

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Saddam is a Devil But Not the Only One

Saddam is alive and well. This is what the recent events in the Gulf region have shown beyond doubt. Whether this is by chance or design is immaterial at the moment. What is important is that two years after the first strike at Baghdad on 16th January 1991, the Iraqi dictator is still there challenging the international will and defying the United Nations Security Council's resolutions. Moreover, those who had challenged his authority have now resigned themselves to the bitter fact that he is there and they should do business with him. This is not good news neither to the Iraqi people nor to the people of the Gulf. Perhaps the only beneficiaries of this situation are the western powers who had attempted to topple him. The continuation of the threat coming from Baghdad helps them to secure major arms deals with the sheikhs of the Gulf at a time of the greatest recession in recent times.

One of the most important topics being thoroughly discussed in the Gulf is security of the region. This has been the case for the last fifty years or perhaps as long ago as 175 years. Then the security of the Gulf waters was being infringed by the pirates. The first treaty between Britain and the sheikhs of the Gulf was signed in 1820 banning them from any act of piracy and introducing a red flag on all ships to protect them from pirates. The same theme is being discussed today, the difference being the sources of insecurity. Up and until the early eighties, the Soviet Union was viewed as the main hindrance to the long-term peace in the region. It was assumed to have designs to occupy Iran in order to reach the hot waters of the Gulf one day, and the western strategic plans focussed on how to face up to a Soviet invasion of Iran and the Gulf. Throughout the eighties the Islamic Revolution of Iran replaced the USSR as the main threat to the security of the Gulf in the eyes of the western planners and their local fiefdoms. Now they fear the Iranian influence in the Central Asian republics which were part of the USSR.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq thirty months ago again changed the source of instability in the Gulf. Since then Saddam Hussain has become the main source of mischief in the region and the western plans have changed accordingly. The war against Iraq two years ago was launched by a multitude of international forces spearheaded by the United States armed forces. Two years on the western alliance found itself in a state of war again and a brief flare-up almost led to an all out war similar to the earlier one. Again Saddam Hussain exploited the situation to test the resolve of the new American

administration and attempted to defy the United Nations Inspection Team, moved few missile batteries in the South and carried out four cross-border incursions into Kuwait. The Americans again resorted to the use of firepower and Tomahawk cruise missiles to beat off Saddam's ambitions.

However, the new war efforts by the western alliance could not solicit the blessings of either the Arab countries or the world public opinion. This is because of the double standards being adopted by the West in its policies towards the political problems in the world. The hesitation by the West to use force to stop the Serbian aggression against the Bosnian Muslims has greatly affected the political alliances within the UN. Furthermore, the failure of the UN to force Israel to implement Resolution 799 which requires Israel to accept back the 410 Palestinian deportees has angered the Arabs and Muslims and played to a great extent into the hands of people like Saddam Hussain. The overall situation has caused a serious crack in the western alliance with France openly criticising the United States for her heavy-handedness approach towards Iraq.

The new American administration headed by Bill Clinton took over last month in a messy international political situation dominated by crisis all over the place. The next few months will be crucial in determining the direction of the new US government and her priorities. The new president is reputed for his emphasis on internal problems especially the faltering American economy. Whether he can stick to that with the same vigour as his electioneering slogans had suggested remains to be seen. Furthermore, Mr. Clinton is supposedly a man with a vision for change. He is from the post-war generation and was known for his critical views on the American policy in Vietnam. Human rights issue ranks high in his priorities according to political analysts who believe the new US president will give weight to it in his relations with foreign countries.

With this prospect in mind, the GCC leaders who held their 13th summit in Abu Dhabi last December discussed the possibility of foreign pressures to respect human rights and effect political openness in their countries. However, they continue to resist calls for reforms and are adamant to continue the old style of government without due attention to development in the world and new realities in the region especially in light of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the end of the myth of the Arab solidarity and fraternity. However, the damage has been done and the sheikhs of the Gulf have

to face the consequences of their past support to the Iraqi dictator. Moreover, the old-fashioned style of government cannot continue without major reforms. This is one of the causes of instability in the Gulf and the rulers will have a better chance of survival if they succumb to the realities of the new world and start reforming their regimes.

