

BAHRAIN

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The Doha-Riyadh Confrontation Could End the Fragile Alliance What Future for the GCC?

The diversity of the political inclinations in the Gulf region is lending itself to major rifts possibly leading to catastrophic consequences. It is difficult to talk about a unified position vis-a-vis any of the major problems in the region. In order to substantiate this, some examples will highlight the situation.

As has already been mentioned, the opinion is divided regarding the relations with Iraq, a major player in the politics of the region in the last fifteen years. Prior to that almost all the regimes were against the Ba'hist regime of Iraq. Baghdad was bombarding the capitals of the Gulf states with a barrage of abuses and criticism.

To Iraq, then a Soviet satellite, these states were "puppets of the imperialist west", whilst to them, Iraq was a pro-communist ideology. It was after the Islamic revolution in Iran that a truce was observed between Baghdad and other Gulf capitals, the hatred towards the new regime in Tehran being the unifying factor. Today, however, the situation is more confused. The six countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are divided on the single issue of Iraq. Whilst Saudi Arabia leads the anti-Iraq campaign assisted by Kuwait, Bahrain and to a lesser extent, the United Arab Emirates, both Qatar and Oman are adopting a more conciliatory attitude towards Baghdad. This is an unprecedented situation since the GCC states have never been in a similar situation since the British withdrew from the Gulf in 1971.

The relations with Iran is another example of the divergence of the policies of the GCC states. Today, Iran enjoys a relatively good relations with almost all these countries except the UAE with whom a conflict on three small islands has erupted. However, these relations vary extensively from warm to cool, and after every meeting of the foreign ministers of the Gulf states a conflict arises. The GCC states are obliged to go along the western notion which implicates Iran as a destabilising force in the Gulf. Here again, there is an American policy which seeks to maintain a tight control on the affairs of the region. Iran is being equated with Iraq as a source of instability in this volatile region. When the American Assistant Secretary of State, Robert Billiro visited the region early in May, he mentioned Iran in the context of a destabilising factor. Also, when the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, Douglas Hogg, toured the Gulf states in June, he also reiterated that Iran was a threat to the stability of the Gulf. At least in this context, there is a cool reception to the idea of antagonising Iran.

However, the divergence of the political

opinion is now clearest in the case of Yemen. Since the hostilities in that country flared up in early May, there has been two approaches towards it from the GCC countries. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is leading the campaign of encouraging the sessionism of the Socialist Party of the South. In this crusade, Riyadh is being assisted by Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. But Qatar has openly defied this policy and has openly sided with the North and called the Socialist Party sessionists and illegitimate movement against the legitimacy of the government of President Ali Abdulla Saleh. When the GCC foreign ministers ended their meeting at the Saudi town of Abha in early June and issued their final communique referring to "Yemen" only, the Qataris registered their reservations and insisted on the official name of "the Republic of Yemen" which is the name of the unified Yemen. The Al Thani government in Doha has all along called for the protection of unity and rejected any compromise.

Moreover, when the Qataris attended the Non-Aligned foreign ministers meeting in Cairo in June, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabir Al Thani, the foreign minister, called upon the conference to rally around the unified Yemen and reject the partitioning of the country. Medical aid has been sent from Doha to Sanaa, and many doctors volunteered to serve there. Perhaps more significantly was the Qatari move to present a counter-proposal to the United Nations Security Council early June when the other GCC states tabled a proposal calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The Qataris rejected the proposal and put its own which called for the protection of the unity of Yemen. Doha expressed clear reservations on the UN resolution 924 which was issued later. This Qatari position is in contrast to the other GCC states and indicates a serious rift not only on policies but also in perception and priorities.

The Qataris are motivated by their sensitivity towards the Saudis with whom they have had a rough time over the last two years. Following the Saudi attack on Al Khafous border post which belongs to Qatar, the Al Thani government went out of their way to deplore the Saudis and oppose them in almost every policy. They believe the Saudi opposition to the Yemeni unity is due to the border disputes between the two countries and the democratic experience of Yemen. Also, a unified Yemen poses a strategic threat to the Saudi hegemony in the peninsula. The Saudis are believed to have supplied the southerners with material and military assistance in the months before the conflict and are

continuing to do so. The Saudis are also engaged in a diplomatic campaign worldwide to force the recognition of the new state in the south which has been named "the Democratic State of Yemen".

