

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Financing the Peace Accord

Gulf Sheikhs are Force to Offer Political and Fiscal Help to Arafat

Three years on, the shifting sands in the Arabian peninsula following the "Desert Storm" are still hindering any attempt to reconcile the opposing parties. Yet another storm has erupted somewhere else but is being felt strongly in the Gulf region. The "peace storm" which has clouded the Arabian climate for the last fifty years is becoming an embarrassment to the rulers of the countries forming the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and is becoming a nightmare. Although the first storm has almost led both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to bankruptcy, the Gulf states are now being asked to finance the peace process. What makes the proposal even more insulting is the fact that the beneficiary of this will be Yasser Arafat whom the Gulf financiers despise most. However, they have no choice but to pay. After all, this is what the decision makers in Washington want, at the moment. Peace has to be bought off with oil money from the GCC countries.

The reluctance of the Gulf rulers to go ahead with the finance of the proposed Palestinian entity is echoing badly in the western centres of power. After all, no one among the western leaders would want to be the financial backer of the Palestinians, having abandoned their duties to oppose the long Israeli occupation. The Gulf rulers wanted to go ahead with the recognition of "Israel" but with a slower pace than the Americans would like. The disenchantment of the West with the Gulf sheikhs especially the Saudis and the Kuwaitis is expressing itself in various reports on human rights conditions in the two countries. Amnesty International published a lengthy report last month about the maltreatment of both the Shias and Christians in Saudi Arabia. The report which was published on Tuesday 14th September detailed cases of repression against the religious minorities which are on the increase.

Tens of Shia are still being imprisoned, tortured or even killed, the report said. The Shias which, according to the report, form 10 per cent of the Saudi population, are facing official discrimination and are considered political opponents. Some have been condemned to death after unfair trials on charges of apostasy. The case of Sadiq Abdul Karim Malallah who had been beheaded publicly in September 1992 was highlighted. According to Amnesty International, he was killed because of his political activities especially his relentless defence of the rights of the Shia in the Arabian peninsula. The Christians are also unlucky. The report said hundreds of Christians were harassed by "the committee for enjoining good and

forbidding evil". Most of the victims among the Christians are from third world countries. Among 329 people detained since August 1990, 325 were citizens of third world countries whilst only five people were from European countries.

In fact the repression in Saudi Arabia has intensified in the last few months and there is deep disenchantment amongst the elite. In spite of the formation of the Consultative Council, detention of opponents has intensified in recent months. There has been great resentment against the Council and many high ranking personalities have voiced opposition to the nature of "reforms" introduced by King Fahad. A Council whose members are appointed by the King and have no right either to refuse the appointment or to resign at any stage, these people say, is not worth having at all. New detentions have included Dr. Ahamed Othman Al Tuwaijri, Dr. Sa'ad Al Faqih and Dr. Abdul Aziz Al Wuhaibi. They have been subjected to physical and psychological torture and the situation has since become tense especially in the academic circles.

The other significant report was issued by Middle East Watch about Kuwait. The main theme of it is the governmental decision on 6th August 1993 to dissolve all private associations which did not have official sanction. The two reports are indications that things are not going well in the relations between the West and the Gulf countries. Human rights violations are abundant in almost all GCC countries. Numerous international reports were published in the last decade highlighting the degradation of human rights in these countries. None of them was ever taken seriously by the Western governments and in fact, in some cases, western assistance was offered in this context. Bahrain, for example, enjoys unlimited help from Britain in the field of intelligence, to the extent that a British officer, Ian Henderson, has been running the Special Branch for the last 25 years. Tens of reports by reputed international organisations highlighting human rights abuses in that country were published, but the western response to them was non-existent. Whatever may be said to defend the Deputy Director General of Public Security, the notorious Ian Henderson, he is held responsible for the countless misery in Bahrain.