An example of the resistance of the Gulf sheikhs to any call for reforms is to be found in the case of Bahrain. On 16th January 1993, the Amir inaugurated his "Consultative Council" which consists of 30 selected members all of whom had been hand-picked by the Amir himself. The inauguration was nothing more than a stylish festival with brief speeches from both the Amir and the leader of the Council who himself was chosen by the Amir. The people did not share their ruler in his festivities and very little enthusiasm was expressed by them towards the new "Amir offer". People had hoped the government would heed their calls for serious political reforms and stop its oppressive measures against political activists. The insistence by the Amir on his council has left the people with a feeling of powerlessness on one hand and bitterness on the other.

Earlier, a delegation representing the people had had an audience with the Amir to enquire about the petition which had been handed to him signed by hundreds of the citizens. (see Voice of Bahrain No. 12). The Amir was cool in his reception and had little to offer. He kept insisting that the Consultative Council was the only solution and nothing else. When pressed on constitutional matters he shouted and evaded the issue. The delegation which consisted of five people who had advocated the latest political initiative realised they were wasting their time talking to the Amir and the meeting was abruptly ended. It now remains to be seen what actions the popularist movement will take to enforce its demands in the light of the Amir's refusal to listen to them, reply to their petition or initiate a dialogue with the ever growing opposition.

It is hard to see a way forward towards a political stability other than through the constitutional approach. The regimes of the Gulf consider this a totally unacceptable demand and are adamant in their rejection of any sort of reform. Unless real pressure is brought to bear on these regimes the stability of the Gulf region will remain threatened. Not only does Saddam constitute a threat but the backwardness of the sheikhs and their rejection of any openness or political reforms are all but hindrances in the way to stability. An Elected body is a nuisance

Inauguration of Al Khalifa's Talking Shop

The appointed Consultative (Shura) Council met for the first time on 16 January 1993. The Amir (ruler) inaugurated the first session with a less than five minutes speech. His audience were senior members of his ruling family, appointed members and a handful of invitees. The Amir addressed appointed members of the Council saying "we hope that your reputable Council shall mark a successful step for national unity of progress, stability and prosperity"

Back in 1975 when the Prime Minister withdrew his cabinet from the meetings of the elected National Assembly affecting the required quorum, his reasoning was stated in a letter he sent to his brother the Amir. He complained that the Assembly was hampering the work of the government and positive results were obtained other than troubles. The parliament was a nuisance that must be banned.

The powers of the ruling family were never challenged in such a way by legally-immune people as had happened in the elected assembly. It was for the first time that a "common" man was able to question the Interior Minister about allegations of maltreatment, torture and deportation, or to question the details of the national budget which reserved a large amount of the country's wealth to a handful of ruling family members. The cabinet was made accountable to the people. This is quit an extra-ordinary affair which the ruling family found impossible to live with. Accountability is nuisance, and the Amir stepped-in and banned it.

Since then, members of the opposition were harassed, persecuted and subjected to all forms of inhuman treatment. Twenty seven year later,

the ruling family was as determined as ever to resist any attempt for instituting accountability. On the contrary, the whole nation is made accountable to the ruling family. This was the underlying message of the Shura Council inauguration day, as can be read from the following extracts of interviews with the appointed members.

Abdul-Nabi Al-Shuala: "every one of this establishment (Shura Council) is proud of the trust given to him (by the Amir)". Abdulla bin Hindi: "I consider this Council as a gift to the people of Bahrain". Jasim Fakhroo: "our appointment to this Council was based on the trust and we all have to be competent for this dear trust of our Amir and our respected government". The latter could not be more explicit in indication who is accountable for who. Jalal Mohammed Jalal: "we shall remain competent in accordance with the trust given to us by the Amir". Farooq Al-Moayyad: "we were honoured by his Highness selection of us". Ibrahim Al-Mahmood: "I and my colleagues are honoured by the Amir trust and we shall endeavour to be competent". Khalifa Al-Dahrani: "the political leadership chose us and hope to be able to satisfy it". The other interviewed member played the same stereotype.

This is exactly what the ruling family is after. A group of obedient people endeavouring to satisfy the government and the person who appointed them and who can remove them at will and without explanation, as was stated in the Royal Decree. The first and last word is in the hand of the sovereign: the head of the ruling tribe, the Amir!

