

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Human Rights and Wrongs in the Gulf

The GCC Countries Had Little to Show at the World Conference in Vienna

Whatever the World Conference on Human Rights had or had no achievements, some useful understanding has emerged that will have profound impact on the evaluation of the world's political situation. Nonwithstanding the reservations of certain political groupings such as the Asian one, the performance of other less significant powers is worth observing. The Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were abundant and their contribution was immense. However, of interest to us here is the way representatives of the Gulf states at the conference put their case forward.

Here, three distinctive approaches were there. The Gulf's NGOs had a strong case to put. It is simply that the governments of their countries have all along resisted any move to enhance the situation of Human Rights in the six states comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The lobbies of the conference venue in the Austrian capital, Vienna, witnessed their activities which were in line with the other NGOs. Plenty of evidence was distributed in the form of written material such as booklets, leaflets,....etc. Human Rights groups from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia had a case to present.

In a region where the formation of a human rights group is tantamount to the declaration of war against the state, according to the governments, human rights are easily violated at state level. When a group of Saudi intellectuals ventured to present a simple committee to defend human rights in Saudi Arabia last May, their fate was immediately sealed. Not only did they find themselves jobless, but they were totally alienated from the system by an official decree. Despite the fact that their social status was greatly enhanced and that thousands of citizens declared their unequivocal support to the committee, the special branch has laid siege to their houses and are under constant monitoring. The Americans with whom they had an audience before the royal decree declined to do anything in their defence.

The other level of presence in Geneva was the pseudo-official Kuwaiti Human Rights committee. The Kuwaiti parliament had established a human rights forum and some of its members were present. Some Members of Parliament presented a reasonable account of their activities in Kuwait where monitoring is necessary to make sure no excesses would take place in the treatment of foreign workers, those without nationality, the bedoons, and other opposition figures. The Kuwaiti example was greeted by

delegates since it resembles to a certain extent, the conditions in other countries where a certain degree of freedom prevails. The democratic atmosphere in Kuwait has definitely led to an improvement in human rights in that small state, thanks to the shocking experience with Saddam Hussain. The presence of the Kuwaiti delegates was an embarrassment to other Gulf officials who would not approve of similar activities in their countries. The reason being that those activities are not in line with the cultural heritage of the region.

The third level of presence was that of the governments. The new Secretary General of the GCC, Sheikh Fahem bin Sulatan Al Qasimi, did take the effort to go to Vienna to present his case, that is, the Gulf states enjoy the best record of human rights in the absence of constitutional rule. Having just been nominated for the post, Sheikh Al Qasimi had to encounter a reality which is hostile to his style of thinking. However, he did well to satisfy his bosses in Riyadh. The Saudi Foreign Minister, Saud Al Faisal, was, however, more controversial. The protocol did come to his aid and he was saved from a barrage of criticism among the delegates. He went back to his country with no commitment to touch upon the issue of human rights in his country having been spared the direct onslaught should the environment have been different. The Committee to Defend the Legal Rights was not represented in Vienna. Unlike the Kuwaitis, that was the last thing the Saudis would have allowed to happen.

In his address to the summit, Saud Al Faisal did his best to deflect the attention from home. He emphasised the necessity to take the traditions and differences in culture into account when addressing the issue of human rights in a country. This motto has become familiar in the Gulf politics and to reverse the trend an immense effort needs to be done. He stressed that the international community should seek to "apply the concepts of human rights in a way that takes into account the differences in societies, its habits, traditions and its beliefs". According to him, the issue of human rights must not be used to justify interference in the internal affairs of other states. He urged the world community to be cautious when reviewing the human rights violations in countries such as his because, according to him, that would deepen differences among countries. Prince Saud Al Faisal used the opportunity to defend his country's records on human rights and outlined various ratifications by his government of Is-

lamic covenants on the issue. However, he evaded the issue of the crack-down against the human rights committee last May.

The proceedings of the World Conference which was the first in 25 years, i.e., since the Tehran Conference in 1968, have clearly shown a diversion in the perception of the human rights issue world-wide. Instead of improving upon the existing covenants and agreements on the issue, discussion was diversified and the third world countries within their regional groupings objected strongly to the basis of the contemporary notions on the issue of human rights. For example, notions such as universality and indivisibility as embodied in the UN Declaration on Human Rights became issues of contentions and disputes. It had been anticipated that with a world conference, the issue of human rights would be squarely dealt with in a modern and responsible manner. What was not expected was the conclusion of the conference on a note of dispute and disagreement, and the absence of any commitment on the part of the governments to make sure they would respect rights of their citizens in an honourable way.

