

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Massive Arrests in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain

Repression is Not the Answer

Is it the end of Saudi domination over the Gulf affairs? This is the question that is on many people's mind as they follow the unfolding events in the kingdom and indeed in the region as a whole. The Americans are now wary of the continued stalemate at the internal front of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz insisting on keeping things in his own hands while his health continues to deteriorate. When the American newspaper *Compast* reported that the health of the Saudi monarch was worsening and that he had been admitted to the hospital on 23rd September 1994, the Saudi authorities quickly denied the report and stressed that King Fahd was running the affairs of the country in collaboration with his brothers.

However, confusion is spreading about what is happening in the Saudi Kingdom. Sources close to the Saudi hierarchy have reported that there is ongoing debate within the Al Saud family on how to remove the king now that he has stopped to function as expected from a strong ruler. He is known for his heavy drinking, a habit that made him a night man. The GCC leaders have found it difficult to work with him at the summits because he could only attend meetings at night, and has the habit of sleeping in the day with heavy hangovers. He has therefore become a liability on the country and his continued kingship could only worsen the situation, with increasing internal problems.

Over the last few weeks the Saudi opposition, whose members come from the inner circles of Arabia proper, has intensified its activities inside the country and abroad. The Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights in Saudi Arabia (CDLR) which is operating from London has reported on 18th September 1994 that up to a thousand people were arrested especially in the Saudi town of Buraida. The town was reported to be under siege following the arrest of a prominent clergyman, Sheikh Salman Al Awdah, an outspoken critique of the regime. The arrests included, according to the committee, Sheikh Safar Al Hawalli, Sheikh Abdulla Al Jalali, Sheikh Ayez Al Qarani, Sheikh Sultan Al Khamis, Dr. Khalid Al Dawish, Sheikh Bishr Al Bishr, Sheikh Hmood Ghazi Al Harbi, Dr. Muhsin Al Awachi, Dr. Abdulla Al Hamid and Sheikh Mohammed Al Faraj.

The mosques in the town witnessed serious clashes between the worshippers and the security agents, and the situation is reported to be extremely tense. Human rights violations have been widely reported. The detainees were forced to sign a statement to the effect that Sheikh Salman Al Awdah was an apostate, in an attempt to discredit the opposition amongst the

Saudi populace.

Furthermore, the Americans have been reported to be exerting pressure on the Saudis to respect human rights and open a dialogue with the opposition. They have cautioned the Al Saud tribe against allowing the situation to get out of control lest they meet the same fate as that of the Shah of Iran. Washington has apparently started to realise the dangers surrounding its allies in the Gulf, a region of the greatest importance to the American foreign policy.

The Clinton Administration finds itself in a moral dilemma. On the one hand, 20,000 American troops were sent to Haiti last month to bring down the generals and re-instate Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been elected president last year. On the other hand it has kept quiet about the attitude of its Gulf allies who have refused to adapt their political system to take account of the ongoing global call for democracy. The Saudis instead appointed a Consultative council which has failed to satisfy the intellectual people of Saudi Arabia.

The Al Khalifa family of Bahrain has followed the Saudi example and refused to restore the country's 1973 Constitution. If the Americans were to live to their international commitment to encourage democracy and respect of human rights, they would have stood against the continuing violation of human rights and the rejection of the constitutional rule demanded by the moderate opposition. Instead, the American deputy foreign minister, John Shatuck, was instrumental in the removal of Bahrain from the list of countries under United Nations human rights monitoring, one year after it had been listed.

The fragility of the internal situation is not only in Saudi Arabia. The Sultanate of Oman was also the scene of major crackdown on some religious groups. Few weeks ago, the Omani security service arrested more than 300 people on the grounds of affiliation to an underground movement. It later transpired that they belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. Among those arrested were personalities of high social, political and military profiles. They included a retired air force chief, two deputy ministers and many civil servants and university lecturers. Many of those arrested in the first wave were later released. The incident highlights the tense atmosphere in the Gulf where political activities are banned and where political affiliation is a high risk. With no written constitutions or elected parliaments, the power remains in the hands of the absolute ruler and his entourage, usually members of the ruling family. Sultan Qaboos of Oman has often been cited as a man of independent political views and deep insight

into the political situation in his country. He is ahead of other Gulf rulers on the level of allowing a degree of political participation. But the recent arrests which were announced officially several weeks after they had taken place serve as an indication of the tense political environment in the Gulf states.

