

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Oman Objects to Saudi-UAE Border Treaty

Tribalism Versus Nation-State in the Gulf

The latest flare-up of verbal encounters between the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is a manifestation of the extent of lack of understanding among the six states comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Again, disputes on borders are the main cause of hostilities. Twenty years ago, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates reached a bilateral agreement on their border demarcation. For few decades earlier, the two neighbouring states had been engaged in feuds due to disagreement on the borders of their territories. A notorious spot for trilateral differences involving Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman has been the Buraimi Oasis. Despite numerous attempts to reach an accord on the area disputed by the three countries, it has remained one of the hottest spots in the region.

In 1974 King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan of the UAE sealed an agreement on their borders, and last year, Riyadh presented it to the United Nations for authentication.

The Omani foreign ministry objected to that agreement and considered it a violation of Oman's sovereignty over her own territories. The dispute is apparently on the Buraimi oasis. It was only last month that the Omanis disclosed the contents of their letter to the UN. Many observers and politicians were taken by surprise at the Omani move. Apparently Muscat saw it improper to add injury to the wounds in the Gulf following the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, and hence, Sultan Qaboos kept the episode within the political echelons in the Gulf. When Omanis envoy to the United Nations, disclosed the contents of his country's letter of objection, it was a shock to those who had assumed everything was normal in the Gulf.

It now transpires that not only does Qatar object to the Saudi policies which are based on the desire for domination, but the quieter Oman shares the same opinion. Sultan Qaboos has always distanced himself from his next door neighbours, and has never adopted the policies outlined by the GCC summits. The Omanis, for many reasons, have always viewed the Saudis with suspicion and contempt. Being largely Ibadhis (an Islamic school of jurisprudence), the Omanis do not hide their sensitivity and, indeed the rejection of the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. For two centuries, the two Muslim shoals of thought have been at loggerheads and competition, and perhaps, hostility, has characterised the relations between the two peoples.

The Omani Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ahmad Al Khalili often attacks the Wahhabis for their extremist views on Islamic jurisprudence. Sheikh Al Khalili's views are broadcast live on Omans

Radio and Television, and are published in its media. The Saudis, on their part, have sheltered opponents of Sultan Qaboos, and until today, descendants of the Imam of Oman, who had been defeated by the Al Busaidis in the forties, live peacefully in Saudi Arabia, to the dislike of the Sultan.

The Saudis are also harbouring the opponents of the Qatari government. Prince Abdul Aziz Al Thani who had laid a serious claim to the throne in Doha, lives in Saudi Arabia and, when the relations between the two countries sour, he often appears on the Saudi media to give statements against the government of his country. This policy of bullying and blackmail had paid off in the past. But whether it will bear fruit in the future is open to debate. The indications are that it has started to backfire fiercely. The Qataris have almost reached the point of no return in their relations with Saudi Arabia, and the Omanis are not the best friends of Riyadh. Only Kuwait and Bahrain have remained loyal to their elder brothers in Saudi Arabia. But even these two countries have continuous fear for their own existence. The Saudis are exerting enormous pressures on Kuwait and Bahrain to give up more of their territories to their larger neighbour. Kuwait is wary of the Saudi claims to the island of Garoah in the Gulf, and to the neutral zone between the two countries. Al Khaliji, famous for the major battle during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, was once a Kuwaiti city. Today it belongs to Saudi Arabia.

Bahrain has lost two small islands to Saudi Arabia in the last ten years. Furthermore, it is reported that the Saudis have laid claim to the whole bay separating the two countries. Their claim is that it was the Saudis who had paid \$US 1 billion towards the cost of the building of the causeway, and hence it is theirs to the end of it, i.e., to the mainland Bahrain. It caused a furore in Bahrain and the Al Khalifa flirted with Al Thani for a short while. But what is more serious is the fact that Bahrain has now become a surrogate of Saudi Arabia, with its foreign policy going hand-in-hand with that dictated by Riyadh. Well-placed diplomats have expressed surprise at the extent to which the Al Khalifa have gone in their subordination to Al Saud.