There is a lack of will on the part of the western power to undertake any major action to curtail human rights abuses in the GCC countries. When they wanted to defeat the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait, they managed to do so unemployed by the Iraqi military might. The

Gulf sheikhs are much weaker than Saddam Hussain, and there would not have been a major obstacle to reprimand them if the political will was there. The unbalanced stands in the western policy towards the Gulf region is causing both anxiety and despair. It is hard to understand rationale behind the extent of support offered to the Gulf rulers whose records in human rights abuses are unparalleled. When these rulers flatly refuse to adopt a constitution in their countries, and insist on keeping their citizens subject to their personal vendetta, it is hard to justify the political and military support being offered to them by the "democratic" west.

The policy of politicising human rights issue cannot be expected to work. Regardless of the political ties with those corrupt regimes, a more stable environment could only be expected to flourish when ordinary citizens are given their due rights and human dignity. The issue of human rights must not only be floated when a certain political goal is in mind. The lack of sensitivity in certain western political circles is causing unease in the minds of the elites in the Gulf. Whether in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Bahrain, there is a sense of despair amongst the educated classes having witnessed the biased attitudes of the western countries towards the welfare of the natives of the Gulf region. Whether to recognise Israel or not is not the issue in a region where basic rights are not guaranteed. What is at stake here is that the people of the region are denied the peaceful and amicable existence, unhindered by the threats of torture, exile or even execution. Human life is sacred and tribal heads must not be given the freedom to threaten his own people.

When King Fahad announced his disrupted "Consultative Council" and named its 60 members, the news was more shocking than exciting. The new political venture is much less than any one had asked for since it offers no real concession to the people. Any member who was appointed by the King neither had the right to turn down the appointment, nor was he allowed to resign. Kuwait did not fare much better when the government banned the popular human rights associations. It is difficult to imagine a situation where prosperity, development and hope become the order of the day in a region which is denied freedom of expression, association, belief, or political participation. Everyone concerned about human rights situation in the world is duty-bound to exercise enough pressure to make sure the dictatorial systems relinquish their absolute power in the Gulf region.

Brothers at War

It happened at last. The confrontation between the two place took place on 13th September 1993 near the main highway leading to the Bahrain-Saudi causeway. In the morning of that day, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman, the prime minister went to a new shopping area created by his younger, but troublesome brother, Mohammed to see for himself the mischief of Mohammed. Coincidentally, the two brothers faced each other at the market place. After exchanging few words tempers rose to the point where scuffles broke out between them. Only the intervention of the standards by prevented a blood bath. Mohammed rushed to his car to get his rifle whilst Khalifa, surrounded by his bodyguards was ready to take the situation to the limit.

In the heated exchanges, Khalifa told Mohammed his government could no longer tolerate his bad behaviour, and that he better shows some respect for the system. Mohammed replied accusing his brother of spreading corruption in the country, and asking: if your father were here would he like what you have been doing to this country?

Mohammed had built a new market known as "Souq Al Ain" without the permission of the municipality. People had also complained of his behaviour and how his works were hindering their movement. Khalifa decided to see for himself, and went with his entourage to the scene. A bloody conflict would have erupted if the standards by were not there. Mohammed ordered his armed Indian men to come to the scene. Khalifa, in turn, ordered armed men from Bahrain's Defence Force to take position in the market and along the main highway. Armoured vehicles were scene roaming the road and the situation remained tense for more than a week.

According to some informed sources, there is a worry within the ruling family circles that Mohammed may now forge an alliance with the government of Qatar which is locked in a legal battle with the Al Khalifa on the issue of ownership of the isles of Howar. Meanwhile, orders have gone out to the various official bodies not to provide amenities such as electricity or water to whoever rents a place from Mohammed and that municipality taxes must be paid to the proper authorities and not to Mohammed, a practice that has been there for many years. Industrial rate taxes which amount to 10 per cent of the rent is usually payable to the municipality, but those who rent from Mohammed are forced to pay him the taxes. Moreover, He has been helping himself with whatever he likes from other people's property whether it is land, cars or farms. He is benefitting from his family's domination without shouldering the blames levelled against it by the people. His brother finally broke off the vicious circle.