But what is significant is the lack of enthusiasm so far to the sessionist policy of the southerners on the part of the major western powers, namely the United States and Britain. The hesitation of the Americans to recognise the southern entity has blocked any recognition of the GCC countries and has forestalled the Saudi move. Riyadh feels frustrated but could do little to change the balance of power in the region to her favour. The Saudis have just escaped serious condemnation from the Islamic world after the tragic death of hundreds of pilgrims in May. Accusations were levelled against the Saudis for negligence and lack of a proper management of the holy places. But it is difficult for Riyadh to continue harassing her neighbours as it did with Qatar two years ago. With mounting internal pressure to perform some changes in the political system, the Saudis are not in a good position.

This diversity of political inclination in the Gulf states is an indication of the seriousness of the rift engulfing the Gulf alliance. The Saudis have committed major mistakes in dealing with their neighbours especially on issues of borders and internal policies. They have failed in dealing with the border dispute with Qatar and resorted to the use of force.

That policy has proved a serious blow to Riyadh which finds herself embarrassed by the Qatari insistence on adopting their own policies which are often contradictory with those of Riyadh. The relations of Qatar with Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Iran are not conducive to the Saudi interests. It is difficult to see a way out of this quagmire, and the Al Saud will gradually find their grip on the affairs of the region slipping away. With a weak internal position, the Saudis are in an unenviable situation. Unless something dramatic takes place in the Gulf, the situation will remain tense with Saudi Arabia and Qatar at loggerheads.

The next few months will be crucial to the future of the GCC. The outcome of the conflict in Yemen will also influence the way the politics of the region will be formulated. The attempts of the west to preserve the Gulf alliance without encouraging internal political openness will be futile. Outside problems coupled with internal dissension could only contribute towards a total fragmentation of the uneasy alliance of tribal chiefs who lack the basic attributes of modern leadership.

In Chain With Pride

Six Tortured Prisoners Await International HR Organisations' Action

Since early April, six prisoners on conscience have been transferred to the notorious Al-Qala'a prison, the headquarters of the Security and Intelligence Service. The six are: Mohammed Jamil Al-Jamri, Sadiq Ja'afar Mohammed Ali, Ali Hassan Ali Hassan, Ali Ahmed Jasim Mubarak, Abdul-Hussain Mohammed Hassan Ja'afar (Omani) and Salah Al-Khawajah. It is the worst news for any Bahraini to end-up in the ancient unhealthy cells of Al-Qala'a. It is here that detainees and prisoners are tortured and interrogated. It is here that the State Security Law is implemented, where a person may spend up to three years without trial. The six prisoners were transferred from Jaw prison, where they have been serving long-term sentences. The reason for the transfer was the discovery of a radio in one of the cells. Political prisoners are not allowed to listen to news or read newspapers. They are also restricted to read and write only at certain times and only marginal literature or educational books are allowed. The political prisoners are also prohibited from corresponding with any university or educational establishment for studying any subject. So the major crime of the six prisoners was listening to radio.

They have been transferred, tortured and were admitted to hospital following the ill-treatment. Last month, the family of Mr. Mohammed Jamil Al-Jamri, visited their son, only to discover the psychological and physical scars. He was unable to eat food, due to the punches he received at his jaws. His eyes were blackened in a torture session. He was admitted to the military hospital in April after the transfer.

The families of the six visited the UN office in Bahrain, but received no assistance. Solicitors attempted to represent the prisoners but were told off by the SIS. The Jaw prison authorities were contacted, but all replied that as long as the case is with "Al-Mukhabarat", i.e. SIS, no body in Bahrain can do anything.

