

BAHRAIN

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The Labyrinthian Politics of the Gulf

GCC Foreign Ministers Failed to Address Important Issues at UN

As the threats of military escalation in the Gulf region diminished following the two major wars in the region, it has become clear that the governments are in no mood to effect a serious change in the centuries-old political system. Twenty years ago, the "Yom Kippur" war erupted between the Arabs and the Israelis eventually leading to the Camp David accords. However, that war also led to a significant development elsewhere. The prices of oil which were a mere US\$ 2 per barrel, jumped beyond the US\$ 10. The petrodollars began to influence events in the region immensely.

The centre of political weight in the Arab World shifted from Egypt to Saudi Arabia. This was partly due to the Camp David accords which had left Egypt "isolated", and partly due to the fact that Saudi Arabia had become able to use its oil wealth to consolidate its political position. It financed governments, groups and parties. With the mounting economic difficulties in other Arab states, there was a vacancy for a large player in the Arab arena. This development coincided with the beginning of the rise of the Islamic awareness in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, due to its conservative nature managed to exploit this phenomena and was not all together excluded from the new trend. Furthermore, the Saudis managed to snatch the religious leadership from Egypt. For centuries, Al Azhar was the focal point of Islamic Jurisprudence in the Islamic world. No one ever turned to Riyadh to religious guidance. With the mounting wealth the Saudis managed to shift the centre of "Islamic Reference" from Cairo to Mecca. They used their petrodollars effectively in that sense and sponsored hundreds of religious projects in the world.

The rising stardom of Saudi Arabia came at a time when the United States of America was looking for a foothold in the region to protect the oil life line. The British influence in the Gulf was declining following her military withdrawal in 1971. Saudi Arabia was able to forge an alliance with the US in a way that was to become a strategic one. The fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979 helped to encourage the Americans to lend heavy weight behind the Saudis having lost one of the two pillars of the American policy in the Gulf. Huge amounts of armaments were pouring in the region in an attempt to compensate for the fall of the Shah. In this race to establish political and military presence in the Gulf, the Americans were in no mood to countenance issues of human rights or political reforms. The assassination in 1975 of King Faisal was seen in the context of improving environment for American future presence in the region, especially in light of the use of oil as a bargaining card with the West in the struggle against Israel.

The eighties were the decade of major

political upheavals in the Gulf region. The Islamic Revolution in Iran was considered a threat to the stability of the regimes in the Gulf and was countered by all means, political as well as military. The Americans did not want to compromise their position in the Gulf by allowing anti-government forces to flourish in the six states of the Gulf that had, in 1981, formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In the process human rights violations were committed at large scales in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and even Oman. The consolidation of the American presence in the Gulf was not accompanied by improvement of political life of the ordinary citizen. Infact, to many of them, the American presence symbolises the hidden power that was encouraging, rather than opposing, political repression. With the presence of thousands of military and security advisers it was hard to believe that things were taking place behind the back of the US administration.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait three years ago provided yet another opportunity to rectify the situation. Saddam Hussain who had been supported financially and politically by the GCC countries, and militarily by the West, made the situation clear. The threat to national security would not come from elements within, it would be a mischief from beyond the border. Local human rights and political activists are not bad guys. They are only struggling to achieve the minimum acceptable level of decency in line with what is happening around them in the countries which have developed over the years. It was becoming clearer that the improvement in the welfare of the people was not being matched by an improvement of the quality of political and cultural life they are allowed to enjoy. The GCC regimes have resisted, with every means at their disposal, any serious attempt to bring about a reform that could lead to a democratic process. Totalitarianism was to be preserved at all costs.