The tension is running high and the expectation is that the infighting within the Al Khalifa ranks may intensify as opinion among them on how to settle the conflict differs. One thing is clear; things will not be the same again within the ruling Al Khalifa ruling family. No one can predict the outcome of the crisis but the people of Bahrain have felt a great relief now that the rot of the ruling family has come to the surface.

Mohammed, The Maverick

Sheikh Mohammed bin Salman Al Khalifa, the younger brother of the Amir and prime minister, is undoubtedly one of the richest in Bahrain and the Gulf at large. Sheikh Mohammed does not have a formal public post despite being the brother of the Amir. This has partly to do with Mohammed's desire not to accept but the post of prime ministership.

Mohammed believes that he should be the prime minister. Today, the Amir and his brother are not on good terms. People with inside information say that the rift between Isa (the Amir) and Mohammed has caused family troubles; one sign of that being the disapproval of al Annoud, their mother. She believes that the Amir leans too much to his half brother from father (Khalifa the prime minister) at the expense of Mohammed. Sheikh Mohammed is the youngest of Sheikh Salman, father of the Amir, the prime minister and Mohammed. The Amir's mother continues to be alive and well. She is known to be tough; in fact her name literally means that she disapproves and disavows. In short, al Annoud believes that the Amir has left the state affairs in the hands of his brother from father. It is true that Khalifa runs the day to day affairs of the state. Sheikh Khalifa now is powerful enough with ambitions to

- 1) either become the next Amir or
- 2) Ali the son of Khalifa becomes the new prime minister.

Sheikh Mohammed concentrates on building an empire of hotels, farms and the like. Given his displeasure of the Amir, Sheikh Mohammed went after his own affairs. Mohammed considers himself to be a defect leader of the state. He has his own jail, pays no fees for the state and even does not recognize the government of Khalifa. For example, when Sheikh Mohammed decides to have a new building, he would not take permission from the municipality. His people visit the concerned offices and demand actions. Sheikh Mohammed is busy adding estates and farm lands to his ever growing empire. For instance, Mohammed owns a number of hotels from Al Jazira to Al Athari. In the last three years alone, he added Gulf Gate Hotel, Gulf Pearls Hotel. The newly built Gulf Pearls is a shopping mall with several outlets including bars, restaurants all belonging to Sheikh Mohammed. In addition, the young, arrogant merchant owns the land over which the four-star Delmon hotel stands. News has circulated in the country that Sheikh Mohammed now wants the Delmon leave; owners of the Delmon hotel kept increasing the monthly rent for the land in order to appease him.

Sheikh Mohammed is in the food business. He owns many farm lands capable of producing various fruits and vegetables. The products later are sold by Mohammed's workers directly in the marketplace.

Sheikh Mohammed takes protection fee. Mohammed owns many office buildings, shopping places from boutiques to antiques. No leases are enforced by the immature sheikh. His clients pay rent but no electricity, municipality charges. This is because the government could not ask for fees from those renting from

the Sheikh. In return for his services and more importantly protection, the Sheikh requires the leasing concerns pay a protection fee. Certainly no one can object. As a sign of the improvement of ties, Bahrain allows some Iranian merchants to arrive in the port, and then sell their products in the local markets. Accordingly, Sheikh Mohammed rushed in erecting some hastily arranged shops, known as Souq Waqef. The name practically means that the area is for selling with no area for sitting. In return, the Sheikh charges the Iranian protection fee. At the end, both the Sheikh and his new clients are happy.

Sheikh Mohammed hates the rich. People with substantial enough funds are regarded as jerks by the Sheikh. He spares no time harassing many rich especially those who became affluent through illegal means like becoming very close to the Amir. Time and again the imperious sheikh threatened the lives of prominent Bahrainis. All people in the country know the story of Al Zayani, a well-known sunni merchant; Al Zayani witnessed his expensive car being damaged by shots fired by the Sheikh personally.