Of interest to us is the lack of coordination among the GCC delegations. They have failed to present a unified stand on the issue and they were even less enthusiastic towards the implementation of the tenets of the Human Rights Declaration and the two protocols issued in 1966. They have failed to ratify the international covenants on the issue and banned any organisation dealing with it. Their dilemma lies in the fact that any identification with international norms and standards would lead to them being scrutinised on their practices and policies towards their citizens. Democracy, for example, would have been presented as an area where GCC states had failed in their international commitments which require that political rights of individuals be respected.

The Western double standards in the issue of rights as manifested in the crisis of the Balkans, have done little to enhance the West's chances of securing commitments from third world countries to respect the rights of individuals.

The only hope is that the world conference on human rights has put the GCC states on their guard and that the international community has not forgotten its commitment towards a better quality of life in all parts of the world. If this does not happen, the Vienna conference would have been nothing but yet another of those talking shops.

Evading the Real Issue of Human Rights

Al-Qussaibi Failed to Enhance His Government's Reputation

Ghazi Al-Qussaibi, Bahrain's Foreign Ministry under-secretary, represented the Bahraini Government at the UN-sponsored Vienna human rights conference (14-25 Jun 1993). The International Conference on Human Rights was attended by some 83 governments' representatives and some 1500 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Bahrain, in line with other oppressive states, is in no position to speak about respect of human rights. The many reports from international human rights groups about abuse of human rights condemn the feudal regime to one of the worst in the region. Yet, Mr. Al-Qussaibi had the gut to address the International Conference and claimed that his government supported the UN efforts for enhancing international cooperation in the field of human rights.

Al-Qussaibi claimed that "the State of Bahrain gave priority to protection of individual and collective rights for its nationals". He further elaborated that these include "political, economical, cultural and social rights based on freedom of expression and rule of law". Al-Qussaibi did not clarify what he meant by these terms, but indicated the opposition of the Government for introducing new bureaucratic position, i.e. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He claimed this will drain the financial resources of the UN (now at less than 1% of the total budget).

As for political rights, we do not need to provide a more striking evidence falsifying this claim than the suspension of the elected parliament and the constitution since 1975. Since then the country is ruled by Amiri (royal) decrees. More than half of the government ministers and high officials are from the Al-Khalifa ruling family which represents less than one percent of the total population. Economical rights are exemplified by the dominance of the prime minister (through his Unitag Group) and other members of the royal family over trade. One third of the oil revenue (out of 110 b/d from both Bahrain and Abu-Sa'fa fields) goes to the ruling family while the country suffers from a contract-

ing economy. Cultural and social rights are non-existent. Bahrain natives are denied their rights for forming societies and schools. In 1984 the government closed the Islamic Enlightenment Society and its schools. In recent years schools in A'ali and Tobli villages were shut down. The crown prince Hamad has up until now prevented the Shia population in the new town named after him from establishing a gathering place. When a group of elders requested him to allow the establishment of the gathering place, he replied: "don't you have enough place in the nearby villages?".

It is a joke to hear a representative of such oppressive government speaks about rule of law. Of course people are ruled by laws passed by the ruling family. The implementation of the State Security Decree is considered rule of law. This law prescribes imprisonment of any suspect for up to three years, renewable, without trial or charges. Other un-constitutional laws relating to trading in modern slavery, by importing and abusing cheap labour from sub-Indian continent and Far Eastern countries.

It is no wonder that Al-Qussaibi opposed the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, because Bahrain will be probed and punished. That is of course if the US and UK governments didn't succeed in shielding the ruling family. The claim that cultural particularity must be taken into consideration, especially in relation to selection of the type of government is another attempt to stand in the face of mounting internal pressure for democratisation of the political system. Neither Islam nor any other system of values accept the notion of a ruling family running the country for selfish interests.

The right to development is important for developing countries. But human rights are universal and indivisible. No country can develop the materialistic side of a nation by subordinating human being. The latter is never a means for development, rather the aim of the development is to provide the happiness and dignity of human race.

Guilty of Driving on the Road

Aqeel Jaffar Al Saqqai is a young man in his twenties. He owns a humble car which he drives daily to his work, without bothering anyone. He hoped his good behaviour would save his skin from the oppression of the system in Bahrain. His hopes were futile.