In the current United Nations forum in New York, the six foreign ministers of the GCC failed to address issues of human rights and political reforms in their countries. Apart from the Qatari FM who offered a brief and general remark on his government's "respect of human rights values" the main text of their speeches was routine statements that have no political significance. Perhaps the only point that is worth noting is the difference in opinion on the most important issue to the rulers of the Gulf; the policy towards Iraq. Whilst, the Kuwaiti, Bahraini and Saudi foreign ministers insisted that international sanctions on Iraq be continued until all UN resolutions be complied with by Baghdad's regime, the Omani foreign minister did not address the issue at all. More significantly, the foreign minister of Qatar,

stressed his willingness to see these sanctions removed. This obvious fragmentation of GCC policy towards Iraq indicates the extent of internal rifts among the Gulf states. This has been seen in the context of the tribal mentality that could only allow a truce with the immediate neighbour once an outsider attempts to intervene or carry out aggression.

The Gulf is now beginning the post-Gulf War 2 era. The relations with Iran are improving save for the little hiccup with regards to the dispute with the United Arab Emirates on the sovereignty over the three tiny islands. The Iraqi file is about to be closed with the failure of the Gulf regimes to induce a political change in Baghdad through their allies. The economic situation is very bleak, and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have advised the Gulf sheikhs to adopt austerity measures to reduce budget deficits. The outcome of the Gulf War 2 are more devastating than the rulers of the Gulf would admit. Saddam Hussain is still in power and he has not stopped reiterating his rhetoric against his neighbours. He has not recognised the border demarcations which have been completed by UN missions, and still repeats that Kuwait belongs to Iraq. On the other hand, the GCC states have emerged from the three-year dispute worse off, financially and politically. The unity that was exhibited throughout the eighties has now disappeared and their stock of hard currency has shrunk.

The political repression has not proved vital for their well being. This is why perhaps the Saudis have adopted a different approach to their internal problems. As the opposition to the regime intensified in the last year, this time from the mainstream Sunni circles, King Fahd has tried to woo some of the Shia opponents at home and abroad to prevent the formation of a unified national opposition to his regime. In the last few weeks scores of political detainees were released and most exiles were allowed back unconditionally.

However, these steps are not enough to stop the rising opposition to the totalitarian regime in Riyadh and political maneuvering of this kind cannot put an end to the ongoing calls for reforms. The Bahraini regime of the Al Khalifa is even worse. It has failed to release one single political prisoner before the end of the sentence. Many prisoners have even seen their sentences extended. Few exiles were allowed back in the last year but on conditions that most exiles did not want to accept.

The Gulf regimes find themselves in a political quagmire. They should have realised by now that political manoeuvres are not the way to survival and stability. A serious approach based on the willingness to adopt a constitutional system and respect of human rights and civil liberties are the only ways out the stalemate.

Political Corruption Sponsored by Great Powers

Politics in a modern society is about how people manage their differences (democratically) with regard to choices and allocation of resources so that a peaceful coexistence may be established. In this case corruption may be present, but only on the margin. Moreover, such corruption would be limited and liable of being exposed by the press or any of the state's institutions, and hence perpetrators are severely punished.

However, in a country like Bahrain, such arrangement is vigorously resisted. Contrary to the official and some western government's official, the resistance does not emanate from the culture of the people. Indeed Bahrain experienced a form of free debate between 1972 and 1973 before the dissolution of the parliament. In August 1975, the head of the ruling tribe, referred to as the Amir, decided that he and his brother (the Prime Minister) could not tolerate the elected parliamentarian any more. The MPs have crossed the red line by exposing the corrupt and dictatorial nature of the ruling family. The latter are not only ruling in an absolute manner but are also trading and competing with ordinary people.

Although the MPs were very careful not to criticize the Amir, as required by the constitution, there were many issues that touch on the corruption of the ruling family. The reader can imagine living in a country ruled by a tribal chief. The cabinet is headed by the eldest brother of the chief. More than one-third of the cabinet carry the same family name, two of whom have their sons sitting with them as ministers.

Outside the cabinet, more than half the public organisations are headed by members of the same family. Nearly all sport clubs and associations are presided over by members of the same family. All profiting companies trading in every business imaginable belong to members of the same family.

