

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Petitioning For The Constitution

People's Political Participation Is A Right, Not A Gratitude

As the Amir of Bahrain continues his preparations for the annual official bonanza on 16th December many forces are now in action to forestall his plans. First of all, the economy of the country is not doing well and the popular resentment is rising as a result. With the deterioration in relations with other Gulf states the prospects of a salvage operation to improve the state of the economy are gloomy, with the deficit ever increasing. The political front is not any better, either. The last few weeks have seen a frenzied activity to pre-empt an anticipated announcement by the Amir on the "National Day" to the effect that a consultative assembly whose members are to be nominated by the Amir himself is to be formed. The most important action taken by the opposition was the petitioning of the Amir by a coalition of various forces demanding an end to the state of emergency and the restoration of constitutional rule.

Undoubtedly, the petition which was signed by many social, professional and political personalities signifies a marked shift in the style of the opposition by trying to corner the government into a position of retreat. It is the first time in recent years that such a grouping has taken place. The signatories of the petition included religious scholars, artists, journalists, engineers, lawyers, both Sunni and Shia. The main theme of the petition is the demand for the restoration of the democratic life as called for by the constitution. According to its contents, the petition calls for the lifting of the Amiri decree of 1975 which dissolved the elected assembly, and the enactment in full of the 1974 constitution. It is therefore a direct challenge to what the ruling tribe of Bahrain is planning and signifies a turning point in the popular struggle to retrieve the rights of the people.

The government is still business as usual, or so it appears from the outside. However, the internal circles of the Al Khalifa family is working round the clock to contain the challenge and produce something that could offer a save face whilst dampening the popular resolve in the pursuit of the long-awaited political reforms. A lot of fuss is going on and the Amir is reported to be angry at the way events are unfolding. He had thought his "reforms" were enough to silence the opposition for a while, and the idea of a nominated parliament has long been discussed and approved by the ruling tribe's council. To them, such an alternative to an elected parliament is a way out of the dilemma especially in light of the relations with Saudi Arabia. It is now known that the world's

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The Historic Petition

Translation of the Petition Submitted to the Amir of Bahrain on 15.11.1992

His Highness Sheikh Essa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Amir of the State of Bahrain.

Peace be upon you.

In a historic moment, your highness had approved the Constitution of the State of Bahrain on 12.11.1393 A.H. (6.12.1973) after it had been discussed and approved by the Constituent Assembly which you had called for it to be established according to Law No. 12/1972 of 9.5.1392 A.H (6.12.1973). At the time you were recalling Bahrain's history in the context of Arabism and Islam, and were anticipating with faith and determination, a future based on consultation and justice, rich in participation in carrying out the responsibilities of government and administration, ensuring freedom and equality, and confirming fraternity and social solidarity, as stated in the preamble of the constitution. This constitution laid down the basis of popular participation in public rights and duties on a strong footing based on the principles of consultation as outlined by our Islamic religion, and on the principles of justice, freedom and equality which have always been deep-rooted in the Islamic and human civilisations.

That process was a pioneering change targeted by your highness in order to establish a modern system to govern the state of Bahrain and a cultural achievement which will be remembered by history for your highness.

And although the dissolution of the National Assembly on 26.8.1975 by the Amiri decree No. 14/1975 according to the authority which Article 65 offers to your highness, the article itself emphasises the need to call for the election of the new assembly within a period not exceeding two months from the date of the dissolution. Otherwise the dissolved assembly would retain its complete constitutional authority, knowing that article 108 of the constitution prevents the suspension of any of its articles except in the case of martial laws within the limits outlined by the Law. The dissolution of the Assembly did not take place in these circumstances.

According to this and taking into account the local, regional and international changes during the recent years, and in view of the new direction of the international will to create a

new world order, therefore the situation requires -if article 65 is not implemented- the call for electing a new national assembly by direct and free election process as determined by the constitution.. This is so that the state may exercise its democratic system according to Article 1.d which states that: "the system in Bahrain is democratic, in which sovereignty is for the people who are the source of all powers, and that the exercise of power must be as outlined by this constitution".