The situation is more serious in Bahrain. Last month more than forty young men were arrested when they participated in a peaceful demonstration demanding a review of the employment policy in the country which has the highest unemployed percentage in the Gulf. With a workforce of more than 242,600 people, the Bahrainis represent less than forty percent of the total workforce. It was estimated that up to 30,000 Bahraini nationals were without jobs in 1990, a figure representing more than 30 percent of national work-force. This may help to explain the tension that has been creating unease among the unemployed. If the government takes the decision to give only 22 percent of the of the jobs taken up by foreign employees and workers to the national workforce, there will be no unemployment problem.

When the unemployed marched in the streets of the capital of Bahrain, Manama early last month they had no revolutionary agenda, they were merely demanding a fair share of the national jobs. Instead of listening to their demands and sympathising with their problem, the government ordered the crack elite forces to attack them and scores of people were arrested. Three weeks later, some of the detainees were released and 13 people are still in cells.

It will be erroneous for any observer or politician to side step the political situation in the Gulf or consider what is happening in the region as a natural reaction to small events here or there. There is a serious problem requiring a serious redress from whoever is concerned with this troubled region. Although the argument that the lack of civil liberties is behind these troubles is often quoted, it is in fact at the root of the problem. It may appear odd that in a region with high national income generated by oil export that there should be cases of extreme poverty, but the reality is that the policies adopted in the economic sector are a reflection of the unserious attitude of the regime towards the thesis of democratisation. The western political and military support offered to these regimes may protect them but this is at a high human and moral cost. The hope is that a serious reappraisal of the western policies towards the problems of democracy and human rights in the Gulf be taken up sooner than later. Only then, could a real improvement in the situation take place.

Why \$18 million Could Not Make a Success?

What a Fiasco

It was definitely not one of the best of our exhibitions, exclaimed one of the organisers of the first Gulf States and Britain exhibition which was organised at the Olympia exhibition centre in London, from 12th to 18th September 1994. This attitude was not confined to the neatly dressed gentleman from Bahrain with his Arabian "thobe". He said the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce had expected much better results, but what has been achieved is by no means satisfactory. Almost all of the exhibitors shared this opinion. Some of them have not negotiated serious deals let alone signing one. Our expenses have gone down the drain, said an exhibitor from Qatar. I was told this was going to be one of the most successful exhibitions ever to be organised he said, but what I have experienced in the last seven days has been extremely boring and frustrating.

It was not a secret that the London exhibition was a total failure. Whose idea was it? whose fault was it that no proper organisation took place? who is to blame for the total lack of response from the targeted customers? These questions need to be addressed seriously and proper explanations given if any such exhibition is to be ever contemplated. The lack of a proper media campaign prior to the exhibition, a well-defined objective, a realistic approach to the British market and bad timing are but a few factors cited to explain the failure of the Olympia GCC exhibition. It had been organised jointly by the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce and the Union of Chambers of Commerce of the Gulf States comprising the Gulf Cooperations Council. The London-based Arab-British Chamber of Commerce, chaired by Mr Abdul Karim Al Mudarris, took the initiative in order to enhance its image having long been considered to have a tilt towards the now-discredited Saddam Hussain of Iraq. The results have been shambles.

Throughout the seven-day period there have been visitors to the exhibition, but they have neither been of the projected numbers nor the type needed to make it a success. It was intended to promote the image of the Gulf States as countries where business can be conducted successfully without the huge burden of either corporate or personal income taxation systems of the West. Advanced telecommunication system with the up-to-date technology, cheap but skilled workforce from the Indian subcontinent and countries of Southeast Asia, low cost fuel and petrochemical products, modern international banking system and easy flow of capital in and out of the region without any constraints, are among the factors enumerated by one country after another to attract favourable responses from the British business community. Some of these states have even presented a social environment not dissimilar to the liberal life in London. However, at the end none of these factors seemed good enough to attract customers.