All the members of the family receive monthly salaries as from the day of birth by virtue of carrying the family name. They are also exempt from paying all the utilities bills, custom duties and other rates. Above all, they can never be

prosecuted as individuals. Any claim by an ordinary person against a member of the ruling family would be referred to the ruling family council. The latter corporate body will stand against any claim in any court. The courts are headed by members of the same family. So don't waste your time waiting for justice.

When some one attempts to oppose this set-up, a professional security team composed of expatriates from an advanced democratic country (Britain) conduct sessions of interrogations and torture until the persecuted person "confess" of meddling in politics. Then, 3 to 15 years or life (if not actual death under torture, as has happened to some eight people in the Eighties) prison sentence is waiting.

This is not a gloomy and exaggerated picture. It is bread and butter of a people subjected to internal repression propped-up (for selfish reasons) by external powers dominating the world stage.

Britain controlled Bahrain for 150 years. In 1971, independence was formally proclaimed. Since then the US influence picked up and peaked recently to a superior level. Britain crushed the pro-democracy uprising in the fifties, a fact fully documented in the Foreign Office released files. Then, it was stated that the movement was pro-Nasser of Egypt. Now, both the American and British claim that Islamic fundamentalism may win from liberalising the political system. The fact of the matter is that there are interests that are more important to the US and Britain than principles of democracy. The banner of democracy may be raised in countries where there is nothing at stake to lose, like Cuba, and where a propaganda theme is needed. In the past Britain wanted the Gulf for its geographical location on the way to India. Now the US is more interested in the barrels of oil than in a "bunch" of human beings.

Attacking Freedom of Expression

On 25 September 1993, Seyed Dhia Yahya Al-Mosawi, delivered a speech at Mo'min Mosque in the capital, Manama. Since the day that followed until now, he has been detained without charges. Al-Mosawi, a young religious scholar, was participating in a socio-religious gathering. He happened to choose the peace agreement signed in Washington between the PLO and Israel as a subject matter. This was unforgivable by the intelligence department since "meddling with politics" is a crime in Bahrain. The care-taker of Mo'min Mosque had received a threat that the mosque would be closed, in a similar fashion to the way that another place Ma'tam Al-Qassab was closed on 21 August. The message was that the mosque must stop inviting personalities who criticise the regime, implicitly or explicitly.

In August, Ma'tam Al-Qassab, was sealed (banned) and the care-taker, Seyed Alawi Mohsin Al-Alawi was detained, tortured and had his arm broken under torture before being released in mid October, amid wide-spread condemnation by international human rights organisation. Ma'tam Al-Qassab was also unsealed in mid October with a threat to other members of the executive committee that they would suffer the same consequences if they resume inviting speakers.

Mo'min Mosque is one of the oldest in the country and has a history of independence from government pressure. Moreover, it is located in a strategic place, only a few minutes walk from the notorious Qala'a prison, where political detainees receive their torture recipes. The security service is skilled at picking on some people and making an "example" to deter others. The arbitrary (Russian-roulette type) selection landed this time on Seyed Dhia Al-Mosawi. He is to be the example for the organisers and participants in the Mo'min Mosque activities. After searching his house and possessions, he was led away to Al-Qala'a Fort for interrogation under the State Security Law. Since his arrest, people were outraged and his photographs were distributed around the country calling on the government to release him. Furthermore, a petition, the first of its kind for a decade, was signed by forty religious scholars and delivered to the Interior Minister stating the following:

"His Excellency the Minister of Interior. Greetings. On 26 September, the security services of your ministry detained a religious scholar, Seyed Dhia Seyed Yahya Al-Mosawi, without charges. We consider this action an intimidation to religious scholars. We are astonished and condemn this move. We hope that you order his release, to serve the stability and security of the country, and in doing so, the State would abide by its slogans on allowing freedom of expression. Signed by 40 dignitaries on 15 October 1993".

This has come about after Bahrain was removed from the UN list of countries whose behaviour on human rights is but under observation. Since then, hundreds of young people and senior personalities have been subjected to various forms of intimidation; interrogation, torture, jail or deportation. Is this what the UN would like to happen in Bahrain?