And in order to institutionalise confidence, and mutual respect between the state and the citizens and due to our keenness on bringing together the efforts of the people of this country, the rulers and the ruled in order to achieve the progress and prosperity of this country, and in order to liberate the energies of every citizen to participate in the process of social and economic development according to article 1.e of the constitution which states that: "the citizens have the right of participation in public affairs and enjoyment of political rights, starting with the right of election, according to this constitution and conditions and circumstances outlined by the Law". We the undersigned present to your highness this letter motivated by the feeling of our Islamic and national responsibility, and our legitimate rights according to article 29 of the constitution which states that: "every person has the right to communicate with the authorities in writing and with his own signature", and because your highness is the head of the state according to article 33.a of the constitution, requesting your highness to issue orders for election of the national assembly as outlined by section 2 of chapter 4 of the constitution.

The national assembly as a legislative and constitutional one does not contradict what has recently been mentioned regarding the intention of the government to form a consultative council to widen the sphere of its consultations regarding what the government wants to do. The consultative council does not replace the national assembly as a constitutional and legislative authority.

We hope your highness will realise this popular demand in which there is good for every one. Please accept our thanks and respect..... (Signed by 153 dignitaries).

Tribalism is Anti-Statehood

The Conflict Between Family Rule and Modernism

Twenty years ago, Bahrain was in the middle of several crises. The Shah of Iran wanted Bahrain and the United Nation had to send an envoy to report on the wishes of the people; whether they wished to form an independent state or be annexed to Iran. The British were withdrawing their army from Bahrain and the national movement had stepped-up its pressure for political change and reform.

Cholera broke out in October 1972 to the extent that the government was about to close the airport in an attempt to contain the disease. In November 1972 a disastrous fire ravaged the BAPCO refinery destroying eight storage tanks and causing heavy financial losses. It took the fire brigade 48 hours to extinguish the flames.

The refinery was modernised to protect it from such fire (or sabotage) and advanced technology made sure that Bahrain was up to the highest standard of safety and industrial protection. Cholera is history. The high level of quality medical doctors and facilities provided by well-trained Bahrainis was advanced and modern enough to protect society from evil diseases. The military vacuum created by the British withdrawal was filled by US navy and military protection from external aggression and from possible internal military take-over was "assured".

All crises seemed to be solvable, except what to do with national demand for political change and reform. For Bahrain to be granted the right to join the United Nation as an independent state, it meant some form of modernism and general consensus was needed. Fearing the Shah may "woo" the Shia Arabs (who are the indigenous and form the majority of population), the ruler (Sheikh Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa) contacted some Shia community elders and assured them that he had no ill-intentions against the Shia and what happened in the past (degradation, sectarian oppression, etc.) was history. To prove this he built a mosque (ma'tam) for the Shia in the newly constructed town named after him (Issa Town) and paid a visit to the holy city of Najaf (Iraq), where he met the then world spiritual leader of the Shia (Ayatollah Mohsin Al Hakim) and expressed his goodwill towards the Bahraini Shia. He also permitted some exiled Bahrain Shia activists such as Seyyed Ali Kamal Al-Din to return Bahrain without fear of reprisal.

The same offer was made to most of those exiled in other countries since the fifties to return without fear of reprisal. The Khalifa family was concerned that those senior exiles returning home were keen to see something changed. To dampen such pressure, many of the exiles were offered senior administrative post including ministerial ones in the newly formed cabinet. Others received gifts in the form of houses, cars, cash etc.. But still the majority resisted buy-out of their opposition. What to do?

Within the ruling family, there were two wings proposing different solutions to the prob-

lem. The hard-liners led by the then and current prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa, objected to any adventure into an alien (with respect to the concept of tribe) world of politics, whereby the ruling family may give up some of its privileges and power to "others". The realists led by the then and current foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak, thought that eventually the ruling tribe will have to give up some of its privileges and power, so why not do so voluntarily. With the political climate pushing strongly towards more openness and the need felt by the Khalifa family to extract some form of legitimacy, the realists won the day.

The Amir announced his permission for establishing a Constituent Assembly and the election was held on 1 December 1972. The Constituent Assembly was made up of 22 elected members, 8 appointed by the government and 12 ministers (ex-officio) members. A draft of the Kuwaiti constitution was adapted and presented by the government to the Assembly and after a year of debate the new Bahraini Constitution was issued on 6 December 1972.

Election for the first National Assembly followed a year later on 7 December 1973. This was made up of 30 elected members and 14 (ex-officio) ministers. In both the Constituent and National Assemblies, these ministers were granted the same rights as the elected members. Although such arrangement was devised to ensure the ruling family's leverage on the legislature, the people of Bahrain and their elected representatives presented a highly sophisticated skill in debating legislations, budget and in acting as a watch-dog against unjust practices of the government. Out of the 14 ministers, six were members of the ruling family (including the post of prime minister), i.e. it was tribally controlled. Despite all these provisions, the Khalifa tribe found itself face-to-face with the people of Bahrain for the first time since they invaded the country in 1782.