But it seems the financial needs of the Al Khalifa members have landed them in the muddy water of the Riyadh. It will be catastrophic for the region to become under the guidance of the Saudis who have lost any sense of political direction. It is now a well established fact that the Saudi foreign policy is in tatters. What Riyadh does is a mere reaction to the events and have lost the drive they have enjoyed at some stage in the eighties. Some

observes attribute this to the fact the King Fahd has become a lame duck suffering physical illnesses that have almost decapitated him.

What has made the situation worse for the Saudis is the recent Yemeni crisis. Once again, the Saudis misread the implications of that crisis and put their cards on a losing horse. Not only have they lost the gamble and with it their credibility, but the remnants of the Socialist Party of the South Yemen who had fled after their forces had been defeated are now levelling blame against those countries who betrayed us. Saudi Arabia is implicated here. The Socialists are now looking for some guarantees for their safety in order to return to Yemen, albeit defeated and disheartened. The Saudis have appeared immature and reactionists in conducting their foreign policy, whilst their arch-enemies, the Qataris, have emerged victorious having backed the North Yemenis to the last minute. They even went out of their way to challenge the GCC stands at the United Nations and propose their own agenda to deal with the Yemeni crisis, a step that had infuriated the Saudis.

With this situation forming the background to the new order in the Gulf it is hardly surprising not to see a whole-hearted support to the United Arab Emirates dispute with Iran on the three islands. It is not only Iran that has a problem with the UAE, every other country has such a problem with its neighbour. The Omani envoys remarks on the Saudi-UAE border accord is only one of the border disputes that have entangled the Gulf politics in recent years. This flare up will shed more light on the intractable problem which is the result of two main factors. Firstly, the British left the Gulf in 1971 leaving behind a trail of ill-defined borders thereby sowing the seed of future flare-up of hostilities. The British did little to make better the situation and were only waiting for the eruption of the situation. Secondly, the nature of the tribal system leads to the present situation. When logic and modern language is absent from interstate diplomacy, the result of any dispute, however small, could be bloody and unlimited.

It will be a long time before wisdom becomes the order of the day among the tribal chiefs. They have dealt with modern state affairs in the same old fashion when the tribal chief dealt with his folks of sons, cousins and slaves listening to no one and fighting endless wars to maintain his sovereignty over an oasis. Unless present day chiefs realise that they are in a new world, and that the citizens expect to be treated according to international norms and conventions, things could only go from bad to worse. In all this, our people are the first victims of such a policy.

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30% Unemployed and No Action is Forthcoming The Careless Caretakers

It is fair to say that the nature of Bahraini culture keeps stemming the full adverse impact of unemployment. For instance, it is normal to find someone at the age of 25 living in the fathers house with no shame; this person is provided with shelter and food and certainly this helps disguising the unemployment problem; at the same time, availability of lodging and adherence to faith both alleviate the full negative effect of the those unemployed on the society. In other words, in Bahrain one tends not find cases where people would revenge from the society and the ex-workplace as it is common in the United States. However, stories where fathers expel their sons from the household are finding their ways into the peoples ears. Certainly, there is a limit for everything.

As per official figures, at least 65% of the those in the labour force are non-locals. Undoubtedly this is an extreme number by any accounts. True Bahrain needs and will always be in need of many professionals and unskilled expatriates at the same time.

Still, what is happening in Bahrain is beyond imagination. In fact, many skilled expatriates feel that the country must have some standards and pay close attention to the case of local employment. According to a secret governmental report, the forecast for the year 1995 is that there will be some 50,000 unemployed, of these, 12,500 shall be expatriates.

The wonder is that why should there be so

much unemployment among the non-locals. The expatriates naturally must be in the country on the need basis only.

