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■ Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa yesterday received in Bangkok CP Group chairman and chief executive Dhanin Chearavanont and hailed the group as a giant Thai company with ventures in many countries. He later attended a lunch banquet hosted in his honour by Mr Chearavanont. Thai ministers and officials as well as the Premier's delegation were present.

Hamas crushes rebel challenge

GAZA CITY: Hamas struck back at an Al Qaeda challenge to their grip on the Gaza Strip by storming a mosque that left the leader of the "Warriors of God" splinter group among up to 28 dead.

After fighting ended early today the town of Rafah was sealed off to media, but Hamas said the physician and preacher who led the group and who had declared an Al Qaeda-style "emirate" from a local mosque was dead - blown up by his own hand along with a Syrian ally after killing a mediator.

Some of the dead were former Hamas men who, people who knew them said, wanted a tougher line on imposing religious rule.

The group "wanted a return to anarchy", said Ehab Al Ghsain, the spokesman for the Interior

Ministry of the Hamas government which has run Gaza since routing forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in June 2007.

"We have said there is no chance of a return to anarchy."

As Hamas police hunted more followers of Abdel-Latif Moussa and his Jund Ansar Allah (Warriors of God) following what locals in the Egyptian border town called a "night of horror", a Web site linked to Al Qaeda denounced Hamas as a "criminal gang" imitating Israeli tactics and bent on thwarting religious rule.

After Abbas chaired a meeting in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, PLO said the violence showed its rivals were turning Gaza into a base for anti-Western radicals.

Hamas officials said 22 people were killed, including three children and three other civilians as well as six policemen. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights put the death toll at 28, with about 100 wounded.

Residents said the Ibn Taymea mosque where Moussa preached to a hundred or so supporters, some armed and dressed like Taliban, was hit by grenades and Moussa's house destroyed.

Hamas officials said one of Moussa's sons was also killed, along with an aide named

Travel ban on official

MANAMA: The General Prosecution yesterday charged former Political Development Institute executive director Dr Ibrahim Al Rumaihi with misusing public funds and profiting from it. He is on BD10,000 bail but banned from travelling abroad. Chief prosecutor Wael Bu-Allay said case proceedings were pending the assigned committee report.

"cancer" of radical Islam. The Muslim minister for urban regeneration said the head-to-toe body covering and veil represented the "oppression of women, their enslavement and their humiliation". Amara, who is of Algerian descent, said France was a beacon for an enlightened Islam at ease with modernity, so it was necessary to fight the "cancer of radical Islam which completely