One day last month, his luck ran out. As he overtook a car which was driving slowly in front of him, he was immediately harrassed and forced to stop by moustached and speckled men. He was to spend 25 days in prison. His crime was; overtaking a young boy from the family of Al Khalifa. Why didn't you stop? Are you blind? Do you want us to kill you? Who had asked you to do that? (overtake the young sheikh). Unless you confess, you will continue to receive your due night (torture)...etc.

For twenty five days first at the prison of Al Houra, then at Al Qodhaibiyya, the young man had to endure the wrath of specially-trained executioners who often seemed thirsty to have a go at him. His ordeal came to an end only after his family asked for the mediation of some businessmen. A sum of BD 250 (US\$ 750) was paid as a ransom.

Arab Hospitality: the Saudi Way

The scene of a young woman being pulled from her hair in the mid summer heat of Saudi Arabia was unbearable to Sayyed Alawi Al Shahrakani, so he intervened to stop that. He was to spend three days for saying few words which did not impress the Sheikh.

At heart of Medina, the second holy city of the Muslims, the Bahraini cleric was going home when he saw a group of Saudi police and members of the a Wahhabi committee beating a young female pilgrim with her body seminaked. He said "If the King was here, he would not have condoned your action". That was enough to enrage the "law-enforcement" group whose main function is to humiliate people and bully pilgrims.

One member of the Bahraini Hajj committee, Sheikh Ahmed Al Asfoor was summoned to the police headquarters and interrogated for three hours. Later he was released, but Mr. Shahrakani remained in the cell for three days in the most inhumane conditions. Go to Saudi Arabia and see for yourself their brand of the Arab hospitality.

Chamber's Elections Fever

The recent elections of the Bahrain's Chamber of Commerce and Industry were held in an atmosphere of intense competition. Eighteen Committee members were voted for the board out of 37 candidates. For the first time in its history, a lady was among the new board of the Chamber. The government has all along attempted to hijack the elections and at some stage presented her own candidates for the posts. Few years ago, election process was interrupted by the government for fear of members not in line with governmental policies winning places in the board.

Results of last month's elections were not surprising, although many hopefuls could not make it. The disappointment is that only 1200 members cast their votes out of a total membership of 4000. Only half the members paid their subscription fees and those who did not were not allowed to vote. However, the number of members is only 10 percent of the total number of those on the Trading Register. People have given up hope of being able to effect any change through membership of professional bodies in the prevailing political circumstances. Still the Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the only powerful body which is able to assert itself and point to the excesses of the ruling family.

Khalifa Outlines His Views On Patriotism

"This is the true patriotism" announced the prime minister when addressing the appointed Consultative (Shura) Council at the end of its first session. The appointed members were grateful for this blessing. Khalifa went on: "We don't need a politics which don't take into consideration interests of this country". "Politics has nothing to do with parties and partisan incited by selfish and probably foreign greed". Such an un-warranted attack may be understood by understanding the mentality of the prime minister. During the second Gulf War and under the pressure of Qatar claim for sovereignty of Hawar Islands, Khalifa met with a group of businessmen and personalities to sense the mood in the country. During that meeting, one businessman, asked the prime minister: Why is it after decades that the Interior Ministry is still staffed by foreigners? Khalifa turned angrily to the businessman and asked him: How many Indians do you employ in your companies? Many of them are Indians, came the reply. Did we ever intervened in your business and asked why is it still you are employing foreigners? Silence followed as the answer was clear in its terms. According to Khalifa, the Interior Ministry is his private property. He does what ever he wishes. No accountability to any one. Indeed, the ruling family considers all Bahrain, its wealth, resources and people as private properties. Khalifa created another private property: the Shura Council. It is up to him who wins the membership, what is to be discussed and what term mean in the vocabulary. Therefore "true patriotism" is what he sees fit to suit private interests of the ruling family. In his view, "true patriotism" has nothing to do with an elected parliament, a functioning constitution or any sort of public accountability. On the contrary the members of the Shura Council are accountable to him and therefore they belong to his properties and qualify for his "true patriotism".

Nuisance in the Backyard

Yemen's Elections Irritate the Gulf Sheikhs

Democracy is not far way any more. A multi-party election for the legislature on 27 April, followed by the formation of a multi-party government last month. An advanced model for pluralism is being established in the Arabian peninsula to the dismay of the Saudis, Al-Khalifa and other sheikdoms, who vehemently insist that democratic elections and representative government are alien to the traditions of the region. Not any more. No one can deny that the Yemenis are the original Arabs in the peninsula. After all, Arabs came either from Adnan or Qahtan, both forefathers came from Yemen. The American Administration is finding it hard to support the new democracy, as it vowed to do so. The US is a staunch supporter of the Saudis, who have up until now denied their people any form of representation. When recently a group of people formed the Committee for Legitimate Rights, the Americans stood-by while the Saudis dismantle the committee.