What happened later on was known to every one. The Khalifa government failed to answer all critical questions regarding matters such as budget allocations (one-third of national income goes to His Highness), repressive measures by the British-officered security service, the right of labour to unionize, etc... Labour disputes and students demonstrations were the talk of the day.

The Amir struck at opposition by issuing the State Security Law in October 1974 without consulting the parliament. Both Islamic and National Blocs within the Parliament rallied other independent members and the public into opposing the humiliating decree, which empowers the interior minister to order the administrative detention of political suspects for up to 3 years (renewable) without trial.

This was a golden moment the prime minister has long waited for. To win his point he withdraw from the Parliament, thus hindering its sessions by affecting the quorum. On 24 August 1975, he wrote to his brother the Amir

(ruler) complaining that the parliamentarians were obstructing the work of the government. The big brother responded by dissolving the Parliament on 26 August 1975.

Twenty years on since Bahrain experienced some form of democracy, the world has changed dramatically. Yet the same players are on stage, replaying their stereo-type connotations. "His Highness" the Amir states in his latest interview with the London-based Saudi daily "Al Sharq Al Awast" of 9 November 1992: "we are serious in announcing the formation of a consultative assembly which will be made up of appointed members". He goes on: "just as the Americans are proud of their political system, so are we in the Gulf. Our approach did not come from vacuum. It is the outcome of our continued tradition and way of life".

By this, the Amir is conveying the full message, that tribalism is not compatible with free election and true public participation. Self-determination, human rights, democracy and the rest of the jargon are non of his concern. He is proud of his way of life and is not prepared to give up his authoritarian rule for the sake of a "legitimate" authority, neither is he prepared to give up coercion for the sake of consensus, nor is he prepared to replace the tribe with the state.

Who Signed the Petition

The petition submitted to the Amir on 15 November was sponsored by six personalities, three Shia and three Sunni: Sheikh Abdul Ameer Al Jamri (religious scholar and Ex-MP), Mr. Hamid Sangoor (lawyer), Mr. Abdul Wahhab Husain Ali (Educationalist), Dr. Abdul Latif Al Mahmood (university professor), Mr. Mohammed Jaber Al Sabah (Ex-MP) and Mr. Isa Al Jowder (religious scholar). The petition was signed by 153 people of high social, professional and political status. The signatories composed of 22 religious men, 3 Ex-MPs, 8 lecturers and teachers, 17 businessmen, 32 lawyers, 18 artists and actors, 9 executives and specialists, 3 journalists, 17 engineers and 24 others. Four women were among the signatories..

Suppression of Religious Activities

The Security forces stepped up its campaign to suppress the activities of Shia religious gatherings. All people in charge of the premises for holding activities (Ma'tams) were summoned to Al Khamis Police HQ on 12 November, and were warned not to allow any religious processions to take place without a written permission. On 31 October two youths from Jahrami Matem were arrested for unknown reasons. They are Husain Ismail and Fuad Salman. This is yet another example of the Al Khalifa atrocities against basic human rights, as have religious activities have been going on for the last 1300 years. This is part of the campaign embarked upon by the regime against the popular and ideological culture of the people of Bahrain which preceded the Al Khalifa.

13 Could be A Lucky Number

A New Gulf Order May Result From The Forthcoming GCC Summit

It is now almost certain that Qatar will not attend the 13th summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) due to be held in Abu Dhabi on 22nd December. If so, this will be an unprecedented challenge to the 10-year old organisation. It is more so because the GCC bylaws state categorically that decisions at all levels must be taken unanimously and not by majority vote. The Qataris have so far shown no sign of backing down, and were absent from various ministerial preparatory meetings like those of the interior, finance and foreign ministers which were held last month in Kuwait, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

While it is not expected that the GCC summit will take any significant decision, the open crack in its front at the highest level, is very embarrassing and could herald the end of the alliance of the sheikhs as we know it.

