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Saudi Arabia calls for strong and solid Gulf union



Saudi Crown Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz attending a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Bahrain Monday expressed the kingdom's hope for the declaration of a Gulf union. "We aspire to a strong union with integrated economies, a joint foreign policy and a common defense system," Prince Salman said.

Meanwhile, King Hamad of host country Bahrain called for the GCC to provide "a security umbrella for its peoples" and urged "economic complementarity" between its six member states. Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, Kuwait's emir, called for humanitarian aid for Syrian civilians and urged Iran to reach a peaceful settlement with neighbors, including over three Gulf islands in dispute with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). He announced a donor conference for civilians caught up in the Syrian conflict to be held at the end of January at the request of the United Nations. In an exclusive statement to Al Arabiya, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said the GCC was concerned by Iran's nuclear activity, and the Bushehr reactor in particular. He added that the lack of transparency by Iran on its program has raised suspicions over whether the nuclear activity is intended for peaceful purposes. The two-day summit is to focus on strengthening "Gulf unity... especially politically, economically, in defense, security and culturally," Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa had said. Last week, Bahrain said an announcement over a union of the six member states would not be made at the summit. A Gulf union would supersede the existing GCC and bring member states even closer. In November, the six Gulf states recognized a newly-formed opposition bloc as the Syrian people's legitimate representative. The GCC members -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- were the first to recognize the opposition coalition. "The states of the council announce recognizing the National Coalition... as the legitimate representative of the brotherly Syrian people," GCC chief Abdullatif al-Zayani said. He said the oil-rich bloc would support the coalition in the hope that "this will be a step towards a quick political transfer of power."