The Saudis, insistent on resisting and combating any move towards democratisation, is attempting to destabilise Yemen. Last month while the government is being formed, the Saudis issued warning letters to six companies exploring oil in Yemen. The Saudis claim that the oil companies are on Saudi territories and must stop exploration. Yemenis recognise the challenge. After expelling nearly a million Yemeni people from Saudi Arabia two years ago, and thus denying Yemen of a source of income, the plan is now to starve Yemenis of any other income. When oil flows, the Yemeni people will not only better off politically but economically they will prosper, thus leading the region out of dark politics.

Appointed assemblies, ruling families governments, monopoly of economical resources is under threat. No one can claim the threat is coming from revolutionary Iran and no sectarian pretext is available at hand to justify a repressive governments' campaigns similar to the ones in the eighties. The threat comes from democracy in the south of the Arab land.

The Gulf people are well aware of the double-standards of the American policy in the region and expect no support from other than themselves. Change is an internal process and must remain so. Moreover, change is inevitable in countries where everything has developed: education, health, transport, housing, etc., except one thing: politics. The government and high office are reserved to certain people with the same surnames. People aspire change, and the only thing which will not change is change itself.

Bank Robbery in Daylight

While the people were celebrating Eid Al-Adha, a group of people were busy carrying out a Hollywood-type robbery in the Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait. The robbed safe containing BD675 millions was emptied without any trace of robbers. The safe needs two secret codes and two key, in the position of two people, independent of each other. The question raised by observers is whether the money ever entered the safe or was it fiddled on paper. Crime has been on the increase in the past five years in a way that has never been. One main group to blame for this rise in crime is the ruling Al-Khalifa family.

They Were in Vienna Too

Words of Bahrain's Envoy Are Proven False by Mounting Detentions

Interrogations of young men continued unabated throughout the months of May and June. No obvious reason was apparent apart from the fact the government was acting in a pre-emptive manner to prevent the spiralling of the popular anger. The following is an account of these repressive measures:

* On 16.6.1993 the security forces, acting on orders from the hierarchy directed by Ian Henderson searched the house of a young man, Shaker Al Hourri, handcuffed him and took him to the detention centre. Two days earlier, his house had been thoroughly searched but nothing "subversive" was found. They were looking for anti-government leaflets. Nothing has been heard about him since.

* Habib Khalil Ibrahim, from the town of Jid Hafs was briefly detained in the middle of June, interrogated, abused and subsequently released. He was asked to join the security service but refused.

* Sheikh Hussain Al Mahroos was summoned by the special branch on 19/6/1993 and interrogated. The questioning was about Sheikh Isa Ahmed Qassim, a high-profile cleric who had been a member of parliament twenty years ago and is still active. Mr. Al Mahroos had just returned from a pilgrimage trip to Iran where Sheikh Quassim is currently engaged in higher studies.

* During the month of May, many people were detained, interrogated and later released. Among these were Hassan Ali Mansoor Al Basri, Abdul Hussain Ali Ahmed, Mohammed Salman Ahmed and Mohammed Ali Hamed (all from the village of Maqab), Jaffer Al Jassas and Sayyed Hashim Al Hally (from the town of Jid Hafs). From the town of Duraz, Mohammed Jaffer, Salman Yousef and Sheikh Hussain Al Akraf were also given the same treatment. And from Manama, Al Sayyed Ni'ma and Jamil Al Ekaisa were both detained, abused and threatened with torture.

* For two days (29 and 30th May) Sheikh Mohammed Khojestejeh was subjected to intensive interrogation after his return from Iran. He was specifically asked about his relations with Sheikh Issa Qassem.

* On 24th June 1993, three young men were detained, interrogated, abused and then released. Two of them were brothers; Jaffar and Mahdi Sahwan. They had been repeatedly detained in the past. The elder, Jaffar, had been jailed for

five years from 82-87.

* For the first time in some years, a lady was briefly detained and interrogated. Huda Al Jallawi, 35, was summoned to the Al Qal'a Torture chambers and questioned for hours about her activities in the ladies circles.