Qatar's decision not to take part in the most important event in the GCC annual calendar might appear strange and very undiplomatic. But, a deep look at the political wrangling and internal pickering amongst the Gulf leaders helps to understand why Al Thani are not going to Abu Dhabi. The GCC was formed in the shadow of the Iran-Iraq war which followed the overthrow of the Shah. Analysts perceived the birth of this regional alliance to represent a complex of reactions and aims, the most prominent of which are:

1. One of the GCC's prime objectives, which was largely achieved, was to draw and implement a unified diplomatic and propaganda plan against Islamic tendencies in the region and in support of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussain.
2. Coordinate financial and material support to the Iraqi government including: a. hard cash paid mainly by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates; b. grants and loans pledged directly for arms supplies; c. the sale of over 300,000 barrels per day of oil on behalf of the Iraqi government, and ; d. increase oil production to squeeze the Iranian income from this commodity.
3. The GCC and its headquarter in Riyadh became an ideal channel for communications and coordination for the six member states to combat internal dissent through a common security and intelligence agreements and practices.
4. the organisation made the task of Western assistance to the ruling tribes easier.
5. Most importantly, however, the GCC was a legitimate cover for Saudi dominance and manipulation of other small Gulf states. Saudi views and decisions were smoothly passed to and adopted by other members even if they were against the individual national interests. This was more so apparent in the Saudi hostile attitude towards Iran and total support to Saddam Hussain. Another area was in the Saudi uncompromising view on any form of internal political openness.

6. Similarly, the Saudi territorial ambitions were disguised by the GCC. Riyadh continued to exaggerate the external and internal threats to the ruling families in order to lure them into signing Bilateral Security Agreements. Such agreements often gave the Saudis the right to literally invade and occupy parts of other Gulf states. Only Oman and Kuwait refused to sign. The latter was due to a stiff resistance put up by the National Assembly which was eventually dissolved in 1986. The UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar realised only to their cost that Saudi territorial claims were, quietly and under the security agreements, settled in favour of Saudi Arabia. However, they were unable to complain, let alone resist.

It is only after Saddam invaded Kuwait in August 1990, and brutally pillaged the country, that other Gulf states began to question the seriousness of the Iranian threat as presented by the Saudis and others. Indeed, the Iranian stand against the Iraqi aggression and in support of the Kuwaiti statehood and territorial integrity helped to rebuild confidence between the Islamic Republic and her Gulf neighbours, including the Saudis. But it became apparent that a security vacuum did exist on a regional level. Two strategic options were explored. The first was the 6+2 declaration of Damascus. It envisaged a quasi-military alliance between the six Gulf states on one side and Egypt and Syria on the other. The larger Arab states would provide the military muscles (personnel in particular) while the oil-rich Gulf states would set a fund to pay for the service. The Iraqis were not very keen on Egyptian military deployment in the Gulf, and the Saudis were against a Syrian presence. Indeed, not anyone of the Sheikhs and Amirs was at all happy with having his palace surrounded by troops from Arab republics.

All things considered, the "Damascus Declaration" remained just that, and it is unlikely to turn into a serious plan. The second option to fill the security vacuum was an Omani-sponsored project to enlarge the Peninsula Shield, the military arm of the GCC. The force is made of 10,000 soldiers with light armour, and made almost exclusively (90 per cent) of Saudi troops. It proved its total ineffectiveness on the eve of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The Omanis, with the help of Western advisors, proposed enlarging the force by ten folds to 100,000 soldiers. They also proposed a more even participation, and adding an air arm and rotating the position of Chief of Staff. The idea was that an agile and a realistic force as such would be capable of absorbing the first shock of a surprise attack from a regional power against one of the GCC members. It would then be decided if a Western intervention is required and the nature and scale of such an intervention.

The ambitious project was put to the 12th GCC summit in Kuwait last December. The

Saudis rejected the plan, and the Peninsula Shield continues to be merely a token contingent deployed on Kuwaiti soil as a symbolic gesture. Thus, the security vacuum remains as dangerous as ever.

Meanwhile, the Saudis speeded up their expansionist policy during and after the end of the Gulf War 2, as if nothing had happened. However, the improved atmosphere in their relations with Iran, gave the smaller countries the confidence to stand up to the Saudi political ambitions, and geographical designs. Qatar, for one, was not willing to let the Saudis take any more of their land. Qatar forged strong cultural and economic links with Iran. The Crown Prince and Defence Minister, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa visited Tehran, and Dr. Hassan Habibi, the Iranian Vice President, visited Doha. The two countries signed an agreement to share the world's largest known gas field "Shamal Field" which lies offshore in the shared waters of the two countries.