What did the Amir tell Opposition Leaders?-



Six members of the committee which sponsored the petition signed by hundreds of professionals and leading personalities demanding the restoration of democracy submitted to the Amir in mid November managed to meet the Amir two months after submission. Dr. Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmood Sheikh Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri, Sheikh Isa Al-Joder, Mr. Abdulwahhab Hussein, Mr. Mohammed Jabir Al-Sabah and Mr. Hamid Sangoor represented all strands of social and cultural tendencies in Bahrain (Sunni, Shia, religious, leftist and national strands). In the meeting the delegation stresses the popular demand for restoring the Constitution and allowing for the return of the elected national Assembly. The Amir replied pompously replied that what he offered was the best for the country. The meeting then ended in failure.

More Petitions

The wives and families of 22 political prisoners submitted a petition to the Amir in the first week of last month demanding the release of their relatives. The petition stated "We, a group of prisoners' families, whose sons have spent several years in jail on several charges which were passed in the shadow of totally different international, regional and local circumstances to the prevailing ones. It is hoped that the foreseeable future shall be based on values of consultatio, freedom and dialogue between the government and people for the interest of our beloved fatherland, we therefore, request that the National Day will be a day of ending the separation between us and our sons".

The prisoners are serving prison sentences of up to life passed in summary trials short of the international standards. The Amir replied by ordering more arrests and interrogations.

Another group of 26 people who have recently returned to the country wrote the the Ministry of Interior stating "it is now 4-7 months since we returned home, and we have been corresponding constantly requesting the re-issuing of our passports after the confiscation of old ones. And since the passport is a key document for the completion of any official matter, we request you to give your orders for issuing the passports".

The petition fell on the Amir's deaf ears.

Suppression Continues

Several people were arrested, interrogated and some of them were tortured before being released. The SIS also reverted to its well-established practice. Those arrested were released after intimidating them by ordering them to work as informers. Mr. Abdul-Husain Al-Ekry was arrested and released in December 1992. Mr. Yasir Alawi Al-Saari (17 years old), from Saar village was arrested and released three times during January 1993. The latter was threatened that if he did not work as informer he would be locked-up for several years. Sheikh Ali Jasim Al-Jamri, one of the signatories of the pro-democracy petition was interrogated for the second time in January 1993. Raed Al-Khawajah was arrested and released for the second time in January. He was told to report to Rifaa Police Station where he was ordered to work as an informer. Ali Yahya from Nuaim was also arrested in January and ordered to work as informer. Maki Mohammed Ali of Dar-Kulaib was subjected to the same thing in January. Hussain Al Tattan was also interrogated on 25.1.1993, threatened and asked to become an informer. He refused and was subsequently released.

These practices indicate the extent of the political dilemma facing the regime due to the increasing popular participation in the political activities in the country.

Jim Bill Retires

Jim Bill, the British officer in-charge of heading the Public Security Directorate has retired at the end of 1992. He was appointed by the British government as head of the Police in 1965 after the crushing of the uprising that year by the British Army which was stationed in three military bases at that time: Muharraq, Jufair and Hamalah. In that year the British government also appointed Ian Henderson to head the intelligence service. Both officers played a key role in persecuting, torturing and killing of people who dared to oppose the feudal Al-Khalifa regime.

Jim Bill retired from his position as Director General of Public Security. He is now in Britain and intends to write his biography! He had three deputies: Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, Ian Henderson and Ahmed Abdul-Rahman Bu-Ali. No candidate has been named for his succession. Ian Henderson was supposed to retire a decade ago. He is still in command of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS). The British Government always claimed that these and other dozens of British officers are not seconded by the HM Government. It is hard to convince the people of Bahrain otherwise.

Whether these individuals are helping the Al Khalifa regime on their own accord or carrying out their acts on behalf of the British

Continued on Page

Home Thought

The First Encounter Was Sad

Since the Amiri Order insists that the meetings of the newly appointed Consultative Council should be held in secrecy, it is hard to know what actually goes on or is it? Some well-briefed sources have revealed some information about the first meeting. The first encounter between the Council members and the government officials who had time to attend was exciting, to say the least.

By 9 o'clock in the morning, everybody was seated, composed and waiting. After a recitation from the holy Quran, the chairman (you may call him the speaker) rose on his feet. The speaker is Mr. Ebrahim Humaidan, who is also the Transport Minister, and previously held the post of the Minister of Labour, and before that, the Prosecutor General. If you excuse the translation, there now follows some of what took place, according to our well-informed source.

