

BAHRAIN

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Baghdad to Aden in Three Years The Gaspie-Billitro Doctrine Claims New Victims in Yemen

Robert Billitro, the American Assistant Secretary of State, is well-acquainted with the affairs of the Middle East. He had served in the region for some time, and was the US ambassador to Tunis in the eighties. He was instrumental in the negotiations between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organisation that eventually led to the signing of the Gaza-Gericho accord. However, Mr. Billitro's experience with the politics of the region could not enable him to stop a looming war when he visited both San'aa and Aden early last month. He left Yemen on the eve the war broke out in a violent manner. He had tried his skills and persuasive powers to bring the two parties together in order to avert a military conflict. His efforts proved futile. The war is raging in the fiercest sense, and no end seems to be in the horizon. Whether or not the Americans had any interest in paving the way to the conflict is open to interpretation, but what is clear is that the military confrontation had been precipitated by the boycott of the governmental activities by the vice president, the leader of the Socialist Party, Ali Salem Al Beidh since he returned from the US in August 1993. The controversial trip was for treatment, but political contacts were made by Mr. Al Beidh including a high-level meeting with the Mr. Algor, the US vice-president.

The war which has been raging for a month has succeeded in polarising the political situation in the Arab world on similar lines to the Gulf war. On one hand, Saudi Arabia assisted by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain has supported the southerners, and advocated the abandonment of the unity of the Yemen. Riyadh had many interests at stake, not least the border dispute with the Yemenis, and the sensitivity of the spread of democracy on its southern borders. On the other hand, San'aa has several supporters. Among them are Jordan, Iraq, Oman and Qatar. This is a serious fragmentation of Arab public opinion, but it is widely felt that the North enjoys a wider popular support among the Arab people. Blame is levelled against the south Socialist Party of Ali Salem Al Beidh who has adopted separatist policies since it became clear that their position in a unified democratic Yemen would be much weaker. The elections last year marginalised them to the extent that they ranked third in the overall number of parliamentary seats. The third bloc, the Yemeni Alliance for Reform, which is the main Islamic bloc, emerged in a stronger position than the Socialist Party, a development that has proved devastating to the political system. The Socialist Party had complained of a series of assassinations among its cadres and accused the main party in Yemen, the People's Congress of sheltering the culprits. The situation has been

deteriorating since last summer, and all mediation efforts have failed. When the war flared up last month there were many factors that had contributed to its eruption and the outside parties who have interests in Yemen have adopted a wait-and-see policy, leaving both parties to settle their accounts on the battlefield.

The joint mediation efforts taken up by Jordan and Oman resulted in the signing of the "Covenant and Agreement Document" in Jordan last February. It was signed by both the President, Ali Abdulla Saleh, his deputy, Ali Salem Al Beidh and the speaker of the parliament, Abdullah Hussain Al Ahmar. It was clear immediately after the signing of the agreement that seriousness was non-existent. No sooner had the signatories returned home than did the bickering started. Despite calls from outsiders as well as insiders to abide by the terms of the Amman Accord, calls for dialogue went unheeded. There has been a deterioration in the political and military situation for the last three months, and even after isolated military encounters took place little effort was made by powerful mediators such as the Americans to halt them. It was clear the situation was rapidly escalating towards military confrontation possibly leading to an all-out war. It is now known that countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United States have poured arms and money into South Yemen thereby encouraging the Socialist Party to become more stubborn. Behind the calls for self restraint, there has been a great deal of encouragement to the southerners to go all the way towards separation.

The 'American envoy, Mr. Billitro, was clearly siding with Aden when he stated after his visit to Yemen, his conviction that the President, Ali Abdulla Saleh, was the one to blame for starting the war. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the president of the United Arab Emirates, also accused the Yemeni president for prolonging the conflict. Lastly, the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, also blamed President Saleh for refusing outside intervention.