The truth of the matter is that many people including members of the ruling Al Khalifa and those with influence and money are able to bring in expatriates as much as they can afford and like. These people are known as holders of free visa. For example, someone like Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa, son of the Prime Minister, is able to bring some expatriates from India and Pakistan and other places on the condition that these people pay him an annual fee. Thus, these people are free to do what ever work they like and then pay the dues, hence the term. They are free and are not subject to engaging in specific works. It is customary nowadays to find expatriates at office doors soliciting job vacancies. This newsletter has covered the topic on a regular basis. The free visa case is just part of the problem.

Strangely enough, the Ministry is housed in ultra beautiful complex making it possibly one of the few such governmental departments not in need of fresh spaces for at least the next twenty years.

The Labour Minister for many years died only last year. He died in Bahrain at night. The most common story is that he shot himself and was taken to a local hospital where he died from his wounds a few hours later. It is said that the flamboyant ex-official was told that he is HIV positive, as is the case with former Los Angeles

basketball star Magic Johnson. Thus, the Minister felt that he has AIDS or will acquiring it; certainly the ex-official was aware of his personal life more so than others. Minister Khalifa had the habit of making sure that he represented the Ministry at every international gathering. He used to go as representative of the Bahraini Labour. Before the ex-Ministers death, an Under-secretary named Jameel Al Jishi died prematurely of heart attack. Jameel was an alcoholic person. The current Minister is a very close relative of the ruling Al Khalifa. He is a cousin to the Amir and the Prime Minister. Also, it is said that the Minister is son in law for the Amir as he is the husband to one of the Amirs daughters. At the same time, the Prime Minister is husband to a sister of the current Minister.

Observers have noticed that the fact that many unemployed have gathered at the Ministry was an attack on the so-called Consultative Assembly. It was reported in the press in the past that the vague Assembly had been holding talks on ways to increase local employment (we say vague because the meetings and proceedings of the assembly are off limits to the public). By and large people have little if any hope from the Assembly, an organisation with no power to effect its recommendations. The opposition in Bahrain wishes no success for the Assembly for it is short to what the masses desire, namely that of free general elections and the application of the constitution.

Bert Mapp: Their Highnesses Breed Like Rabbits

Bert Mapp articulated his findings about the Al-Khalifa family in his book, *Leave Well Alone*, ISBN 0-9521814-0-1. Chapter 16 was entitled "His Highness". Bert started his chapter by the saying "The old order changeth", fitted modern Bahrain, superficially. But for the Al-Khalifa family, the old order, the absolutist political system, remained. For them, any change could be summed up as bigger, better and more.

"The earth is Lord's and the fullness thereof" was not a theological statement but a matter of everybody practice. The ruling shaikh, the Amir, was not only monarch of all he surveyed but omnipotent.

What would his father, Shaikh Sulman, have made of it? He, the most photographed creature in the whole Gulf of his day, never commissioned a portrait for public display apart from a few pictures used in oil company publications, snaps taken of the old man were locked away private albums. And now his first son, Isa, the lissom youth become plumb cheeked in middle age, cast a stern smile on the populace from each and every angle, from every nook and wall in public and private places, in shops, offices, homes and hospitals. There was no escaping that face, nor those on either side, his brother and prime minister, Shaikh Khalifa, and his son, crown prince Hamad. Open a book, an official publication of any kind, and after the title page appeared three whole page coloured portraits. In a bilingual book, the pictures occupied both ends.

There could be no doubt as to who was

master of Bahrain. And to leave none in doubt as to who was master of Bahrain. And to leave none in doubt that he was still alive, if not entirely well, the Amir was given an airing by press and TV every day.

One way of consolidating power was eliminating the past. Out went old street names - Daly and Prior as well as Belgrave - and thus were significant chapters torn out of the history books. Other than inanimate names like Government, Palace and Exhibition Roads, only Khalifa shaikhs were remembered by streets, with a Saudi ruler immortalised in King Faisal Highway, the feeder to the Arabian-Bahrain causeway built by the Saudis.