If anything these interrogations point to the fact that the situation in Bahrain is both volatile and critical. It may not be on the verge of an outright revolution, but the political situation is polarised in a way that could not lead to stability. The government of Al Kahlifa has attempted to reflect an image of stability and being in control of events, but when this control cannot be achieved except by the use of force and repression, the situation cannot be one which may be described as stable.

Ironically, at the time these young men were being subjected to interrogation and abuse for no valid reason, the Bahraini main delegate to the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna was addressing the convention emphasising his government's "respect of human rights". Mr. Ghazi Al Qosaibi, the Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, resorted to slogans to make his point. Bahrain, he said, had expressed her total support for the International Declaration on Human Rights, being the first practical experience in the field of human rights on international level. However, he admitted that promotion of the issue of human rights differed from country to country due to historical, cultural and economic circumstances. This, he explained, was behind the lack of progress in the issue in some countries. He elaborated on his government's attitude towards human rights. However, he failed to commit himself or his government to the ratification of the international covenants and protocols related to this issue.

It is not very difficult to claim anything in an environment where facts are often buried underneath the basis of the present-day civilisation especially where the weak has no place. The mounting evidence against the validity and authenticity of Mr. Qosaibi's claims renders his remarkless unworthy of being taken seriously. He was among those governmental representatives who opposed the proposal that the UN Human Rights Director be upgraded to the status of a high commissioner. Such development would have meant catching regimes such as that of the Al Khalifa of Bahrain red-handed.

Henderson and Ibrahim Al-Khalifa

The British officer who managed the oppressive security intelligence apparatus since 1966 has been divulged in the two dailies for the first time early this year. This followed the departure of another Briton, Mr. Jim Bill, who headed the Public Security Directorate before his retirement last December. Then two people struggled for the position, the ageing Ian Henderson and a member of the ruling family, Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa. The latter disappeared after failing to get the promotion for the top security post. On 27 May, Al-Ayyam

daily published another photograph of the bold-headed Henderson wearing his black glasses. This time Ibrahim bin Mohammed was also standing next to the Interior Minister. Both, Henderson and Ibrahim, now bear the title Acting-Director General of the Public Security. This followed a lull in the power struggle which re-surfaced with allegations levelled against another senior security officer, Hasar Isa Al-Hasan. The latter is accused of levying money for himself in return for employing foreign cheap labour in the anti-riot squad.

The Powerless Council is Doomed

Six Months of Useless Debates Have Sealed its Fate

Having failed to show a strong performance in its six months of existence, the "Consultative Council" has now resorted to discussing petty issues. There is already an increasing disquiet among its members having felt themselves totally powerless. Although no major defections have been reported, the mood in Manama is of failure and despair. The government, as well as the public, have now realised that an imposed form of mandate cannot be expected to work smoothly. With the absence of any popular enthusiasm towards the appointed council, the next few months will be crucial for both the Council and the government. So far, the regime has managed to maintain a brave face in a situation where problems are mounting, both economically and politically. It is one thing to impose your will on the people and another thing to satisfy them and keep them quiet. The governmental policies have, hitherto, remained static and have shown little flexibility when dealing with the real issues of the people.

Few weeks after their appointment to the Council, some members, having felt social pressure on them for being powerless, tried their luck. They went around collecting information on the Bahraini exiles from their families. Their plan was to raise the issue at the Council and show the people they could do something tangible. They contacted many families and compiled information on their sons, such as their personal details, qualifications, when they left Bahrain, their political affiliation, their whereabouts etc. Although they were reluctant, few families were prepared to cling to the faint hope the "MPs" offered. That was the end of the story. It was reported that the Prime Minister had rebuffed them for their action and warned them "not to get involved in Politics again". When the Amiri decree pardoning few exiles came last month, the beneficiaries of that "gift" were different from those the "MPs" tried to help. That incident caused a lot of embarrassment to those figures who thought their appointment to the Council was an act of honour and appreciation of their contribution to the state.

Now that the Council has gone into summer recess, the Prime Minister is acting as the head of both the Executive and the Legislative powers in the country. In the concluding session for this year, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman addressed the members to thank them for their services to his government and to say few more words. Those words amounted to nothing more than some slogans exposing the real problems of his regime. He said: "the Council has proved to everyone and every just person that politics is not sermons or platforms for competition, and that it is not parties or partisanship motivated by minor benefits and personal desires or perhaps foreign interests, but the political acts is the true patriotism as it should be". He further added that "we need whoever is aware of the circumstances which had passed or are surrounding us."