The North has always considered the conflict as an internal one that did not need outside mediation. To them, the elections last year gave the citizens the chance to choose their representatives in the parliament and since then, constitutional rule has been in place. It was the southerners' fudging commitment to democracy that has created the confusion in the country. The declaration of independence by the south last month could only antagonise the situation rather than solve it. The President has vowed to continue the drive to crush the

rebellion and bring the "criminals" to justice. Whether he could do this or not is immaterial at this juncture. What is important is whether San'aa could impose its military solution in a war which is not free from outside intervention. The Americans have not helped the situation by siding with the south. On the contrary, their policy towards the situation in Yemen could only lead to a more confused situation where the Socialist Party will be viewed as a satellite of the US and is conducting a war by proxy. Washington has been sensitive towards Yemen since it sided with Iraq during the liberation of Kuwait. At the time the Yemeni ambassador to the United Nations, Abdullah Al Ahtal, adopted a policy of countering the US efforts to mobilise the international task force to liberate Kuwait. That had antagonised the Saudis and the Kuwaitis and all efforts were then directed towards the dismemberment of Yemen. To the Yemenis their have been many attempts and plots to undermine their much-cherished unity and have been sensitive to any move towards the weakening of their state. Since their northern neighbour, Saudi Arabia, has mobilised her mass media, financial assets and political machinery to assist the south as a way to realise the fragmentation of Yemen, it was felt the situation could not continue as it was, and a dramatic move would take place.

It is only legitimate to suggest that the Gulf money, mainly from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the political manoeuvring by the United States of America, and the readiness of the southern Socialist Party are among the factors that contributed to the creation of the present messy situation. With the declaration of the Socialist Party of the independence of the south and the establishment of the "Democratic Yemen Republic" the North has to act quickly to regain the military and the political initiatives. The end of the Yemeni experience, both in the union and the democratic political system, is the end of the dreams of many Arabs and Muslims. The American envoy's performance in Yemen is open to question in a way similar to that of the former American ambassador to Iraq, April Gaspy. In both cases the American policy in the region, was confused and disoriented. Perhaps the future will tell what Mr. Billitro told the President and his deputy during his brief call on San'aa and Aden. Again the Gulf states have failed to adopt a unified stand vis-a-vis the development in the war-torn Yemen. Southern Arabia is once again the battlefield between the forces of unity and democracy and those of separatism and despotism. The Gaspy-Billitro doctrine is in action again. The invoice goes to the people of the region, who have no choice but to pay the high cost.

Robert Billitro's Conclusion After Visiting the Gulf People's Participation Makes You Strong

Has the American changed their policy in the Gulf? Has the troubled President Clinton decided to emphasise the flagship note of his policy often cited as one of the attributes of the Democrats, i.e., promotion and defence of human rights in the world? In the case of China this could be the change, but whether we are going to see a tilt towards a cold war with that country is another issue. What is important here is the recent resort to the issue of human rights in China, Haiti, Iraq and other less important countries. But the test of the Clinton's administration is the Middle East and most notably, the Gulf. So far the Americans have succeeded in forcing a peace process on the region, a development that has taken many observers by surprise. The Palestine Liberation Organisation has now moved some police cadres to the occupied territories and a limited degree of self-rule is beginning to emerge on a tiny portion of the Palestinian land. That is surely a development which may change many things in the region, especially the alliances and the political agenda. Whether this momentum for peace could be sustained depends very much on the United States and whether it can force the Israelis to give some practical concessions to the Palestinians especially those who have so far opposed the peace process.

The other fundamental test of the American policy in the Middle East is the extent of the White House's commitment to human rights. At the peak of the Gulf crisis three and a half years ago, people were led to believe that the spring of human rights and democracy was looming. The forces which were mobilised ostensibly to defend Saudi Arabia and free Kuwait did their job at a high cost to the region and its resources. The least expected is to endeavour to promote the most basic values of modern societies; human rights and democracy. So far, not much of this kind of action is forthcoming, and a feeling of frustration is in place among most citizens in the Gulf region. The tribal sheikhs have so far managed to avoid being caught in the midst of international outcries for respect of human rights and democratic values despite the fact that the region has the worst records on those two issues. There is no worse situation than one in which the most basic rights of free speech and political rights are constantly violated. Amongst the six states comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council, only Kuwait has a taste of a degree of democratic practices, though the eventual political decisions are left to the inner circles of the ruling tribe. The others have no elected institutions, but have maintained a form of consultation which is non-binding and largely undemocratic.