Prisoners' Letter to the Amir:

The six political prisoners managed to send the following letter to the Head of State (Amir): ((His Highness the Amir of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Greetings.. We are the group of political prisoners who were jailed several years ago regarding certain cases, we wish to present to you the picture of the hardship we are undergoing under all conditions of our daily prison life. We have recently been subjected to punishment because of a minute incident which the prison authorities blew it up beyond proportions. We were accused of rebellion inside the jail, and we were accused that we attempted to attack the prison officers. The real story is that we and our cells were subjected to a thorough inspection. The action was taken when we were asleep, and in a provocative attitude. We were then left in the open under the burning sun, despite the fact the majority of prisoners suffer from many types of illness due to the conditions we underwent in jail. The inspecting officers turned the cells up-side down and scattered all our belongings. This has provoked the prisoners, who requested to see the chief officer. We were not told of any reason for the action. Then a group of us were chained,

beaten-up and transferred to Manama (Al-Qal'a) prison. Our punishment continued for a prolonged period, starting from 5 April 1994, and we do not know how long is this situation going to continue. While the State is presenting a modern picture to the outside world, the political prisoner is living in a very bad situation as compared to modern and neighbouring countries.

For example, the officers have been treating us badly during the interviews. The prisoner is separated from his family. Even the mother is not allowed to sit by the prisoner. Three police men sit amongst the family. These measures annoy the prisoner and his family especially the ladies and children. Most of what the families attempt to pass to us were prevented, even general and educational books and magazines.

Until 1993, the prisoner was not allowed to see his family more than six hours per year (one hour every two months). Since then, an additional half hour per interview was granted, hence we see our family no more than nine hours per year. We are subjected to violent treatment together with the shouting and carelessness of the prison authorities. When we ask to see the chief officer, we would be lucky to have a brief meeting after two or three weeks. We are barred from any link with the outside world. No papers, no magazines, no radio and no TV. These are not the only things. We are denied from continuing with our academic education. This is in contrary to the treatment received by the criminal prisoners. We live under the burning heat of the summer in cells without air-conditioning. This is the reason why we suffer from the epidemic and painful skin diseases.

We raise our complaints to you, hope that you assess the situation and reflect positively on our general prison conditions and the provoking and uncertain treatment we receive from the prison authorities. Regards, Signed by the six prisoners in Al-Qala'a Prison on 7 May 1994).

Letter to the Interior Minister:

The six prisoners also sent the following letter to the Interior Minister:

((His excellency the Interior Minister, Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa, Greetings.. We, the prisoners of Jaw Prison No. 1, were sentenced several years ago for different cases, submit a summary to our bad situation, that is worsening increasingly. As you are aware that we and our cells were subjected to a sweeping inspection on 5 April 1994 by a group of officers under the command of Mr. Jabir. This happened while we were asleep in the mid-day. We were spread in the open, under the burning sun, which troubled and annoyed us, especially those who are sick. We have prisoners with hear problems, others with stomach illness, and others are suffering from anaemia. When we protested against such action, we were surprised how Mr. Jabir reacted. He and his group scattered all our belonging and turned our tidy places to a mess. Our belongings and cloths were piled in the middle of the cell. This provoked us, and when enquired

from Mr. Jabir about the reason, he ordered the arbitrary transfer of five of us (the sixth person was already transferred) to Manama (Al-Qala'a) Prison to talk to the officer, as he claimed. We objected since at that time, the office working hours ended for the day (afternoon). His reply was the beating and chaining by fifty policemen. We were put in solitary confinement and we were chained 24 hours a day, even at sleeping and praying times. We went on hunger strike when we realised that Mr. Jabir did not transfer us to see any officer, but to punish us.

We are still under the punishment imposed by Mr. Jabir, even after more than one month from the incident. Although, Mr. Rashid has opened the cells doors and grouped us together, but we are still denied our rights.

1. We call on you to allow us to access the media. The criminal prisoners have been allowed to view the TV and to have video facilities. We are denied any access to TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and other things such as tape-recorder and hand-watch. The political prisoner needs these things more than others, and these are allowed for in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. What happened to us was due to the discovery of tapes with family recordings. These are very important to the married and unmarried prisoner, as they compensate for the short time allowed in the visit. This point needs to be addressed.