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* On 1st October 1993, a public meeting was held to commemorate the 40th day of the passing away of Ayatollah Sabzawary in Iraq. Security forces surrounded Mo'min Mosque and attempted to identify participants.

* On 2nd October, Mr. Mahdi Al-Saeed was detained. He remained in his cell for several days for unspecified charges. On the second night, Mr. Zuhair Ismail Bader, was arrested, and later released. He was interrogated again on 4th October. At the same time, a third man, Ali Al-Jallawi, was arrested. He is still in jail.

* Early in the month, Intelligence Service searched thoroughly the Al-Khedher Mosque in Bar-Bar village. No reason for search was given.

* On 26th September, Mr. Hassan Al-Sa'ati, was summoned to the Interior Ministry. He was questioned about his activities in Al-Khawajah Mosque. He was threatened with severe punishments, if he continue his social and cultural activities in the Mosque.

* In the same week, Jamil Al-Agecfa, Jaafar

Selail, Abbas Kalzaman and Seyed Ahmed Seyed Nema, were interrogated and tortured.

* On 11th October, Jamil Ali Salman and Jaafar Selail (again) were interrogated.

* Political prisoner, Mr. Mohammed Hassan Marhoon, had been jailed in 1983, when he was 19 years old, and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. On August 1993, he completed the 10 years term. But, the prison authorities refused to release him. When he complained, he was told that neither Ian Henderson or the Interior Minister.

* On 20th October, Mr. Abdul-Hassan Al-Motaghawi, was detained and interrogated for a day. He had been in a family trip to Iran. He was questioned about his relationship with Bahraini religious scholars studying in the holy city of Qum.

* A group of Bahraini exiles wrote a letter to the UN Secretar-General, asking him to intervene and urge the Bahraini authorities to allow exiles back home.

A fruitless Visit, But What Are The Motives

The president of Uganda paid an official visit to Bahrain starting October 2 1993. On his arrival, Mr. Mosoveini was received at the airport by the Prime Minister and not the Amir, the head of state. It is fair to say that many locals were puzzled by the state visit by the head of a country not known to have serious ties with Bahrain, especially in trade. Thus, certainly there was no direct economic benefit to Bahrain of the trip. The authorities normally make ties where there are promised security or economic benefits. Bahrain's connection to the U.S. is based on security for the regime (the same held true when Britain was running the show in the Gulf). Following the Gulf War against Iraq, Bahrain decided to strengthen its ties with Iran; the motivation was helping the domestic economy by gaining access to Iran's substantial markets. But Bahrain rarely trades with Uganda as per the official statistics detailing the state's trade for 1991. May be one benefit of the state visit was an agreement to allow the national carriers flying to each other's capital. Such an accord often does not require a visit by the country's president.

In addition, Uganda could not expect some economic help from Bahrain. It is well-documented that Bahrain authorities are excellent in collecting funds and not giving them away to others. What Bahrain can and has been providing to some is media support. For example, this was what Bahrain could provide Iraq during its war against Iran (until the Americans decided to enter the war directly, then Bahrain provided logistical support). May be, and we are only speculating for good intentions, that Uganda's president has hoped that Bahrain authorities could intervene to get help from the financial community. Needless to say, Uganda's economic performance is not satisfactory enough to warrant credit.

Uganda supports the Sudanese rebels. Not too long ago, Uganda decided to rally support for the self-declared leader of the Sudanese rebels in the south of the Sudan, where arms from Uganda have been pouring. Whether the visit related to Sudan is anybody's guess. It should be mentioned that Bahrain is the coordinating centre for U.S. operations in the Gulf and other parts of the region. The current U.S. Administration is noted to have some designs on Sudan. Chances are that Uganda's president held secret talks with U.S. military officials in Manama. Low-key farewell was granted to Uganda's president. On his departure on 4 October, Mr. Mosoveini was seen off by the Commerce Minister, a junior in the cabinet. It was not clear why the Amir or Prime Minister decided not to show at the airport. Even the official who normally deputise for the Foreign Minister was not at the airport. The Foreign Minister was in New York for the UN general assembly. It is worth noting that the country's foreign policy was officially governed by the United Kingdom until 1971. Directly afterwards, an agreement was signed with the US offering all British bases American troops. Since then, the US foreign policy largely determined Bahrain's policy, although in this case every thing is directed implicitly.