During his visit to the region last month, the American Assistant Secretary of State, Robert Billitro, hinted to the internal problems facing the GCC countries. At a press conference in Abu Dhabi, he said the security of the Gulf is at the top of the American priorities, and that he viewed both Iraq and Iran as the main source of threats to the stability of the GCC countries. But he qualified his statement later by stating that the policy of his government was not to over-

throw the regime in Teheran, but to encourage it to change its behaviour. He further added that his government "was ready to enter into dialogue with representatives of the Iranian government to discuss their differences." This indicates a shift in the American policy vis-a-vis Iran and could herald a new era of American-Iranian relations.

Furthermore, Mr. Billitro said that the policy of his government towards popular participation in politics has never been secret: "We said that the increase level of people's participation in government strengthens (the system) and does not weaken (it). He said his government had welcomed the steps taken by governments in the Gulf to increase the public participation in Kuwait, and the appointed councils in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman. This hint is a significant one and could mean different things to different people. It could imply acceptance the pace of the political reforms in the Gulf, but it could also mean encouraging the governments to undertake a programme of political reform in their countries in a way that does not compromise the democratic doctrine.

When Saddam Hussain occupied Kuwait, the allied forces suddenly realised they were defending despotic, undemocratic and tribal regimes. They found a paradox in the way American foreign policy was being conducted. A lot of debate took place then in the western media on the viability of defending undemocratic regimes in the Gulf. Comments often cited incidents of miscarriage of justice in places like Saudi Arabia due to the lack of any public accountability. Calls for an overhaul of the tribal system were made, and the governments gave promises to improve their human rights records. Up and until this moment, no country in the Gulf has instituted democracy as a constitutional necessity. Infact none of the GCC states, apart from Kuwait and Bahrain, has a written constitution. Whilst the Kuwaiti constitution has been put back in operation, the Baharaini government has so far opposed the calls for the restoration of the country's 1973 constitution. Mr. Billitro's comments thus need more than the declaration of the principles. A more political approach is needed to induce the governments of the Gulf states to take up the democratic challenge. The new generation of intellectual and political activists in the Gulf states are mature enough to practice democracy in a dignified and responsible way. It is the governments have so far opposed the reformists and often jailed them. The Baharaini government has exiled political enthusiasts calling for the restoration of the country's constitution. This is in addition to the large number of political prisoners.

The American envoy has understood the weakness of the tribal regimes of the Gulf and their continuous bickering. In Manama, where he must have heard the Al Khalifa's grievances against their foes, Al Than of Qatar, emphasised at his press conference on 11th May, the need for the Gulf states to appear strong and united" thereby exposing his unease at the

anarchical state of the inter-state hostilities. He reiterated the American commitment to the defence of the Gulf, but left the door open for speculation on the extent of the pressure he had exerted on the governments to mend their fences and get on with the job. What the US official saw and heard is the same as has been aired by the opposition and patriotic forces about the lack of statesmanship amongst the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. He must have been embarrassed as he talked about his government's commitment to the defence of the tribal regimes who could not agree to any kind of people's participation. But ultimately, what drives the foreign policy of the United States is the national interest which has been served by the existence of weak governments. However, on the long run, the Americans will find it extremely difficult to justify their continuous propping up of despots and dictators. The limited gains from the adoption of this policy is offset by the moral defeat of whoever raises the banner of human rights and democracy whilst condoning acts which are alien to the values of these tenets of the international conventions on human rights.