2. To allow for the possession of books. We were denied to have books for no reason. We returned the old books for new ones to satisfy the quota of the prison authorities. But we received no replacements. We are also denied the possession of academic books. We spent a lot of time in jail without access to education, for no reason. Prisons in all parts of the world are full of books and researches. The prisoners can come out (if allowed the access to education) with a qualification to benefit himself, his family and his homeland. Up until when are we going to be denied such a thing? And up until when are we going to be excluded from the world?

3. The imposition of punishment for any small mistake, is a faulty policy, and has negative consequences on both the prisoner and prison authority. Only by open dialogue that short and long term positive results can be achieved. What we are seeing is the result of ill-treatment that characterised the last fifteen years.

4. We are living in an unhealthy environment. We were mixed with the criminal prisoners who contracted the AIDS virus. The bad smell fill the cells as a result of the dirt ventilation ducts which contain dead cats as well as other cats that generate noise all the time. Our appointments for medical treatments were cancelled since April. We urge to address these problems.

5. The letters from our families are delivered after extensive delays and letters to our families receive the same treatment. We complained about this before, but the letters' delays continue indicating that nothing has changed and no answer was given.

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Double Punishment After Serving Full Sentence

Nabeel Baqir and Ahmed Hussein, both have spent their last seven years in jails after unfair trial. Both were accused of filming an American warship operating from the Jufair Naval Base, which is used by the US as an administrative and command base. The two have gone through an ordeal and suffered from physical and psychological torture. Both received were reported by international human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International. But the Bahraini authorities turned a blind eye and continued its unfair treatment.

Last month, both have completed their sentences and their families prepared themselves for celebrating their release. While the families prepare for their celebrations, the British-controlled Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) has already decided that the two prisoners will be deported from Bahrain upon completion of their terms. Nabeel Baqir is a Bahrain citizen, while Ahmed Hussein is one of the people who was denied citizenship. He is one of tens of thousands of people, who the government call "bedoon", meaning "without". Being without citizenship certificate is like living in hell.

Nabeel Baqir's father wrote to the head of SIS, the British-General Mr. Ian Hendersoon, requesting that the threat of deportation to be removed. The father also wrote and met the head of state (Amir) and requested his intervention. Even one of the leading solicitors and ex-chairman of Bahrain's Lawyers Society, Mr. Hasan Radhi, was requested to intervene. Mr. Radhi advised Nabil's father to go to court. The court confirmed that it didn't order the expulsion of Nabil Baqir and his friend Ahmed Hussein. When the court learnt that the decision has already been taken by the SIS, Nabil's father was told that the court could do nothing to him. Mr. Hassan Radhi apologised that he could do nothing in the face of the SIS.

On 15 June, the terms of both Nabil Baqir and Ahmed Hussein came to an end. The SIS officers took both released prisoners from the cells to the Airport, forced them to board the plane bound to Teheran and told their families to travel to Iran if they wish to see their sons. This flagrant violation of international human rights and the country's constitution is the second time to happen. Over a year ago, Mr. Hashim Al-Mosawi, a political prisoner was forced to board a plane to Syria after completing a five-years sentence.

6. We call on you to lift the pressure imposed on the prisoner and his family during the visit, such as the presence of three officers amongst the family in a way that frighten and annoy the family.

7. We call on you to make available pens and writing pads on a continuous basis.

8. We demand that the holidays are deducted from the sentences.

We put these demands to you and hope that they receive a positive response. Regards. Signed by the six political prisoners on 10 May 1994).

The above letter were written and submitted by the six prisoners to both the Amir and Interior Minister, but both did not bother to pay attention.

Al-Alawi Missed His Son, Ja'afar Lost His Father

Seyyid Kadhem Al-Alawi died in Ireland last month. He was transferred to Ireland for medical treatment after a long period of ailment. Seyyid Kadhem comes from a leading and influential Shia family. His son is Jamil Al-Alawi, the second man in the Ministry of Works, Power and Water. His uncle, Seyyid Mahmood Al-Alawi, who died a few months ago, was the Finance Minister in the early seventies. Before that date, he was a senior officer in the administration that ran Bahrain since the Thirties. Seyyid Mahmood was until his death, the financial advisor of the prime minister.