Sheikh Mohammed keeps buying by force. Mohammed places a price tag on houses, estate, farm, car exhibition and the like that he happens to like. It keeps happening that the Sheikh likes a farm land. Then some of his employees would approach the owners and indicate that "his highness" happens to like the matter. Should the owner "cooperate" then the Sheikh may buy or not. If he is to buy the Sheikh would ask for a price. The expectation is to say that Mohammed can take the property should he wish. This makes the little Sheikh happy and accordingly, pays handsomely, above the market price. However, should the owner fail to cooperate, then all sorts of force come in place. Some people in such cases visit the Amir and complain. The Amir often could not do any thing; but at times, he manages to give good advice in order to get out of the problem. There is one thing that Sheikh Mohammed hates and that is hearing the word "no". To him "no" means challenge and this is something only few can afford.

The Sheikh intends to embarrass the Amir. Some practices raises doubts about the effectiveness of the state authorities if only because the whole state could not say a single word to little Mohammed. To many, Sheikh Mohammed is a mini state within the state.

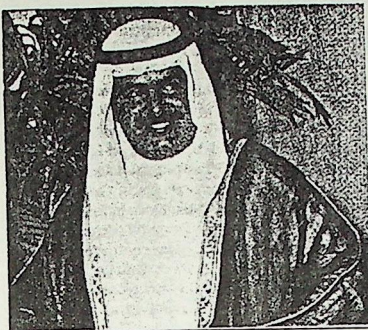
Sheikh Mohammed enjoys travelling to India. This is the favourite destination for the Sheikh. In India, the Sheikh could not resist changing his beloved Taj Mahal hotel. Many Indian servants travel with the de facto (shadow) leader of Bahrain to his many travels to subcontinent.

It is worth mentioning that when the prime minister Sheikh Khalifa was sick in late 1988, Sheikh Mohammed appeared next to the Amir in many audiences. The implication was that Mohammed had hoped that Khalifa would die and that opportunity would provide him with his dream. He is now counting on the outcome of his latest encounter with his elder brother Khalifa, the prime minister.

Premier's son is all but a Premier

Civil Aviation Affairs (CAA) is the government establishment responsible for supervising Bahrain's share in Gulf Air (jointly owned with Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Oman) and for managing the airport operations. Up until now, it has been under Yousif Al-Shirawi, the development minister. Al-Shirawi controls many key enterprises including the important aluminium smelter ALBA, Bahrain petroleum company BAPCO, and, more recently, another ministry for cabinet affairs. The ex-transport minister was limited in his responsibilities. Ibrahim Humaidan held the post of transport minister for about two decades before being demoted to preside over the powerless Shura (consultative) Council, created by the ruler last December. This was the moment Sheikh Khalifa, the prime minister waited for. Instantly, he installed three of his closest people in key positions. The cabinet affairs was given to the PM's private secretary, transport ministry was handed to PM's son, Ali, who had been undersecretary of interior ministry responsible for passports and immigration. The latter post was handed to the PM's son-in-law.

Now, Ali as a transport minister, heads one of the most important state-enterprises, Bahrain Telecommunication Company, Batelco. Since his appointment, employees heard many rumours. One spoke of pay increases and another indicated significant changes in management aimed at installing Ali's people. The first one proved itself a rumour while the other is in place. Ali is simply a corrupt businessman, using his political power to get whatever he wishes. His daytime is spent in negotiating private deals on public pay-roll accounts. The



Ali- Bin Khalifa

government has announced it intends to privatise some public sector companies and allows for competition. This is quite a good venture. However, Ali is the one to compete with the state enterprise he is supposed to manage on behalf of the public. American Telegraph and Telecommunication is said to be allowed to operate some telecommunication services and compete with Batelco. Excellent, but Ali has his shares in the operation as a precondition. As a shareholder with insider information, he is in a position to make self-profitable decisions all the time.