So far, the Gulf states have adopted a conciliatory policy towards the Israelis. Qatar, in particular has conducted high level contacts with the Israeli leaders including a meeting between Foreign Minister, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabir Al Thani and his Israeli counterpart in New York last Autumn. There has also been talk of a deal to transfer Qatari gas to Israel through a pipeline. Last month the Committee for Disarmament which is one of the committees set up by the Madrid conference met in Doha in the presence of Israeli officials. Earlier, the committee of water held its fifth round of talks in Muscat, Oman. A high level Israeli delegation took part, and was warmly received by the Omanis. The Minister of State for Foreign affairs, Yousif bin Alawi bin Abdulla held a meeting with Mr. Bailin, the Israeli deputy foreign minister at the Muscat talks. The Omani Minister also appeared on Israeli TV linking any progress in his country's relation with Israel to the progress of talks between Israel and other Arab countries.

This attitude of the Gulf countries is an indication of the extent of the American pressure and the inability of these regimes to resist them. The Americans have put as a priority the advancement of relations between all Arab countries and Israel. This is why Washington has been particularly sensitive towards the continued Iranian hostility towards the peace process. The American deputy foreign minister, Robert Billitro, has sought to turn attention away from the sensitive issue of relations between the Gulf states and Israel to the issue of Gulf security which is threatened, in his theory, by both Iraq and Iran. The GCC states have so far refused to be drawn into conflict with Iran, but gave in to the pressure to improve relations with Israel. The next few months will be crucial in the development of the GCC foreign relations, and especially with Israel, an issue which both sensitive and dangerous.

CDLR: The Situation in Saudi Arabia is Volatile

The situation in Saudi Arabia continues to be tense after a series of detentions during the months of March and April. The economic situation coupled with lack of democracy and basic human rights make the situation even worse. Although the war in the Yemen has provided a respite for the Saudis, the general atmosphere is of gloom and pessimism. Change is inevitable according to experts on Saudi affairs. It may be some time before change is effected, but the present situation could not continue unabated. Even the Americans feel obliged not to oppose a change in the Saudi leadership. The Committee for the Defence of Legal Rights in Saudi Arabia issued her 8th communique on 8th May 1994. Here is the text:

The Saudi security forces have continued their detention campaign against whoever is suspected of sympathizing with or supporting the reform movement. According to the reports received by the CDLR office in London, the following persons have recently been detained:

1. Dr. Hussein Mash-hoor Al-Hazimi, assistant professor at the Physics Department in King Saud University in Riyadh. Dr. Al-Hazimi, who studied for his masters in the U.S.A and for his Ph.D. in the U.K in radiation and Basic Physics, was detained on the evening of Thursday 5/May/1994 after his house was stormed and thoroughly searched. The father of four belongs to the tribe of Al-Hawazim, a well-known and highly respected tribe in the Jizan area in the south of Arabia. Dr. Hussein is highly reputable in scientific circles and is highly respected within his tribe and in his province. His father, Sheikh Muhammad Mash-hoor Al-Hazimi, is a chief in his tribe and an authoritative figure in the Jizan province.

2. Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Al-Mas'ari, cousin of Prof. Muhammad Abdallah Al-Mas'ari, was detained on the afternoon of Sunday 1/May/1994 after both his office at the Library of Imam Muhammad bin Sa'ud University and his house at As-Suwaidi district of Riyadh were stormed and thoroughly searched. Mr. Al-Mas'ari, who is a leader of the weekly Friday prayers, is a well-known critic of the regime.

3. Lu'ay bin Abdallah Al-Mas'ari, who is the brother of Prof. Muhammad Al-Mas'ari - CDLR spokesman - and a student at the University of Petroleum and Minerals, disappeared suddenly on Sunday 1/May/1994, and is thought to have been detained since then.

The CDLR office in London has learned that the five detainees of Ha'il, whose detention was reported in CDLR communique No.6, have been released due to mounting pressure by the people of Ha'il. The CDLR would like to salute the stance of Mr. Abdallah Al-Ziqdi, who expressed his strong denunciation of the manner in which he and his colleagues were treated by the authorities, and who refused to leave the detention centre until he and his mates were given an official apology.