All this introduction seems to suggest a strong alliance between Al-Alawi and the government. Not at all. While Jamil (son of Seyyid Kadhem) assumes the second most important position in the Works Ministry, his brother, Ja'afar, serves a life sentence at Jaw Prison No. 1. Ja'afar Al-Alawi headed the list of those accused of attempting to overthrow the government in December 1981. At a certain point in time, the hanging ropes were made ready to execute Ja'afar and some of his friend. The saviour at that time was the swinging of Iran-Iraq war in favour of Iran. The authorities allied themselves to Saddam's regime of Iraq, and used the events of December to declare Iran as enemy No. 1, as was stated by the Prime Minister to the Paris-based Al-Mustakbal magazine.

Ja'afar Al-Alawi, was one of the youngest who were arrested, tortured and wrongly accused. Yet, he was sentenced to life imprisonment, and as said above was near to death. This case was a turning point in Bahrain's history. It was also a significant one in understanding the mentality of the ruling family, Al-Khalifa.

Since their invasion of Bahrain in 1782, they have relentlessly slaughtered the indigenous population, locally known as Al-Bahamah, who happened to be Shia Arabs. Since then, Al-Khalifa have developed a relationship with the Shia population based on mistrust. By carefully balancing the carrot and stick, and by getting the British (for the last two centuries) to mastermind the balance, Al-Khalifa have managed to stay in power. The sentencing of Ja'afar to life sentence was a message to all the indigenous Shia population to shut-up. The message, in essence said that: even a powerful family, like Al-Alawi are not immune. Indeed, Al-Alawi suffered the harshest punishment, only to make that point. When Seyyid Mahmood Al-Alawi died, the Amir visited the family, shook hand with the late Seyyid Kadhem and said to him: "Ja'afar will soon be with you". Seyyid Kadhem died before the release of his son, if he was ever going to be released.

Up until now, Al-Khalifa have depended on the British to do the dirty work for them. Ian Henderson and a gang of torturers control the intelligence apparatus and implement a shameless apartheid-like policy. In the forties, the British advisor, Sir Charles Belegrove, stated that Bahrainis do not deserve an elected parliament for at least a hundred years.

Human Rights Monitor:

More Arrests and Searches

* Last month, Nader Hussain Burdestani, was summoned by the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) and was warned not to participate in religious activities.

* Mr. Shaker Al-Najjar, had his house raided by police, who turned his belongings up-side down. No explanation was given and no reason or charges were brought against Mr. Al-Najjar.

* Mr. Mohammed Al-Hayki, was driving his car near Abo-Quwwa village. A group of secret police officers ordered him to go out of his car, then they went through ever item available in the car. No explanation was given.

* Mr. Mohammed Kojestah, was stopped by a car loaded with secret police. He was ordered out of the car for spot inspection. When asked who they were and would they inspect the car, the secret police presented their identity cards. When asked about a search warrant to for stopping and searching cars, they failed to present anything. So, Mr. Khojestah drove-off and informed them to visit him at home when they obtain the warrant.

* The 19 students of Isa Town High School were released without charges. After spending several months in detention, the students were unable to complete their academic year successfully. The authorities, knowing that they are not accountable to public, cared less about the student's future.

* Mohammed Al-Kaabi, from Zallaq village was detained for one day accused of carrying religious books while travelling. It is worth noting that Zallaq residents are part of Bahrain's Sunni community.

* On 8 June, Seyyid Dhia Al-Mosawi, Sheikh Ali Salman, both religious scholars, were summoned by the security forces and warned not lead religious activities.

* A score of youth were charged and brought before the court charged with hindering the work of secret police. The youth were resisting the recent wave of intimidation by security forces, who have been implementing spot searches on cars picked-up in random.