The Khalifas were a remarkable family and not simply because they hogged the limelight, the street names and the best jobs in public administration. Their fecundity was astonishing: breeding like rabbits, somebody said. In 1953, I asked a palace servant to put a figure on family numbers and he said "about 500". I repeated the question in 1991 to the information minister, Tariq Al-moayad. "Between six to seven thousand", he replied.

I was amazed and said so. The United Nations had once forecast a doubling of global population in 35 years, by which test the Khalifas should now be around, say 1,200. I could not believe the minister's figure.

Extrapolating on the Khalifa scale, reigning family in relation to general population, the British royal family, the Windsors, would now number well in excess of one million. Imagine

all of them marrying their cousins, qualifying for state hand and getting jobs in government!

Almoayad did not shrink from his assessment, explaining, "Remember, we marry young in Bahrain and have more children, and we live longer". He turned to tiny Shaikha Nayla: "How many brothers and sisters have you got?" Shyly, she answered, "Seven". That doubtless was a sign off underachievement.

A Warning Letter to the Amir

Ahmed Al-Mahmood, a university professor and brother of the leading figure, Sheikh Abdul Latif Al-Mahomud, sent a daring letter to the ruling Shaikh, the Amir, Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, bringing to his attention the reputation enjoyed by Bahrain under the Al-Khalifa. Al-Mahmood stated that: Bahrain has now been turned to a prostitution house. Prostitutes from east and west are being imported, and recently, we have witnessed the large scale importing of Russian prostitutes, to serve in the country. The country is now a din of AIDS and corruption.

Al-Mahmood letter is a brave one as he addressed it directly to the Amir with his name, address and telephone numbers undemoted. He also called on the Amir to put an end to the policy of creating an international prostitution centre in the name of tourism. It is known that many people now make their way to Bahrain during the weekend for kerb-crawling and prostitution.

Flamboyant, Businessman, Minister and Son of the Premier

Shaikh Ali is always news in Bahrain. The shaikh is the son of the Prime Minister shaikh Khalifa. The Premiers favourite son Mohammed died in California some 20 years ago. It is said that Khalifa has never liked his younger son Ali but for lack of a better choice. Shaikh Khalifa is sick and could not help getting an offspring. One thing that bothered Khalifa in particular about his son Ali is that the little shaikh used to engage in shameful acts in public. The problem was not with drinking alcohol or dating some English and Filipino girls but rather of engaging in such behaviour in hotels, restaurants and some local bars.

Until 1992, shaikh Ali used to be an Assistant Under-secretary at the Ministry of Interior for Passport and Immigration. At the same time, the Amir used to send shaikh Ali as his special envoy to international events, to Japan and many other places. Certainly, the Amir was doing courtesy to the Prime Minister, who has never recovered from the death of his son [Mohammed, who used to study at the University of Southern California].

All of a sudden, shaikh Ali was announced as the Transportation Minister, replacing Ibrahim Humaidan. Mr. Humaidan was then

made president of the infamous Consultative Assembly.

Shaikh Ali makes it a point to always be in Bahrain. For example, earlier in the summer, a daughter of Kuwaits Prime Minister died from injuries sustained in a car accident. Shaikh Ali was envoy of the Amir to offer condolences to shaikh Saad. The interesting thing was that shaikh Ali left for Kuwait and then returned to Bahrain in a matter of couple of hours only. This way he became news for leaving Bahrain, meeting top Kuwaiti officials and then returning home. At the same time, Shaikh Ali makes it a point not to be away from Bahrain because that way he will be out of the limelight, a matter that bothers quite a bit. Shaikh Ali wants to miss nothing and he does not like the situation in which things can be done without his presence.