The remaining detainees, referred to in previous CDLR communiqués, are still in detention. The CDLR renews its condemnation of the continuing oppression and demands the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees.

Edward Heath's Account of the former Bahraini Ruler: My Father Advised Me to be Loyal to the British

Edward Heath the former British Prime Minister is one of the few politicians who had seen the rulers of Bahrain in the early sixties. In his book, "Travels" Mr. Heath describes his encounter with Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa in Bahrain in 1961. The mentality of the Al Khalifa remains the same, and the present situation is not different from what it used to be, a fact which has implications when deciding policies towards the government of Bahrain. The following is the text of his description of what took place at that meeting:

In Bahrain I faced a difficult situation. Just before the House of Commons rose for Christmas, there had been a debate about the way in which prisoners were treated on the island. In the course of this, a good many things had been said that I knew had caused great offence to the ruler Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. Relations with him were strained. I had the delicate task of restoring his confidence in Bahrain while at the same time persuading him to ease the lot of the prisoners.

The ruler agreed to come to dinner at the resident's home. Afterwards, Sheikh Salman and I were guided into the study where we could have a talk alone. One of the resident's staff, who spoke Arabic perfectly was our interpreter. We sat on a long couch, the interpreter between us. The ruler was a man of distinction, tall, bearded and with a splendid bearing. In his gold-edge robes, his ceremonial dagger in his belt, he was most impressive. I invited him to open the conversation.

The speeches that had been made about him in Parliament had broken his heart, he said with great emotion. How could the British say such things about him and his people? He had always thought the British were his closest friends, but now they had done this to him. This was repeated phrase by phrase by the interpreter. I noticed a tear appearing in the eye of the ruler. "My father's last words to me on his deathbed were that I must always trust the British," he said passionately, the tears now beginning to well up profusely. The interpreter turned to me to repeat those words and I noticed with alarm that the tear were also trickling down his cheeks. "I have obeyed my father's last words. I have always been loyal to the British, but now I can go on no longer," said the ruler dramatically. This was repeated with equal vigorous gesture by the interpreter, whose tear-stained face was now resembling that of the ruler. I began to feel very much the odd man out in this emotional exchange. It took me a long time to persuade the ruler that Britain would still maintain the standards that he and his predecessors had come to expect from us. He died shortly afterwards, I hope somewhat comforted, to be succeeded by his eldest son, Sheikh Isa, who has frequently welcomed me to the island.

Human Rights Monitor More Detentions, Torture and Social Unrest

The human rights situation in Bahrain continued to cause concern to the people, and the following is a brief account of recent incidents:

* Mr. Redha Al-Shuwaikh wanted to cross the bridge linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia on 2 May. Over the bridge, he was held for interrogation. His interrogators told him that he is wanted for his part in the events of Momin Mosque last January. Mr. Al-Shuwaikh, replied that he had been in jail, and was released without charges. Nonetheless, he was denied his right to travel and his passport was confiscated.

* Ghazi Jasim Radhi Maatooq was arrested early May and remains in detention. His family was told that he was added to the dozens of pupils detained in April at Madinat Isa High School. These pupils will not be able to study for their final exams and will suffer a loss of one year, if they are released. It is worth noting that some 25 pupils were arrested on 2 April, the majority of whom remain in indefinite detention. A Jordanian security officer, Mohmood Al-Akkoori, told one family that their son was part of a subversive organisation working against the government. Had it not been for the suffering of these teenage detainees, the Jordanian officer comment is not a bad joke.

* The six political prisoners who were found listening to a small radio at Jaw prison, are still at Al-Qalaa Prison. Al-Qalaa Prison is the worst news for any person. It is the HQ of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS). At Al-Qalaa, anything may happen to a person, and no one intervene even the head of state (Amir). The six prisoner suffered from bad treatment and several of them were admitted to hospital due to torture. Amnesty International issued an urgent action last month while other international human right organisations expressed their concern. The SIS officers have not released the six prisoners and it is not known what the outcome would be. The prisoners include Mohammed Jamil Al-Jamri, Ali Hassan, Ali Mobarak, Salah Al-Khawajah, Sadiq Abdulla and Nabel Baqir.