* Last month (see Akhbar Al-Khaleej newspaper of 2 June), the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs issued a ministerial order banning all forms of charity fund-raising. All fund raising activities must, in accordance with the order, be allowed by prior permission on a case by case basis. The Ministry has been issuing many orders aimed at ensuring full monopoly of the government on all public functions.

* Mr. Abdulla Al-Rashid returned to Bahrain after a year of his first attempt to return to Bahrain. Last year, he returned after more than two decades in exile. In the Airport, he was given a one-year passport and was then forced to board a plane to Syria. When his passport expired, he attempted to renew it at the Bahraini embassy in Damascus. The latter refused to renew the passport. So Al-Rashid travelled to Bahrain, where he was forced-out again, this time to Lebanon.

* Bahraini Shia religious scholars issued a fatwa (religious verdict) forbidding self-inflicted injuries to let blood-out of various part of the body in the name of sacred rituals. The fatwa brought to an end a backward ritual that has continued to be wrongly practised in the name of religion for decades.

Bahrain 1994

Orwell's "Big Brother" is Watching You

When the famous British novelist, George Orwell, published his widely-read book "1984", the shadow of the "Big Brother" was so frightening that its existence would scare civilised and freedom-loving people almost to death. In the worst scenario, the political situation in the countries of the "iron curtain" would have qualified to be used as a setting for the activities of the "Big Brother". In the age of the Cold War the countries of the eastern socialist block were viewed as being next to the Nazis in terms of lack of respect of human soul. It was there where George Orwell anticipated the worst of atrocities against human kind to take place. With the end of that era, and the termination of the Cold War, some western writers believed the conflict within the human society had come to an end. Some enthusiasts had gone as far as suggesting that it was the end of history. Fukuyama, the American social scientist, put forward this proposal only to be taken so seriously by academics and thinkers that books were written and seminars were held in major western capitals to look into the thesis of the end of history.

This philosophical debate centres, in essence, on the idea of human values during the endeavour to attain a higher degree of self satisfaction in a free society. The Big Brother should have become redundant if one is to believe that violations of human rights was an attribute exclusive to the communist regimes. In fact, many "liberal" governments thrive on their bloody campaign to eradicate any form of opposition. In the small State of Bahrain, where "liberalism" was often cited as an attribute of the Al Khalifa ruling family, it is illogical to talk about respect of human rights and political openness that should have dominated the planet following the demise of the socialist block. Instead, a regime not more lenient than those of eastern Europe has been in existence for the last forty years, and the people have been denied the basic rights available to citizens in modern civil societies.

In order to highlight this state of terror in Bahrain, it is the intention here to iterate the stories of notable western professionals who have visited that country recently. Their account is an indication of the prevailing situation in that Gulf state. Here is a brief account of their experiences:

1. A notable journalist working for a well-known European broadcasting network has told "the Voice of Bahrain" about his ordeal in Bahrain on condition of anonymity. He visited the country last year on an official invitation and stayed a week there. He said his ordeal started immediately after arriving in the "Gulf Hotel" where the Ministry of Information had reserved a room as an official guest. He was serviced with a chauffeur-driven car and was treated in an "Arab fashion". However, the story did not end here. He started to become suspicious when he realised he was being followed everywhere he went. A car with two people were trailing behind him most of the time. They did not attempt to hide their intentions. Sometimes they even asked him where he had gone that morning. His reply was

obvious: You have allocated me a car and you could ask the driver.

The "guest" had his telephone tapped, and they would listen to his telephone calls. They would ask him about whom he had met in the hotel and outside. He was so upset by his experience that he often reiterated that he did not envy the citizens of that country. He knew they could do nothing to harm him, because they feared a reprisal from his government, but the ongoing censorship of his moves irritated him beyond imagination. He felt like a criminal who was sought for justice, and kept blaming himself for coming to that country. He was assigned the task to visit Bahrain and to investigate the general political and social situation there. He was more than delighted to report back on his experience, and his report which was later broadcast was widely appreciated.