To preempt all this, the Saudis moved quickly to consolidate an agreement with Abu Dhabi known as "Fuad Line", in which the UAE ceded a 25 kilometers wide area close to the Qatari borders. Infact, the Saudis expanded it to encompass Al Udaid creek and Al Khafous valley, cutting through the lower tip of the Qatar peninsula from the UAE territory. Qatar protested and later withdrew from the Peninsula Shield. But the Saudis insisted that the 196 agreement between the two countries must be finalised and signed by Qatar without any further negotiations. The agreement was on commissioning an international company to propose a sustainable settlement. It did not clearly specify the borders. So, Qatar said NO, and eventually announced her intention of not attending the summit. Both Sheikh Saad Al Sabah, the Prime Minister of Kuwait, and Yousif bin Alawi, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs tried to mediate. Their pledged was to the Saudis asking them to abandon their insistence on Qatar's capitulation. Riyadh was adamant and so was Qatar.

This infighting amongst the GCC states, coming soon after the earthquake of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, has many implications for the rulers of the Gulf. It must surely worry them that the future cannot be conceived secure unless a major rethink of the political and social lifestyle imposed on their people takes place. If external security cannot be guaranteed, since even Iraq and Saudi Arabia cannot be trusted, then internal security must be the answer.

This can be achieved through a democratisation process which is already very late. Moreover the outcome of the Kuwaiti elections and the changes in the White House are more in line with this direction. Perhaps that is why, sources in the GCC have told journalists that a prominent item on the summit agenda is the impact of Clinton victory on the region. The hope is that a new Gulf order is now eminent. May be the 13th summit brings luck to the people of the Gulf.

Bahrain Is Not An Oasis of Liberalism

In a special report to the BBC, Roger Hardy who had just returned from Bahrain explained his views of that country. Here is the text of that report which was broadcast at 9.15 GMT on 12th November 1992.

In a well-to-do suburb of Manama, hidden from view by discreet wooden screen is a shanty town hidden by a jumble of wood and corrugated iron. A home for a few hundred people. This is no more pocket of poverty. The inhabitants of these squalid homes are Bahrainis who are not recognised as Bahrainis. And as such, they are part of a much bigger problem.

Gain Bahraini citizenship, and you gain much more than a passport. You can buy land, start business, and most crucial of all, you become eligible for generous government loans. Without citizenship if your ancestors settled in Bahrain generations ago, you are in limbo, and thousands of Bahrainis are in this predicament.

Bahrain is a small place, with only half a million people, about 30 percent of whom are immigrants, mainly from the Indian subcontinent. The indigenous population is a patchwork quilt of ethnic, tribal and religious communities. Over the centuries, Arabs from the Arabian mainland and Persians from the Gulf have settled here. The ruling Al Khalifa family who settled in Bahrain in the late eighteenth century are from the main stream Sunni branch of Islam, but about 60 percent of Bahrainis are Shias.

Travel only a few miles outside Manama and you discover the distinctiveness of the Shiite villages, with their "matams" or "funeral houses", meeting places which help to give the Shiite community its special source of social solidarity.

I passed black and white posters of Ayaullah Khoei, a revered Shiite figure, whose death in Iraq in August brought hundreds of Bahraini Shiites out in the streets in a display of mourning. Because Shiites are in the majority, they suffer most from the problem of citizenship. A government official told me bluntly, that a passport is not an entitlement, but a reward for loyalty. The message is clear. The Shiites, including the shanty town dwellers are simply not trusted. This was more understandable a decade ago than it is today. Following the Khomeini revolution in 1979, Shiite Iran revived an old claim to Bahrain. And two years later, the Bahraini authorities uncovered a Shiite coup attempt, apparently backed by Tehran.

But since (Imam) Khomeini's death, fear of Iran has receded, and nowadays, Bahrain Shiite groups, whether at home or exile seem to have abandoned the heady language of Islamic revolution. What they and other Bahrainis want, is a return to the parliamentary democracy which the country briefly experienced in the 1970s. But the ruling family seems unwilling to go this far. Under the pressure of the Gulf war last year,

most the kings and Amirs of the Arabian peninsula have felt the need to talk about democratisation. Even conservative cautious Saudi Arabia has announced a plan for a "majlis", or consultative council. And this week the Amir confirmed that Bahrain, too, will soon have a majlis. But it looks as if it will be an appointed body without legislative power.

Change may not come fast enough for a population which resents the paternalism of its rulers. We are treated like children, one Bahraini told me. And another gave his view of an elected majlis by quoting an Arabic proverb: "After fasting we ate onion".