* Up to two hundred people were admitted to hospital suffering from an epidemic disease worst than chicken pox. Fifty cases were reported in Ghamatah Girls School in Sitra. All the other cases are also in the same area. Sitra is the industrial area in Bahrain, where petrochemical, aluminium smelter, refinery, and about a dozen of small factories dependent on hazardous chemicals. The government has always neglected the environmental implication and in Bahrain there is no factory inspectorate. Indeed the government is attempting to cover-up the situation and have not published the facts. It is known that a pesticide factor is emitting polluted gases in the area.

* On 30th April 1994, Ali Mubarak, one of the prisoners who had been tortured recently was allowed to see his family. Accompanied by a group of police officers, Mr. Mubarak entered a special room in which the family was waiting, and immediately burst and angrily said: I will speak out regardless of what you will do. He removed some of his clothes and showed his family the wounds inflicted onto him by the security forces.

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights: Bahrain's Record on Civil Freedom is Appalling

Since 1978 the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights has been working to promote international human rights, Refugee Law and legal procedures in the United States and abroad. In its 1994 report (issued in March) the Committee compiled the following report on the human rights situation in Bahrain:

According to the US Department of State, "Because of the restriction on freedom of association and expression in Bahrain, any independent, domestically based investigation and public criticism of the government's human rights policies would face major obstacles."

Since achieving independence from Britain in August 1971, the State of Bahrain has enjoyed only two years of constitutional government. The Bahraini Constitution, drafted by an elected Constitutional Assembly, came into force on June 9, 1973. It upheld many basic freedoms, including the freedom to form associations "in conformity with the law." A National Assembly, made up of 30 elected representatives and 30 government appointees, was created in December 1973. It swiftly came into conflict with the government, however, which is dominated by the ruling al-Khalifa family. In August 1975, citing a lack of co-operation from the National Assembly, the Amir suspended the assembly, together with substantial parts of the Constitution. Since then, Sheikh 'Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa has ruled by decree, with a government dominated by his family members, who occupy all key positions including Head of State, Prime Minister and the Ministries of Justice, Defence and Interior.

In 1974 Sheikh 'Isa took advantage of a parliamentary recess to introduce a Decree Law on State Security Measures. The law, which remains in force to this day, gave the Minister of Interior broad powers to detain without charge or trial, for renewable three-year periods, anyone suspected of endangering or planning to endanger the security of the state or to disturb public order. These powers have been used extensively over the past 20 years to clamp down on dissident opinions of all kinds.

With virtually all avenues for voicing criticism of government policy shut down, some popular grievances continued to be expressed through Bahrain's network of social, cultural and sporting clubs. In an effort to regulate the activities of these non-governmental associations and organisations, the government resorted to a new law on associations, Law No. 21 of 1989.

The law, under which all types of associations are required to register, explicitly prohibits involvement in politics. It provides extensive scope for governmental interference in the running of an association. For example, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs must be given access to all minutes of meetings of a society's executive body. Articles 15-22 of the law require that all reports or documents intended for public distribution, or distribution among the members of an association, must receive prior approval from officials at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In addition, the internal regulations of all associations must comply with a standard formula drawn up by the Ministry.

The authorities also maintain tight control over the financial affairs of non-governmental associations. The receipt of funds from outside of the country requires the prior permission of the authorities, as do domestic fund-raising efforts.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs is vested with the power to dissolve any society, dismiss its board of directors and appoint a substitute, and to install a director of the government's choice. The Minister may also oblige societies to merge, and reassign their assets and property. Societies have no legal redress against these ministerial decisions.

In view of the highly restrictive nature of laws governing freedom of association in Bahrain, it is hardly surprising that no domestic human rights organisations have developed. The Bahraini government would not wish its poor human rights record to be the subject of domestic public scrutiny.