Ali's empire is growing. His new responsibilities will include the Civil Aviation Affairs (CAA) and hence he shall be in control of money, people and stewardesses. A new hotel (Meridian) is being completed inside a reclaimed land in front of Sanabis pleasure beach. Work is going on twenty four hours a day. The

hotel is built for the PM's son and daughter and shall be the centre for red nights and official conferences. Half of the coast is already reserved for the hotel. The pleasure beach is controlled by the information minister, Tariq Al-Mo'ayyad. The latter is not happy to be completely powerless with regard to decisions pertaining to his ministry. He is therefore not on good terms with the son, daughter and son-in-law of PM's.

All this is being done to increase the power of Ali and counter that of his cousin, Hamad, who is the heir-apparent. The Amir (ruler) has long intended to abdicate in favour of his son, Hamad. However, the PM Sheikh Khalifa, brother of the Amir, will never accept to serve under Hamad. So Ali must have an excessive influence to force Hamad to appoint him as prime minister when the time comes, or else empowers him to act like the younger brother of the Amir, Mohammed, who had removed from political power, but now operates as a state within another.

An important trend is emerging nowadays. The ruling family anticipates that the monthly salaries paid to each member of the family (from the national budget) will have to decrease in the near future, as Bahrain's income declines year by year. There will simply be not enough money in the privy purse. So a contingency option is being adopted. Members of the ruling family shall be promoted to head as many ministries, public enterprises, companies, hotels, businesses, etc, as possible. This may help to support the ruling family lavish living, but will burden the Bahraini people with more incompetent and selfish bosses.

Assault on Free Thinking The Engineering Society Challenged

The regime has dissolved the board of the nation's engineering grouping and imposed a new chief. The Bahrain Society of Engineering is an association with high profile. Many of the nation's best engineers are members of the organization. To be sure, not all engineers are constituents of the society. Not too long ago, the Society completed erecting its new headquarters, located in an exclusive part of the capital city of Manama. The Society managed to raise funds for the structure following an active fund raising campaign. For its credit, the Society has, in the last few years, organized several seminars on engineering and other matters on technology of use to Bahrain.

A new crime against intellectual exercise committed by the authorities. The story goes that an order was issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs calling on the board of the Bahrain Society of Engineering to dissolve itself or face punitive measures. The board members heeded the call and dissolve itself. To justify its assault on the elected body, the concerned ministry asserted that the decision was due following stiff disagreement by members of the board; and that the board could not function properly due to the resignation of

five of its members. The ministry further alleges that in order to contain the crisis, a new acting board was installed. The new un-elected board is headed by Emad A. Rahman Al-Moa'yed, member of a family close to the ruling regime.

Many engineers felt offended. The government's decision, while not surprising per se, still could not be accepted by the educated engineers. The forced change at the Society could not come at a worse time for the authorities given that there are many engineers who are unemployed. Also, the action comes in light of democratic changes in many parts of the world. Some insiders told this newsletter the main reason behind the government policy was that both the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Information were not happy with some activities of the Engineering Society. This is a professional organization with a private message. But the authorities have a different story. Certainly the high handed policy of the regime is a message sent to the other professional bodies operating in Bahrain, namely that these specialist associations are no place for free thinking.

Repression Goes On Interrogations and Detentions Continue

The cycle of detentions and interrogation has continued unabated. The following are the latest in this context:

Following the massive demonstration the funeral of the late Ayatullah Sabzwari Iraq in August, several people were interrogated by the special branch. Among them were Jamil Ali Salman, Manama, Saeed Ahmed, Halwachi, Manama, Jaffar Salman Salai, Siu Sheikh Abdul Bari Mohammed Nasr, Duraz

On 15th August 1993 five people were detained and interrogated about their relation with the management of a religious place Sanabis town. They were Ali Salman Rad, Yasser Makki Al Asfoor, Habib Haidar, Mak Abbas and Ali Owainati.

On 25th August, three people were detained and interrogated. They were Sheikh Mohammed Hassan Khojasteh, Sheikh Hussain Ali Al Taweeel and Sayyed Dhiya Al Mosa. They were asked about their recent trip to Iraq and had their passports confiscated.

Sayyed Alawi Al Alawi, Manama, is still in detention following his arrest in connection with the case of Al Qassab mosque. Nothing known about him since he was arrested in early September.