To be sure, Bahrain is not a brutally repressive as Iraq or Syria. And it is a good deal more open than neighbouring Saudi Arabia. But neither is it the oasis of liberalism it claims to be. It has a poor human rights record. Its internal security service run by a British expatriate since the 1960s is efficient and omnipresent. Political descent, especially amongst Shia groups, is harshly suppressed. And despite the presence of CNN and BBC World Service television the local media are carefully controlled by the Ministry of Information, but the settled form of political control is also the simplest. Even a well-off Bahraini whether a Sunni or Shiite who has a passport and all the benefits it confers, lives in fear that if he puts a foot wrong, his passport could be taken away and could lose everything. For him and for all Bahrainis, the fate of the shanty town dwellers serves as a grim warning.

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public opinion is against the continuation of the status quo, and a democratic change has become a necessity.

When the government leaked the news of its intention to form a nominated council, the idea was to gauge the reaction of the people at a time when the regime is facing many challenges in its economic and political policies. The hope was that such a step would keep the people quiet for a while. Time was running short for the government and the calls for change were coming from all directions. With the defeat of George Bush in the American presidential elections and the coming of Bill Clinton to the White House, the Gulf regimes are worried about the implication of this change especially in light of the fact that the issue of human rights may become an important factor in forming the American attitude towards the region. Furthermore, the Gulf officials are feeling the pinch from their European allies in this matter. In the last trade talks between the European Community and the Gulf officials which were held last month in the Qatari capital of Doha, there were heated exchanges between the two sides on the issue of human rights.

Mr. Abdulla Beshara, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council complained the European parliamentarians "had raised issues unrelated to the topics under discussion, some of which were political, the other social like the status of women, the means of information transfer and human rights! Mr. Beshara asked the Europeans in the conference if these issues would affect the ultimate results of the debate between the EC and the GCC. Mr. Martin Bingman, the deputy president of the

European Commission for internal market and industrial affairs, replied that the European Parliament represents the feelings and values of the European citizens and the commitment to human rights. Mr. Beshara commented that there was a difference between human rights as seen by the United Nations and the cultural differences. He added: "the Europeans who believe that their culture should be the centre of international culture must put some efforts to understand the cultures of others."

Once again, the issue of the differences of cultures and traditions is taken by the Gulf officials to justify the policies of repression and human rights violations. The activities of human rights campaigners outside the region, are beginning to bear fruition. Furthermore, the internal political developments in the region are contributing to the creation of a worldwide view that the lack of political freedoms in the Gulf is among the causes of instability. The Kuwaiti elections two months ago have helped to undermine the classic argument cited above. Also, the internal feuds amongst the tribal regimes of the Gulf have certainly not served their causes well. The opposition maintains the view that the nature of these regimes which oppose any call for change is one of the main causes of the political stagnation in the region.

In view of these facts, it is expected that the next few months or years may see changes in the political infrastructure. The Western position is essential in this issue since the relations between the West and the Gulf region bear heavily on the nature of the political system in any of these countries. This is not a call for meddling in the internal affairs of the Gulf by

foreign powers, but is certainly a call to curtail the flow of arms and expertise to the regimes whose records on human rights and political openness are among the worst in the world. The experience with the Iraqi regime is still fresh and the political storms that are engulfing the Western governments must serve notice to the West that it is morally and politically wrong to prop up corrupt governments which are similar in policies and practices to that of Saddam Hussain. The British government which is facing a challenge from the opposition vis-a-vis its trade relations with the Iraqi governments up and until two weeks prior to the invasion of Kuwait must now be careful not to continue propping up regimes such as that of the Al Khalifa of Bahrain by supplying it with expertise in the field of torture and human rights violations. As long as Ian Henderson, Bill, and Albert and others retain the iron fist policy towards the human rights activists in Bahrain, suspect a British role in the maltreatment of the people of Bahrain.

The recent escalation in the activities of the opposition in Bahrain has a historical precedent. Especially the petition is similar in nature and circumstances of the first petition submitted by the High Executive Committee to the father of the present Amir in 1954. The events that followed the first popular petition serve a good reminder to those concerned that ignoring the legitimate demands of the people always results in catastrophe and everyone pays a dire price. We hope the lessons of history are enough to make us all realise the stakes of undermining the genuine grievances of people, and the unwise reactions by other side in the circumstances.