The PM ordered the 30 members of the Council to spend their holiday to discover the

needs of the citizens and plan their next programme accordingly. It was clear that he still feels the people are not satisfied with his government's performance, and that a lot has to be done. He always attempts show that people's needs are nothing more their bread and better. The non-material needs are never addressed, neither by the government nor by the Council. The political situation in the country cannot be described as stable when there are around 100 political prisoners, over 600 exiles, in excess of 30,000 unemployed, etc. Any serious attempt to contain the situation must begin with the treatment of these difficulties. These are not hollow claims, but are hard facts which are substantiated by local and international organisations.

The Council, whose meetings are held in secret and whose agenda are prepared by the government is not expected to last long especially after the fiasco of the first six months. It was reported that it had dealt with the issue of the unemployment, but no substantial policies have emerged from its discussions. Not a single practical scheme has yet been devised to reduce the number of the unemployed. It is a political rather than a technical decision, related to whether the government is ready to open up the political debate in the country or not. The previous decades have proved the ability and willingness of the local workforce to strike for political and economic reasons. That is exactly what the Al Khalifa wanted to prevent. Strikes have often proved embarrassing to the government, and it does not want to see a repetition of the fifties, sixties and seventies. One of the ways to prevent it was to maintain a ratio between foreign and local employees in such a way that the locals could not stage a successful strike alone since they are not the majority

within the overall workforce.

The attempts of the Council to deal with this crisis are thus futile, and are only allowed for local consumption. In reality nothing could be allowed to take place if it meant violating the sensitive balance of power between the government and the people. It must be remembered that the Al Khalifa have never, in their 210 year rule of Bahrain, felt secure, and the only way they will remain in power is by forging strategic relations with outside powers such as Britain and US that could salvage them at times of crisis. Repression is another tool in their campaign to maintain their grip on the country. The Council will never be allowed to discuss these issues, i.e., security, workforce, freedom of press, excesses of members of the ruling family, etc. Decisions on these matters lies squarely with the Amir and his brother, the Prime Minister. Before its recess, the Council tried to fill its time with discussions on minor issues such as the processions during the month of Muharram when the locals pour to the streets to perform their rituals. Apart from these side issues, the Council does not have any prospect of becoming a serious platform to discuss the policies of the country. The Al Khalifa will never be able to stomach the idea of a democratic forum which will do what the Kuwaiti parliament is doing at the moment. Members of the Al Khalifa family are deeply involved in malpractices and no one will be allowed to ask them to account for their actions. It will be totally misplaced to expect the Amir or his Prime Minister to allow a public forum to discuss these issues. The Council is doomed to failure since it lacks any popular mandate that gives it legitimacy and power in the face of a dictatorship such as that of the Al Khalifa.

Al-Khalifa Mass Media

Mass media in the free world is one of the instruments by which people air their views to the ruling elite. Mass media is so powerful in free societies that governments normally consult editors to sense public moods. In Bahrain, mass media is an instrument for the ruling family to suppress public opinion. A main news item typically reads: "His Highness the Amir Sheikh Isa in Salman Al-Khalifa yesterday met with (his son) His Highness the Heir-Apparent Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa". The main news are so boring that people buy the papers and turn directly to the page where translated articles from foreign international press are published. However, the Al-Khalifa ruling family are innovating and trying hard to make the new more interesting. So the new headlines and complete pages of photographs are now reserved for the news on His Highness, the Amir, visits to marriage ceremonies. May 27th and June 9th issues of Al-Ayyam daily are examples of the new trend in press coverage. Many photographs are published for high delegations of the ruling family attending ceremonies of marriages of people close to the ruling family. Unfortunately the new trend is not eye-catching. People were still not interested. So there was another show.

Magazine Banned

The Bahrain offices of the UAE magazine "Al-Shoroq" was closed down after refusal of the editor to hand over the original script of an interview conducted with pro-democracy activist Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri. The editor was ordered by the Interior and Information ministries not to publish the interview and submit all relevant document to security authorities. His refusal to do so resulted in the closure of the magazine's office in Bahrain.

News of the show are on the first pages of the semi-official newspapers. The general director of the Ruling Family Council, Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa heads the ceremony for graduation of students from the US Pentagon-run Bahrain School. Other senior Khalifa figures attend the ceremony of other private schools Bayan and Al-Hikma. The prime minister's son (also Transport Minister) represents his father in the graduation ceremony of Ibn-Khaldoon School. These schools, together with two other church-run schools, exist to educate children of American and British expatriates together with children of the royal family and those of ministers and high officials.