Background notes on Bahrain (1)

The Pearl of the Gulf

Bahrain is the smallest country among its neighbours. Bahrain's total area in 1991 was 695.3 sq. km. (About 270 sq. mi.) Versus 673.98 sq. km in 1976. The slight increment in size is due to land reclamation. For comparative purposes, Bahrain is four times the size of the U.S. Capital city of Washington D.C..

Bahrain's total area and land area are the same. The coastline is about 160 km. Bahrain's location is viewed as strategic thanks to the passing of oil to the western world in the Gulf (Bahrain was used as a staging coordination centre for the U.S.-Led attack on Iraq in January-February 1991).

Bahrain's land is composed of sand and bare rock. Most of the islands of Bahrain are surfaced with hard limestone rock, covered in many places with sand dunes, and, in the case of the main island, with pre-historic tumuli. The territory is generally low-lying, rendering it not quite suitable for farming. To make matters worse, government policies have caused the rapid depletion of the ground water, enough to bring about maximum damage to the agriculture sector. Bahrain imports more than 90% of its foodstuff needs. Agriculture contributes 1% to the gross domestic product as per 1991 results.

Bahrain has limited natural resources. The resources are generally oil, gas and fish. Aside from Iran, Bahrain was the first country in the Gulf to discover oil in its soil. Unfortunately, the tiny Gulf state will be the first to run out of crude oil. The case is promising for the gas, but the problem is in the low gas prices in the world. Fish catching is producing good results for the country. Nevertheless, Bahrain has to import most of its needs such as red meat, foodstuffs, commodities and others.

The islands

Bahrain consists of several islands. By best accounts, there are some 33 islands. Some 99.96% of the land is devoted to the following.

Name of island	% share of the total
Bahrain	84.48
Howar	7.28
Muharraq	3.25
Umm Nassan	2.72
Sitra	2.07
Nabih Saleh	0.11
Jiddah	0.05

Howar consists of a group of 16 islands. The island of Bahrain is the most significant. "Bahrain" is the name of the main island and the state as well. So is the case because the island is the most vital in terms of size (85% of the total) and is home to the capital city of Manama, the government seat, ministries, financial community and hotels among others. The island is 30 miles long but only 10 miles wide.

Located to the northeast of the island of Bahrain, Muharraq occupies the second place in terms of importance. Muharraq is the name of the island and the main town as well. The island is 4 miles long and 1 mile wide representing some 3.25% of the total area of Bahrain. The country's international airport and shipbuilding facility are both located in Muharraq. The current rulers of Bahrain started their reign of the country from this island.

Sitra is essential to the economy. It is fair to say that Sitra is the most utilized island. The

nation's pivotal petroleum refinery is in Sitra. Also, Sitra is the model industrial place. Sitra occupies 2.07% of Bahrain.

The island of Nabih Saleh, lying between Bahrain and Sitra, has become more or less part of Sitra. Today, the island is a relaxing point for the officers of the country's defence forces and many members of the "royal family." The island is merely 0.11% of the total area.

Umm Nasan is reserved for the Amir. Located to the west of the main island of Bahrain, Umm Nasan is a private game preserve for the ruler. Thanks to the causeway linking Bahrain to mainland Saudi Arabia, Bahrainis crossing the causeway can now have a glimpse of a piece of their country. Umm Nasan is 3 miles long and 2 miles wide, representing some 2.72% of the total area, bigger than the island of Sitra.

Many Bahrainis have sad memories of the island of Jedah. The island is not quite far from Umm Nasan and now can be viewed from the Bahrain-Saudi Arabia causeway. Traditionally, Jedah has served as the country's maximum security jail. Many innocent, honourable citizens forcefully spent precious times of their lives behind bars in what has become as the most notorious place in this small state; many locals remain in jails. Following the bridge link with Saudi Arabia, the authorities decided to turn the island into a tourist attraction. Work is underway to make Jedah a free place for alcoholic drinks and illegal sex. Jedah is merely 0.05% of the total Bahrain area and is 1 mile long and 0.5 mile wide.