The journalist, out of his instinctual habit, strived to compile a factual report on the internal political situation. He planned to see some lawyers who had represented political prisoners in the past, but could not easily get in touch with them. He said: I felt sorry for every citizen and I avoided direct contact with Bahrainis because I feared they would face severe retributions if the meeting with myself was ever known. In fact I wanted to meet the families of the political prisoners and exiles, but their safety was paramount and I had to limit my contacts and meetings outside the official programme to the absolute minimum. Sometimes I would ask the driver to take me somewhere, from where I would find my own way to some other place. The trip was enough to convince me of the extent of repression in Bahrain, a small tropical island that lacks the respect of human values.

2. An ex-human rights activist who was the head of a reputed international human rights organisation visited Bahrain recently. The trip was not directly related to his previous career, but mainly for business and gathering information to write a book. He was also on an official invitation, and he thought things would be different. Although he has changed his career, the influence of his previous work would not let him ignore the human rights issue. He had thought his trip would clarify the situation in Bahrain, and he would be able to get first-hand information from the citizens. He stayed at the Gulf Hotel as a guest of Tareq Al Moayyad, the information minister. He did experience what was going on in Bahrain firstly because he felt the "Big Brother" was watching all his moves, and secondly, he was a smarter person and was able to meet more lawyers and journalists. He even received a Bahraini academic at this hostel, and managed to grasp the situation.

The guest was fascinated by the popular petition which had been submitted to the Amir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa two years ago, and he succeeded in meeting some of the signatories. He said the zeal was there among those young professionals and the repression of the security apparatus could not deter them. He has been told a new petition was being prepared calling for the restoration of the constitution, releasing the political prisoners and ending the state of emergency in the country. He was over-

taken by the admiration of the people he had met. They aspire for a more open political regime in the country and are not afraid of the consequences of their actions in that respect. One thing he could not comprehend, and that is why is the security apparatus is so sensitive to the idea of human rights, political openness, popular petitions, restoration of the constitution, ... etc. He commented at the end of his story by saying he came back with a deeper knowledge of the situation in Bahrain and he could now understand why the young men inside the country and outside could not keep silent.

3. A third person is a lady from a reputable international human rights organisation who had visited Bahrain and would not look forward to go back unless forced to. She said I have never experienced fear in the political sense, until I landed at Bahrain International Airport. Throughout my 10-day stay at the island, I felt being followed everywhere I went. A shadow of the men of the security service was following every movement of mine. I said to myself: if this is what they are doing to me, how are their citizens being treated? I managed to see few people, mainly lawyers and some of the families of the political prisoners, but at a very high cost of moral feelings and distress. Mr. Ian Henderson talked to me in a quiet voice but I could not believe a word of his. He was an elderly person and you could see his determination not to give in to the demands for political reforms in the country. He was indifferent to the sufferings of the people, and could not care about the fate of the Bahraini exiles.

4. A citizen of one of the Gulf states comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council, visited Bahrain earlier this year. He told his experience to the Voice of Bahrain, and was published in the Arabic version in March. Hewas forced to cut his trip short after he realised he was being followed by two men since he arrived at the airport. They stayed at the room next to his, they went down with him to the cafe and restaurant. They even went with him through the alley ways of Manama when he went shopping. He said that when I became certain they were targeting me for surveillance, I called the airport and reserved a seat on the first available flight to my country. Even then, they followed me to the gate of departure, and gave me a cheap smile. I vowed not to visit this country although I love its people.

5. An Arab journalist wrote last month an article in the Arabic daily "Al Sharq Al Awsat" detailing his experience in Bahrain. He went on an official visit recently and decided to write a piece as an eyewitness. However, writing in a Saudi newspaper has its limitations. Khaled Al Qashtini chose to write on the fate of the date plants in Bahrain. Until thirty years ago, the number of these trees was estimated at about one million. Today only a fraction of them are still there. Driving through the countryside one could only see tall trunks of dead trees. It was the neglect and bad policy of the government that had led to the death of these trees. The writer saved his neck and his job by choosing to tackle environmental and not political issues in Bahrain.