Thus, the busy Transportation Minister happens to head the basketball business and other functions. He is a minister, head of a popular sports, in charge of Bahrains telecommunications business or Batelco and other functions. Also, shaikh Ali is an investor in several hotels, especially the newly built Meridian. No new projects can go ahead

without first shaikh Ali (through his rich and powerful businessman father) advising of his interest. At times, shaikh enters into the bidding of state projects through different companies. What happens is that he influences the governmental body to grant the business to a specific bidding firm. This way shaikh Ali gets paid for his services. Sometimes, the playboy shaikh is offered some good looking, young girls.

Shaikh Ali is married after all. For his marriage, he was given a girl belonging to a member of the royal family simply because the girl was noted for her educational level. It is said that the bride was in love with someone else, something shaikh Ali found hard to accept. Through his sick if active father, shaikh Ali married the girl he liked but not necessarily what she had dreamed of. The marriage festival was extraordinary to an extent that it humbled other famous marriages of the rich Bahrainis. When the spouse delivered the first baby, shaikh Ali ordered that the price of Coca-Cola reduced by 50%. The shaikh is in charge of the Coca-Cola business among many others of his rising empire. Not everyone in Bahrain knew of the special deal as many vendors decided against offering the soft drink at the special value though they got the Coke at a discount.

The Spread of Corruption in Bahrain Who is to Blame

Certainly there is no free lunch. But in Bahrain this term means something else or more. What it means these days is that those who desire to see their works at governmental entities done rather quickly must be ready to pay a fee for the service. Those who are looking for governmental loans for example have the choice of either waiting for many years or forever or enjoying a fast completion of their work but at a fee. This fee, which varies depending on many factors, must be paid in advance; or else, a good portion of it must be pre-paid. One reason for this pre-payment is that the person who is behind the counter at a governmental agency must pay someone else to have the work completed. This someone else happens to be a top decision maker. Certainly, many people afford paying hundreds of Dinars. At the same time, many others cannot afford and others simply resent paying; at the end of the day those who do not pay, hence their work delayed indefinitely have themselves to blame because they just have to wait and wait.

It is interesting to note that someone who is behind the counter at say the Ministry of Housing happens to drive an expensive Mercedes Benz car, the maintenance bills for such a car maybe more than the salary of the employee. The other money to make living comes from the Ministry clients. Many needy people are being exploited.

Citizens carry various stories of the corruption problem. Not too long ago, someone paid a highly-placed Bahrain style lobbyist some BD 500 in advance and to have the balance of BD 500 paid when the deal is realised. The person was looking for a piece of land at a

desired address. Much to the disappointment of the unlucky needy person, this self-styled relatively old lobbyist died from heart attack. There was no evidence, so the money died with the lobbyist. For all practical purposes, every thing is done on the trust basis.

Again the regime is partly responsible for this harassment given that there are many governmental processes involved in a single project. This is true for getting an approval for start constructing a house. Then, once the house is completed, utility becomes a key concern for the owner who may have to pay in order to get the service started at the earliest possible date.

Furthermore, some people pay to those who have strong access to officials at the passport directorate in order to speed up process; this is happening on a wide scale among expatriates who rent the services of a local to finish their work at the immigration office. Many of the expatriates just fear going to the immigration just in case of irregularities in their documents. Another person might pay someone at the traffic directorate to cancel a violation citation. Such financial kickbacks are likewise taking place in the ticketing offices of the local Gulf Air but certainly not openly.

It is fair to say that corruption has always been in existence in the country. The problem now is with the level of corruption and financial kickbacks are adversely affecting already broken and over-stretched subjects of the society. This sort of money making is big business for many and it constitutes a second source of money, paid in cash. At times free

sex is offered in return of special favours. Incidentally, many of the beneficiaries of this corruption scandal happen to be members of the so-called royal family. Often times, they are the ultimate decision makers and thus must be satisfied in order to have the project completed at once.

True, money is not the only way to satisfy those asking for special privileges. At times, sex is offered. On the state level, it is widely known in Bahrain that the Ministers of Housing and Information are noted for such behaviours. Information Minister Tariq Al Moayyed often times gets girls who happen to be tourists and airline crew members. He is said to be using his private office to commit adultery.