The only legal Bahraini organisation to offer any kind of challenge to governmental control has been the Bahraini Bar Society. When Bahraini lawyers sought permission to form an independent self-governing association in 1979, their request was denied. Instead lawyers were obliged to form a society under the law of associations then in force. With the passing of the new law on associations in 1989, the Bar Society brought a case to the Superior Civil Court arguing that its provisions were both draconian and ambiguous. The Bar Society objected, *inter alia*, to the prohibition on associations becoming involved in politics, on the grounds that this ban was over-broad and poorly defined. It also objected to the requirement for all public activities undertaken by an association to obtain prior written permission from the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, with failure to do so constituting a punishable offence. The Bar Society argued that this pro-

vision risked leading to arbitrary punishment.

To date, the Superior Civil Court has not issued a ruling on the Bar Society's objections. According to one Bahraini lawyer interviewed by Lawyers Committee in 1992, the Bahraini government has tried to persuade the Bar Society to drop its case, offering a number of concessions. These include allowing the Society to attend meetings of the Arab Lawyers Union and of other regional and international legal organisations. The Bar Society has taken advantage of this opportunity. However, its case remains pending before the court. Inside Bahrain, the Bar Society has done nothing to break the silence on public discussion of the country's human rights problems.

Even a country like Bahrain, where dissenting opinion and activities have been tightly controlled for more than twenty years, is not immune to global and regional trends that favour more participatory forms of government. Elections in Kuwait in October 1992 and in Yemen in April 1993, accompanied by a flowering of political debate in both countries, have created expectations that other Gulf states will be forced to accommodate a more open debate about government policies, including in the field of human rights. In an apparent response to these pressures, the Amir announced the formation of a 30-person Consultative Council on December 20, 1992. This Council, made up solely of appointees, meets in secret and has so far contributed nothing to alter a legal and policy climate intensely hostile to the activities of all non governmental organisation.

The above report is part of the newly published "Shaking the Defenders, Legal Restrictions on Independent Human Rights Advocacy Worldwide, A report of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 330 Seventh Avenue, 10th Floor, New York 10001, USA, issued in March 1994, ISBN 0-934143-69-2".

More Pilgrims Die at Hajj They Did it Again

The news that more than 200 pilgrims have been killed during the last season of Hajj (pilgrimage) has caused a furore in the Islamic world. Anger, frustration and condemnation are widespread and the Saudis have to counter these claims by proving otherwise. Although this time the incident might have been caused simply by overcrowding, the failure of the Saudis to offer full explanation of the tragedy has added to the mistrust of people towards the Saudi government.

In 1990, more than 1400 pilgrims died as they were forced into a stampede inside a tunnel. The tunnel was closed on one side to allow the motorcade of one of the Saudi royal family members to pass. In the ensuing confusion the pilgrims were crushed to death. At the time, relations between Saudi Arabia and Turkey were strained as the Turks accused the Saudis of both negligence and mismanagement. The Saudis paid large sums to Turkey to contain the situation.

Earlier, more than 400 Iranians were killed

by Saudi police as they demonstrated in the streets of Mecca in 1987. The Saudis have accused the Iranians of disrupting the Hajj by their demonstrations. However, the two latter incidents could only add to the anger of Muslims towards the custodians of the Holy Haramain for their inability to maintain peace and discipline despite their rhetorics of upgrading the facilities at both Mecca and Medina.

The Saudis gave the figure of 829 fatalities in this Hajj, but failed to give an exact figure of the number of victims of the stampede on 23rd May 1994, at the Jamarat (the stone-throwing ritual performed by the pilgrims to signify the stoning of the devil). It is expected that the total number of fatalities of the latest incident will be far higher than the 200 quoted by the Saudis. In fact they did not announce the news until the pilgrims contacted their home countries and revealed the news to relatives. Since then more details have surfaced but the total picture could not be known for some time to come. The Saudis have once again failed their duty.