The Speaker: We should all be grateful that we are here today. It would have been impossible for any one of you to be elected had we had a free election. So, let us all swear allegiance to the one who made it possible, the Amir, His Highness Sheikh Isa bin Salman AL Khalifa, and not to forget the other His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman AL Khalifa, the Prime Minister, and the other His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Essa AL Khalifa, the Crown Prince, and the other....etc etc.

All the Members: Yeh....Yeh....Long live the Amir, his brother, his son and all his family and servants and anyone who has any thing to do with them.

The Speaker: The first item on our agenda today is to decide, what on earth are we here for.

Member: To discuss things.

Another Member: What things?

The Speaker: None of your business.

Member: What?

The Speaker: Let us get on with the business of today. To define the role of this democratic forum.

Member: What did you say? I can't hear very well.

Another Member: Neither can I. 10 members: Nor us.

The Speaker: Order....Order...Order Keep quiet.

Member: What? What did you say?

The Speaker: I said shut up (oh God what am I doing here with this bunch of deaf businessmen).

Member: So, why does your excellency think are we here?

Eh?

The Speaker: Because the Amir told us so. Now lets press on gentlemen. We have already wasted a lot of time

Member: Who cares..

Another Member: I do. I have to go back to my company.

The Speaker: (looking a bit exhausted and irritable) No you don't. Sit where you are all of you. The role of this council....

Member: Can we have some tea. I don't like this water with gas in it. It makes my stomach turns like a concrete mixer.

Another Member: Like the mixer you hired from me and never paid for it?

1st Member: Oh yeh... do you want to sort it out here, or outside this chamber?

The Speaker: Please can we get to bu...?

Member: We are. He borrowed a concrete mixer from me.

The Speaker: Quiet all of you. Now, why we are here?

Member: To represent people of Bahrain.

Another Member: Represent them where? Why? Who? Who?

Member: To tell the government what people think of it and its policies.

The Prime Minister: Who the hell you think you are? Another Member: Yeh, who do you think you are. We are here to represent the government.

Member: What do you mean? represent the government before who?

Another Member: Are you deaf? we are here to tell the people about the government policies and grievances? The people are oppressing the government. That is why we are selected by the oppressed.

Member: I thought...

The PM: You thought what?

Member: I thought someone was bringing us tea, I can't think if I am thirsty.

The Speaker: With all due respect, apart from my colleagues in the government, none of you has the farthest idea why he has been appointed.

Member: I know. We are here to discuss government laws and policies.

Another Member: Some of the government laws and policies.

The Speaker: A very tiny some, indeed. But, honestly let us discuss our role.

The PM: Let me say one word or two or three. You see, we have been under tremendous pressure from inside and outside the country to introduce some sort of political reforms and public participation. Constantly we have been reminded of the infamous 1973 Constitution. I now feel so angry that I agreed to that document.

We are also reminded of what our opponents call human rights violations. (big laughter from everyone) and which we rightly call the upholding of the law. We have a security law to uphold security laws. You can call it, as my mental would, the Mother of all Laws. The opposition does not like it. Tough luck. Now faced with all this pressure, and squeezed by bad economy, we decided to form this council. It is not a big deal, but after all this is what our traditions allow. (pause)... If I hear any more snoring, I shall sack all of you. So, here we are. You have been selected, because we thought you could never be elected, you lucky people.

A lucky Member: Thank you your highness. But, are we going to discuss some of your policies, just in case someone asks us what did we do.

The Speaker: If someone dares to ask you, tell him to get lost. This is why we have secret meetings.

Member: I see...Sorry, it was silly of me not to grasp the wisdom behind the rationale of secrecy of our meetings. However, I still think we need to put a gloss on the whole thing. For example, we will object to...

The PM: You object to nothing. Where is the

dammend tea?

The Speaker: Here it is. The meeting is adjourned until next month, when the main item on our agenda will be e...come on..all of you.

All Members: Why are we here?

During the tea break, some journalists contacted members and asked them about the nature of the meeting. One member said that it was a close encounter, the government almost lost a motion of no confidence.

Journalist: Who tabled it?

Member: the government.

Journalist: But why? How come the ministers initiate doubts on their competence?