The other prominent islands are part of the Howar group. The 16 island assembly is located to the south of the Bahrain island towards the state of Qatar. Bahrain and Qatar remain deadlocked over the sovereignty of the islands. Today, the islands are controlled by Bahrain. To avoid angering the Qataris, Bahrain authorities are making little use of Howar. Qatar is challenging Bahrain for control of the islands in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague. Deliberations on the case by the respective lawyers of the two nations are expected to begin later this year. The two countries all but started a military confrontation in 1986 following a raid by Qatari forces on the island. Qatar was objecting to an engineering work carried out on behalf of Bahrain. Several Asians were arrested and taken to the Qatari soil. Intense Gulf mediation succeeded in containing the crisis. During the plight, Bahrain authorities realized two important matters. One, many members of the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) were reluctant to fight. This was the last thing on the minds of the soldiers. The BDF was always viewed as a secured low-risk job. Two, the regime felt that most Shi'a (who represent the majority among the indigenous Muslims) had little sympathy for the rulers; as such, the government felt that in the case of an armed conflict, many Shi'a won't fight on behalf of the rulers.

One reason behind the island's name of Howar is that "Howar" stands for a young camel in Arabic. The Howar islands resemble the island of Bahrain and its surrounding much smaller islands. This is likewise true in the case of Howar where there is a main island plus a handful of smaller ones. The message is sent to Qatar. Interestingly enough, earlier this summer, the authorities in the Information

Ministry ordered the closing down of the state's main Arabic daily for three days after it had printed the map of the state of Qatar together with the Howar islands, meaning that the Howar group is part of Qatar. At any rate, Howar is located off-Qatar, but that is no reason to be part of Qatar. Howar is 7.28% of the total area of the state, making it the second largest after the island of Bahrain. This may be one reason why the authorities are not willing to give in to the Qatari demands. The Bahrain-Qatar dispute has always had a negative effect on the functioning of the regional grouping of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The rivalry between the two neighbours is not the only one of its type within the GCC.

The twelve administrative regions

While the country is made of many islands, the state is divided into 12 regions. Manama, the capital, is one region. The Howar islands constitute one region. The nation's capital has only 3.7% of the total area. Rifa, the place where the Amir and his ever expanding family members live, represents some 42% of the total area. By far, Rifa is the largest region in the country.

1) Al Hidd 2) Al Manama 3) Al Mintaqah al Gharbiyah 4) Al Mintaqah al Woosta 5) Al Mintaqah al Shamaliyah 6) Al Muharraq 7) Al Rifa and Janabiyyah 8) Jidd Hafis 9) Madinat Hamad 10) Madinat Isa 11) Mintaqat Juzur Hawar and 12) Sitra

Other basic facts

The following figures are true of Bahrain as of 1992.

Birth rate: 27 births per 1,000 population

death rate: 4 deaths per 1,000 population

Net migration rate: 7 migrants per 1,000 population

Infant mortality: 21 deaths for every 1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth: 70 years for male, 75 for female

Fertility: 4 children per woman

Literacy: 77% of age 15 and above (male 82%, female 69%)

Languages: Arabic (official), English (widely spoken, used in business activities); Farsi, Urdu, others especially Asian

Organized labour: only government sponsored, controlled in select manufacturing organizations

Capital: Manama

Government: absolute monarchy

Independence: 15/8/1971 from U.K.

Constitution: 26 May 1973; went into effect on 6 December 1973

National Day: 16 December; it is the date marking the accession of the Amir to power in 1961, 10 years prior to independence. Sheik Isa has been the country's only "head of state" ever. Legislative power: Elected parliament dissolved on 26 August 1975, hence the articles postponed; the cabinet headed by the Amir's brother-Khalifa has since assumed legislative powers.

Head of government: Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, brother of the Amir; in office since January 1970

Heir Apparent: Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, eldest son of the Amir.

Political parties: none, Elections: none