Minister Tariq has been fighting off attempts to replace him or even given him a different portfolio. Increasingly, he adds new jobs to the massive Information Ministry. It is interesting to note that this individual is ultimately responsible for given approvals for setting up a hotel in Bahrain. The Housing Minister likewise uses his private deluxe office for such illegal business but he does not have as free access to international visitors as is the case with Mr. Al Moayyed. Not surprisingly, many of those who happen to enjoy illegal sex, insist that their private secretaries be males rather than females.

Corruption is widespread. Many members of the so-called Constitutional Assembly are noted for using the prestigious post to win agencies from international firms. This is likewise true of many members of Bahrains Chamber of Commerce. What matters to many of these pro-government figures is that of getting money, cheap sex, free entertainment including international travel.

Water, Trees and Land, Victims of Governmental Policies

Environmentally Unfriendly

When the Arab Organisation of Human Rights issued its annual report last month, it was not surprising that it contained a 9-page report on Bahrain. The report on the violations of human rights in that Gulf state is a brief but a comprehensive one. It has outlined the general areas where human rights are abused in Bahrain. Detentions, Arrests, Torture, Expulsions, Exile, Repression, Lack of Freedom of Speech, expression, political participation are all part of that sad episode. Despite the fact that Bahrain had been removed from the list of the countries being monitored by the United Nations for lack of respect of human rights at the instigation of the United States representative, the situation has not improved a bit. The same old methods of repression are in force, and the police state is still being propped up by the democratic powers of the United States and Great Britain.

The United Nations knows what is happening in Bahrain. It is being informed regularly by members and organisations of the opposition, and all means of communications have existed between the two parties. Furthermore, the United Nations has its own representative offices in more than 135 countries, Bahrain is one of them. In June 1994 the families of the political prisoners petitioned the UN office in Manama, and were received by an employee at the office. He listened to their stories and expressed his sympathy with them but failed to do much. It later transpired that the head of the UN office is more interested in looking after his personal welfare than catering for other peoples political and security needs. Bahrain has always been at the forefront of UNs activities in the region, during the war with Iran, the US frigate, *Vincennes*, which shot down the Iranian civilian Airbus aircraft was based in Bahrain and returned to it after the incident. Since the war against Iraq ended, Bahrain has been the main staging post for UNs personnel who are charged with keeping Iraqs arms industry at bay. The country is still important for the UN for many reasons. At the forefront of these has been the fact that Bahrain has created a liberal atmosphere for foreigners which is not available elsewhere in the region. UNs personnel can enjoy themselves to any degree with no fear of official retribution.

It could be argued that it is these attributes that have protected the regime of the Al Khalifa of Bahrain from serious UN show-down on the issue of human rights. Infact, some sources have indicated that Bahrains generous offers to the UN have been well received, and in return the Bahraini government has escaped condemnation of the worlds community for failing to protect the rights of its own citizens. However, this is being done at a high cost of morale and values. Turning a blind eye to what is happening in the Gulf island of Bahrain is unjustifiable on ethical grounds. The only explanation for this lack of action by the UN is that the international body has adopted a policy which puts interests before principles, in line with the ongoing thinking of the worlds community. The UN has to rethink its stands if it desires to remain

a source of justice and inspiration for the freedom-loving people.

The objections of the Bahraini opposition to the actions of their government stems from their love of their country and of human values. It will be difficult to diagnose a point of departure of interests, principles and aims between the two sides. For example, the opposition has often accused the Al Khalifa family of corruption and misappropriation of the countrys resources. Their policies have been an environmental disaster. Underground water has been polluted or salinated. In the last twenty years the government has undertaken a project to turn large areas of the sea into land. Look for a beneficiary from the whole process and you will find one of the sheikhs in charge of the company that does the work of reclaiming the land from the sea. Many members of the ruling family have made fortunes in this process. But what is more dangerous environmentally is what happens to the sealife as a result. Experts say that the process causes the destruction of the underwater plantation and the fish tends to escape to new locations. The UN teams are now studying the effects of the governmental policies on the sealife and the environment in an attempt to evaluate the whole picture.