Member: They did not. The government wanted to pass a law.

Journalist: What law?

Member: Can't tell you. It is secret. Any way, they wanted to pass a law, and some of us objected, which prompted the government to test our loyalty. So they asked for a vote of confidence.

Journalist: Then what happened?

Member: We looked at each other, scratched our head, and said: let us give them a chance. After all, the same cabinet had been in power only for 22 years. You can't expect miracles in such a short time.

Journalist: No you can't. You are right. So you got the government off the hook?

Member: What hook? What are you trying to say? Has anybody sent you to cause me and my family trouble? Are you mad or a spy? The government is very good, and I said nothing against it. Please go and hang yourself on a hook.

Out on the street, some members were extremely depressed. One of them told a close friend that he feels particularly sad, that he is just ... for a government which imprisons innocent young people, torture them, and has a very poor record on every one of its activities. His friend asked him why does he not ask to be discharged of this dreadful responsibility. His reply was to stare his friend in the eye, smile and then in low voice said: You must be joking, we are stuck between the anvil and the hammer. On one hand the ruling family wants us to act as a fig leaf for their bad policies. And on the other, the people are accusing us of betrayal, or at best naivety.

- When is the next meeting? His friend asked in a sympathetic tone.

- Don't know? When they call us. What I know is that I might be very ill when it comes.

Jim Bill Retires - Continued from Page 2

government is immaterial to the people of Bahrain. They see a British hand in their continuous ordeals and they, naturally, blame the British government for their hardships. It is difficult to accept the claim that the British government does not have a hand in the export of torturers, and she will be wiser to recall these messengers of death and terror back home to serve the country better and to let the people of Bahrain enjoy living in a more secure place. It is inconceivable to continue propping up a repressive regime which has a black record.

Tom William Knows Much, Does Little

He knows a lot. His files contain countless cases which need immediate attention. He is a kind man who demonstrates a humane character and his face reflects real concerns. However, experience has shown him unable to impose his will and what people get are no more than symbolic gestures.

Tom William is an aspiring young man whose main mission at the American Embassy in Bahrain is monitoring the situation of human rights in that country. Unlike other diplomatic staff at the fortress-embassy who report to the Foreign Ministry, Tom reports to the Congress. Whether the American flirting with the human rights issue is genuine or a mere political exercise is not clear. What is clear, however, is that slogans have often been used to settle scores and have rarely become an issue in the American foreign policy except where political and economic interests are threatened by another country. This was certainly the case in the eighties when President Reagan declared war on communism and later on Islamic fundamentalism. Human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union were highlighted as part of the campaign against their rivals. The defeated President Bush paid little attention to this issue and has a real inclination towards the use of force to settle accounts.

Especially where allies of Washington are under the spotlight the American administration has shown no enthusiasm to pursue matters of this kind seriously with the offending country. With the recent change in the American government, there is an anticipation of some kind of change in the priorities of the foreign policy. President Bill Clinton has hinted, during his election campaign to the possibility of pursuing this matter further with governments who systematically violate human rights. It remains to be seen whether the boss of the White House is serious about the issue. He has already been forced to change the list of priorities he had assigned himself to tackle, and setbacks for his programmes have already surfaced especially those related to his pledge to lift the recruitment of homosexuals in the armed forces.

Mr William knows, for example, that Clinton's nominee for the post of the Attorney General at the White House, Zoe Baird, was seriously challenged and he had to withdraw his support for her nomination. The lady was accused of knowingly recruiting an illegal immigrant to work for her, thereby breaking the law. In Bahrain, the Law is violated by the ruling family as a routine, and people, including Tom William, are aware of this. However, little is said or done by whoever is able to say or do something about it. The Constitution has been suspended since 1975, and the Amir is endeavouring to abolish it. The latest initiative by the ruler, that is the convening of a wholly-nominated Consultative Council, is a step towards the eventual abolition of the Constitution. Mr William has been busy in the last three months trying to sense the reaction of the people to the nominated council. When the whole idea was challenged, he stressed his conviction that it was a "step forward". In fact, he tried, in vain, to

urge Bahrainis to go along with the abolition of the Constitution claiming the Amir is serious about reforms.