When He Talks, No One Listens

Bahrain's "Amir" or head of state, in power since 1961, is not known to enjoy giving public speeches. This has been the case for the last 32 years or so. At least after three decades, the Amir, Isa bin (or son of) Salman al Khalifa, has started showing some change in his public appearances. Traditionally, the Amir delivered an annual speech on the eve of the national day. Thus, on the eve of 16 December, the Amir speaks to "his nation" through the radio. The talk has often been very short. Normally, it takes the Amir between five to seven minutes to finish his extraordinary yearly speech. The message has always been the same, that the government under the Prime Minister (also his brother) should be appreciated for its achievements. During the 1980s, the Amir also referred to the Iran-Iraq War on a regular course, praising the "peaceful gestures" showed by the Iraqi leadership. Locals have the habit of saying that the Amir practices for the talk many times.

Bahrain obtained its independence from Britain on 15 August 1971 but the national day is fixed as 16 December. The reason is the December date marks the accession by the Amir to the throne in 1961. The Independence came nearly ten years after Isa became the ruler.

The practice in the past was that during events, the Amir's court would issue a statement expressing the view of Sheik Isa. People become aware of the matter through newspapers.

Certainly, what the Amir says through his press releases becomes the headlines of the newspapers. Thus, traditionally, the Amir or the Prime Minister would just take their seats in the events and at the end hand some certificates. Also the Amir, Prime Minister and the Crown Prince receive gifts from the host party.

Now the Amir gives talks! The first noted incident was that of the ceremony at the re-born Arabian Gulf University or AGU. The event, which occurred towards the end of September, was concerned with the graduation of former and current graduates of the University. The gathering was attended by the Education Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council; Iraq, a founding member of the AGU, was expelled following Saddam's aggression on Kuwait in 1990. In his short speech, as read from a written manuscript, the Amir spoke of the significance of the institution. Also, he praised officials of the member states. The Amir emphasized the need for keeping the institution alive. In addition, he reiterated Bahrain's happiness with hosting the AGU on its soil. In reality, the Amir's message was that the member states need to inject more money at the AGU so as to keep it functioning in Bahrain. The AGU has quite a bad reputation among the local firms when it comes to repaying its debts. Another extraordinary matter done by the Amir at the AGU gathering was that of financing a chair in the field of scientific applications at the AGU for five years (wow).

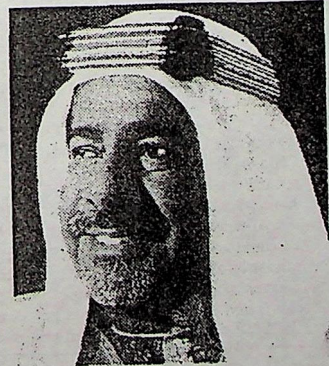
The Amir likewise delivered a talk at the start of the second session of the so-called Consultative Council. The event took place on 2 October. This time, the speech was lengthy by past standards. The Amir read his speech from

written notes. The content of the speech was certainly not reflective of the Bahrain's society. The Amir talked of the said council as if it has been taking place for decades, though this was the second annual session. He referred to this body as an integral part of the decision-making process of the government. This could not be more than a laugh. The council came into being only last year. The council has no relation whatsoever to the day to day affairs of the state. The Prime Minister, brother of the Amir, rules through a cabinet dominated by members of his family.

In his talk, Sheikh Isa, mentioned the rapid changes that are taking place in the world and their impacts on the region. He declared that "whatever happens we have our standing principles that may not be changed". Probably, his message was that the council is an off-product of the tribal system which does not recognise alien concepts of popular participation. In his address, the Amir made no mention of his intention to re-establish the parliament, dissolved since 1975.

