the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade 2009 which will be attended by more than 500 delegates from 40 countries.

HE the Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor a-Thani will give the welcome speech.

The focus of this year's conference will be "Enriching the Economic Future of the Middle East".

Assistant Foreign Minister for Follow-Up Affairs Mohamed Abdullah al-Rumaihi told reporters yesterday that former French president Jacques Chirac and Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen would be the key speakers at the inaugural session at the Sheraton Doha.

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He said the delegates at the three-day conference would take up issues like energy, economy and democracy.

Professor Steven L Spiegel, director of UCLA Center for Middle East Development, co-organiser of the event, said the gathering would discuss strategies towards a multipolar world, the economic scene under Obama's administration, the financial crisis and its implications on the world economy.

Al-Rumaihi said that he "respected and understood" the decision of the Mexico government not to send senior officials to the conference. Mexico is fighting an outbreak of swine flu.

Among the guests would be former French prime minister Alain Juppe, former British foreign minister Douglas Hurd and former US deputy defence secretary Gordon England.