Mr. William knows that the Bahraini ruler does not believe in anything that may lead, one day, to the weakening of his position. Any expression of a free opinion unwanted by the authorities is punishable by arrest, torture and eventual prison sentence. He also knows, from his experience at the American Embassy in Bahrain, that none of the people whom he has recently met, has expressed enthusiasm towards the wholly-nominated Council, and no one expressed desire for the continuation of the old-style way of government exhibited by the Al Khalifas of Bahrain. Because of his frequent visits to the offices of the Bahraini professionals and intellectuals he must have realised how bitter the feelings of the people are, and how the disenchantment of the middle class is threatening to lead to a volatile situation. Despite the fact that no other regime in the other GCC countries may rival the Al Khalifas in their cruelty and lack of any sensitivity towards human values, it is strange to hear any favourable comments from the special representative of a country whose democracy is the source of the pride of its people.

Tom William's encounter with the families of the prisoners of conscience in Bahrain must have revealed a great deal of the agony of the people as a direct result of the propping up by the West of a regime which lacks the most basic form of modernity. He has listened to personal accounts of suffering, he has painstakingly accepted the risk and made himself available to those citizens who wanted an audience with him simply because they thought the American Congress would come to their aid. Tom William is in touch with the publications of the opposition and is well-acquainted with the affairs of Bahrain. Yet all he says to his friends is that he has no political powers and decision on a positive action against the Bahraini authorities is the duty of the Congress and the State Department.

Now, that a change of guards has occurred in Washington, the ball is back in the American court especially in the field of human rights. The Gulf region, though vital to the American interests in a sense, is worthy of humane considerations. It must not be treated simply as an oil well. There are inhabitants who have human values and dignity. These attributes are constantly violated by the present governments with the full knowledge that the United States of America will come to their rescue as soon as their actions has landed them into trouble. Not only when they become victims of dictators like Saddam Hussain do they become eligible for military help, but they are also supported when they face internal challenges. Both in 1956 and 1965, the British troops were landed from ships anchoring off the Bahrain island to quell popular revolts calling for democracy and respect of human values.

Indeed, it is not Britain which is the strong power in the Gulf, but the United States has, so far, failed to tame the arrogance and dictatorship of the tribal regimes in the Gulf. Tom

William does not need to be told of all these facts. What he needs to know is that his country's reputation, credibility and, perhaps, interests, are at stake in the Gulf. The tribal regimes are too weak to take any step independent of their superiors in the western capitals especially Washington. People of the Gulf do not need more than an even-handed approach from powers with interests in the region. Files of international organisations such as Amnesty International, Middle East Watch, and the State Department contain enough material to suggest the necessity of a change of course in the western attitude towards the political situation in the Gulf. It may well be that other considerations are preventing decision makers from taking the appropriate measures to combat the phenomenon of dictatorship. But it must be stressed that time has come for a course of action that makes life more tolerable and worthy for the people of the region. They have always attributed their illnesses and badlucks, with a fair amount of justification, to outside powers which have failed to stand up to their responsibilities.

It is also time that Tom William takes a fresh breath and imposes his presence by advocating a fairer way of treatment by the rulers of the Gulf, especially the Al Khalifa of Bahrain towards their subjects.

We Are Hopeful...

If the popularity of a regime is gauged by the extent of popular solidarity against it, and the rejection of its policies by its own people, then the government of Bahrain is certainly one of the most unpopular regime in the region. She has managed to solicit the support of a certain sector of the society, namely; those who had benefited from the corruption of the regime. The majority has, however, remained sceptical of its policies.

The recent rapprochement among the various political and religious groups has come as a shock to the government which thought its policies in the eighties were sufficient to sew discord among the people of Bahrain. The coming together of the Shia and Sunni leaders, the Islamic and nationalist tendencies, the professionals and social personalities has been viewed with great concern by those who had been gambling on the continuation of the state of anarchy and social fragmentation.

Although it is too early to build on the newly formed alliance that culminated in the popular petition calling on the Amir to reinstate constitutional rule in the country, the results are so far encouraging. This is why the Amir appeared angry and drawn out when he met the leaders of the opposition one day before the inauguration of the Consultative Council. He was so furious at the appearance of a popular delegation comprising of members from all walks of life at a time when the government was gambling on the sectarian and ideological discord among the various groups of the society.

It is not too much to hope for a fully-fledged political front leading to a popular movement that could seriously threaten the stability of the regime, despite its elusive stability.