The current council, which is advisory in nature only and has no other power, is not acceptable to the opposition and the masses in general. All the members were selected by the state and no elections were held. The council's sessions are held in closed doors and the public is not told of its proceedings. All that it does is preparing comments on matters of interest to the cabinet. In turn, the cabinet may accept or reject these comments. Still, the people are not told of what these comments are. What is needed is an independent parliament, elected freely and allowed to perform as per the nation's constitution. What is happening in Bahrain is that the opposition is demanding the full restoration and implementation of the constitution but the government is saying no.

A year ago, a petition signed by some three hundred notables demanding the restoration of the constitution and parliament was handed to the Amir. The result was more repression and the key figures in that event were subsequently persecuted. Since then, the feelings have been running high and observers anticipate a flare-up of emotions, and possibly a popular outrage. What the Amir says in his speeches rarely goes well the public which mistrust the intentions of the government.



Ceremony at the Infamous Gulf University

On 29 September, what is known as Arabian Gulf University, better known as the AGU held its first graduation ceremony. The formality by itself constituted a noted development. Here is why.

The AGU came into being in the early 1980s grouping the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council plus Iraq. However, Iraq was expelled forcefully from the AGU following Saddam's aggression against Kuwait. Towards the end of the 1980s, AGU became bankrupt. Attempts to revive the University encountered difficulties in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Member states were reluctant to pay their dues. Bahrain was willing to pay because the University campus was based in Bahrain and due to the fact that Bahrain was contributing merely 2.5% of the total financial obligation. Saudi Arabia was likewise willing to pay but less so when the Gulf War against Iraq erupted. Kuwait had other matters of concern following the Iraqi invasion. Qatar, arch-enemy of Bahrain, wished that the University fails if only to deny Bahrain any direct benefit. Oman was not willing to see its students studying in the more open society of Bahrain especially because Bahrainis are concerned about civil liberties and political issues, something the Omani authorities do not wish to provide their citizens. The United Arab Emirates was just not willing to pay for no stated reason. The matter became further complicated for Abu Dhabi following the BCCI case. Against this backdrop, many felt that the AGU was near its last days. To make matters worse, the AGU decided to provide their state of the art campus

to University of Bahrain beginning September 1991. Currently, the AGU has virtually no real campus save the little spaces at Manama's main hospital. Right from its inception, the AGU decided to concentrate on post-graduate level degrees and in restricted fields especially technology application and management besides matters related to the region's environment. Many think the focus was too short for a place not known to have many graduates; hence, the University's demise was sealed at its birth.

Shameful repayment of the AGU loans. While the AGU authorities spared no time enjoying the structure of the campus at the Sukhair (part of the Riffa area, the place where the "royal family" lives), the debtors were left in the cold. The AGU owed tens of millions of U.S. Dollars to the South Korean construction firm Daylam. In turn, Daylam had other local and non-domestic sub-contractors. The debtors waited patiently to no avail. The Koran firm decided not to take the case further as part of its business practices. Only in this decade did the Korean firm decide to seek a court decision if only to satisfy the local sub-contractors. The debtors were asked to forego all interest arrears plus a good amount of the capital. The debtors accepted the verdict for lack of better viable alternatives. This was the case for a good amount of the debts. Still, new cases are pending before the active courts in Bahrain for more than thirty million Dollars.

Thus, all of a sudden there was talk of the ceremony for graduates of the AGU. The ritual took place at the campus of the University of

Bahrain, which formerly belonged to the AGU. Nearly 400 graduates received their diplomas or letters of recognition. The group included former and recent graduates. This was the first ever graduation ceremony held by the AGU. The rite received wide media coverage in the Gulf. It is believed that Bahrain purposefully effected the high profile media coverage to give the impression that the AGU decision made a right choice for selecting the Bahrain site for the University. The message was that the AGU remains alive. All the Education Ministers of the GCC attended the festivities. The only exception was the Iraqi Education Minister, who by the virtue of the University's decree, should have been present.