Another issue where the UN can express its opinion is the extent of Bahrains government compliance with the international norms and conventions especially on issues of human rights and political pluralism. Here, it is reported that the UN is undertaking a study on Bahrain to decide on the issue. This is happening quietly but the government of Bahrain is adopting a policy of bribery of UN personnel. The Al Khalifa are worried that they may not get the status of a favoured state from United States. The American body that decides the issue is reported to be disappointed by Bahrains human rights record and the lack of democratically-elected bodies which encourage popular participation. The Bahraini government is endeavouring to impress the Americans on this issue, but it is unlikely that a change of heart will happen unless the situation changes. The Americans should make it plain that the constitution should be restored and a degree of democracy be adopted.

The issue of environmental destruction is a sensitive one. Bahrain has suffered a great deal in area especially in the last twenty years. The island had been known for its fresh water wells, and the British historian, Lorimer in his *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf* issued in the period 1908-1915 compiles the functioning springwells and describes more than fifteen of them. Today, there is barely one of these water sources. Athari, the famous Bahraini well is polluted and has lost the glamour it had until the seventies. It was the main resort for swimmers from all over the country. Furthermore, the government had embarked on a project of construction following the oil boom of the mid seventies. In order to cater for the rising demands of the ruling Al Khalifa family, large areas of cultivated land were deliberately destroyed. Thousands of date palms were cut down to make room for the new compounds of luxury

villas afforded by the highly-paid expatriates. Today, even dates are imported by a country previously known as the land of the million date palms. As an Arab journalist, Khaled Al Qashtini, put it in an article published by the daily *Ashraq Al Awsat*, he was at pains to see rows after rows of dead tree trunks as he was driving southwardly from Manama. This policy of agricultural destruction could not be justified by any sensible observer, neither it is a good example of the attempts to achieve development.

In mid-eighties, the government of Bahrain negotiated a deal with a British company to supply large number of plastic palm trees similar to the natural ones in Bahrain. Apparently, one Al Khalifa wanted to guarantee a large portion of commissions, but it was also an indication of the extent of the destruction which had befallen the natural beauty of the this tropical island. This is in addition to the losses incurred by fishermen whose activities have been curtailed either by environmentally pollution of the seas or by the diminishing boundaries of the country following the annexation of Bahraini islands by the Saudis and the crisis with Qatar in 1986.

At a time when every citizen is locked up in the struggle to sustain basic human living, environmental issues may be overlooked, but there is a clear vision of the people whose life-style has been affected greatly by what has happened to the local environment. The oil money which were abundant in the seventies has been spent on the luxury of the ruling family, and the creation of a class of people whose survival became inextricably linked to the well-being of the regime. However, even the businessmen of Bahrain feel the agony as members of the ruling tribe compete with them in every small project, with a clear favour on his side. The prime minister and his son have become notorious for their business dealings, and the way the whole country has been held hostage to their greed. A well-known example is being talked about by people. Last year the cabinet ordered that all roads in the capital be paved by special slabs. It later transpired that the required slabs are made only by a factory belonging to the prime minister himself. One does not have to go far to realise how far the country has gone to become a commodity in the hands of the Al Khalifa rulers.

Human Rights Violation

* Salman Rahmah and Mohammed Al-Abbarah were arrested on 6 August after participating a religious festival commemorating the death of Prophet Mohammed. They have been held at Al-Nuaim detention centre and have been subjected to maltreatment. When their families contacted the police station, the officer in-charge stated that he intends to "teach them a lesson". As to why they are punished is not known. But the two have been members of the committee which organised the festival.

* Loay Al-Jamri, a 23 years old university graduate completed his scholarship for teaching Chemistry. The intelligence service intervened and prevented his employment.