Many people talked at the ceremony including the Amir. To the amusement of many, the Amir delivered a speech notwithstanding the fact that the address was quite short. The fact that the Amir decided to address the gathering indicates the level of significance the country attached to the AGU. At the stake is direct economic benefit to the country. Indirect advantages include public relations for state.

The question now is whether the AGU will undergo a new birth? Despite the extravaganza shown at the graduation party, chances for a solid come back for AGU remain slim. What happened was nothing but an attempt by Bahrain to revive the school. We say this while we hope that the University would come back in a new force. It was an attempt to raise the morale of the staff and graduates of the AGU after their hardship.

U.S. Transport Secretary: Buy American Or Else!

On 4 October, America's Transport Secretary arrived in Bahrain. Officially, the visit was said to be part of the tour of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

This stopover constitutes a unique in the ties between the U.S. and Bahrain. For one, historically, U.S.'s Secretaries for State, Defense, Navy and other top military and security officials visit Bahrain. In fact, rarely a week passes without an American official or "expert" making quick stops in Bahrain; visitors include former ambassadors, military figures, or those selling services in the various defence and security fields.

The U.S. Embassy in Bahrain is one of the most modern (and active) of its kind in the island. The visits re-assure the rulers that America would come to their rescue at times of emergency. Bahrain has been ruled by the same person ever since 1961.

The Transportation Secretary's trip had to do with the U.S. economy. It falls in line with Clinton Administration's push for applying pressure on countries that listen to the U.S. such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (or else need the American markets such as China) to give concessions to the U.S. businesses. The Administration is determined to make the Gulf countries buy more American such as planes, cars, computers and agriculture produce.

True, the Gulf countries run a trade surplus

with the U.S. but this has to do with the substantial U.S. imports of the Saudi Arabian oil in particular. Nevertheless, the U.S. has a trade surplus with Bahrain. The Clinton people feel that the Gulf countries will buy more and more from the U.S. and that all they need is apply pressure. In short, America feels that the drive to sell more American goods to the Gulf is only one advantage of the Gulf War of 1991.

The American official was given a high profile visit. According to people in Manama, the reason was that the counterpart of the U.S. Transportation Secretary happens to be "Sheik Ali" who is the son of the Prime Minister. This sheikh is trying to behave as if he will be the next premier.

Gulf Air (GF) will fly to New York direct next year. In return, the Minister asked the owners of the Gulf Air, to provide special treatment to U.S. airline companies. Currently the American carriers such as United, American and Delta are not serving the Gulf region. The U.S. is most probably asking for favourable terms.

It is thought that the U.S. is asking for a deal such as the one in force with Japan Airlines (JAL) whereby American carriers have full access to the regional airports but not vice versa. We have learned that Gulf Air would like to have its trip to the U.S. originate from a member state to London's Heathrow and then

to JFK airport in New York. But neither the British nor the Americans were sympathetic to Gulf Air's call. During the late 1980s and early 1990, Gulf Air had an arrangement with Trans World Airlines or TWA flying Gulf Air's planes from London to New York, manned by TWA's crews only. But later when TWA decided to sell its slots in London to United and American, the deal fell through. Certainly, GF would experience difficulty in making the route a lucrative one given that New York is not a famous destination among the Gulf subjects. However, the deal may be good news for members of the U.S. armed forces who could be found in many parts of Bahrain.

Furthermore, earlier in the summer, U.S. Commerce Secretary Brown paid a visit to Saudi Arabia, the first of its kind in a decade. The Secretary urged Saudi's King Fahad to ask the national carrier Saudia to buy tens of U.S. commercial planes especially the Seattle-based Boeing. Following the visit, President Clinton telephoned the Saudi monarch to choose American planes and not European. The move angered officials at Airbus as an interference in free trade.

The American Secretary was given quite a high profile in his movements in the island despite the fact the trip was very short and that the official is a junior figure in the Clinton's Administration.