In many observers opinion, the approach was not right. There was nothing in the exhibition that could make an impact on the prospective investor. There were all kinds of preserved dates, toiletries, antique reproduction of furniture in eastern style, clothes and fabrics, light

industrial products and petrochemical products. There must be people in Britain who would have found many of these items interesting and perhaps attractive had the approach been right. The problem was that the exhibitors could not decide whether the affair was a business enterprise, a social affair or a public relations exercise. Although the motto was business, the atmosphere was not. It was a mixture of folklore and public relations endeavour. The singing group from the United Arab Emirates dominated the scene, with drum-beating enthusiasts roaming the exhibition area every hour to express their delight at being at the Olympia. The noise of their live action echoed in all corners of the hall, leaving serious negotiations on business deals out of place. Women wowing mats and rugs and others drying the hands of young children were in full swing for the whole week, while elderly gentlemen were practicing their traditional crafts of making fish nets. All this was taking place simultaneously, making the setting one of the most romantic scenes from the Gulf.

Whether these activities could be construed as essential to the image-building needs to be assessed. But what is certain is that the final image is not of a business trend. Surely, there have been some activities on the level of public relations with many dignitaries from the diplomatic service, past and present, ambassadors and ministers being present at the daily symposiums organised by each country. These guests were treated to a stately dinner, thanks to the Arab generosity, and it was an opportunity either to renew old ties or to forge new ones. Again what was absent from all this was the business aspect. Perhaps the Gulf sheikhs have decided not to have business, and that they have enough oil revenues to enable them to survive comfortably regardless of what happens to the oil prices. They are ready to pump as much as is necessary to ensure that.

The good public relations activities and the social image being portrayed are good things to do, but if the exhibitors who had been forced (in some cases) to participate had been told of the whole affair, there is a good chance most of them would not have come to London.

The Bahraini opposition was exhibiting as well. On Bahrain Day, the opposition distributed full packages of information about human rights abuses and the continued instability of the political situation. Officials couldn't do anything to prevent the voice of the opposition reaching all exhibitors and attendants.

Perhaps one of the most challenging questions is whether any British businessman of a middle size is eager to invest in a country where there are no constitutional guarantees either for the safety of business or his own. With the internal problems spreading throughout the region, it is difficult to convince outsiders that it is safe to invest in the region. The internal political situation will continue to hamper any effort to attract foreign investment, unless a real change in the internal situation takes place. The ruler remains the absolute authority in the country, with his own clan dominating both the political and economic lives. Many instances

could be cited to prove the fragility of the situation under the rule of the sheikhs. Banks were forced to ignore debts owed by royal family members, or to give loans with no guarantee of their retrieval, other companies were compelled to give away some of their products and services to cousins of the ruler, and so on.

The image of the Gulf region as a backward place is not what one wishes to show here. Infact, there are many intellectual people with the highest degrees from the most famous western academic institutions. The people of the Gulf are hard-working, endure hardships and sacrifice a lot in order to improve quality of life. They are known for their sea-faring qualities, and their uphill struggle against illiteracy and poverty. It is only in the last half a century that they have been made to look as lazy and backward people. This is part of the ongoing attempts by the rulers to maintain their claim that the people were not yet ready for modern-day political practices such as democracy and parliamentary activities. The outcome of this is a continuous repression and unlimited cruelty by the security apparatus.

Infact, one of the best organised exhibitions at Olympia has been the Bahraini part (both trade exhibitors and opposition). The exhibitors, who had been asked to pay for almost all the cost of their trip, know they stand a good chance of losing everything if they do not show enthusiasm and do hard work. They know they have the ruling family members competing with them on unequal footing for any project, and they will always be the losers if they do not do exceptionally well. The Bahraini opposition made their points clearly and ensured that their presence was felt.

The consequences of the failure of the London exhibition will be ignored by the governments, but the people who had paid dearly to participate will continue to blame the organisers for the fiasco. The exhibitions was done in a haste, and it is understood that the governments of the GCC countries have been feeling uneasy about the way things were going. With Iraq gradually being returned to the normal line of international activity, they stand to lose their image as well as their financial leverage. With dwindling oil revenues, the lack of democracy and respect of human rights, the onus is on them to show a gesture of being in control of the affairs of their own countries.

The Sultanate of Oman has boycotted the exhibition. This is a sign of one of two things, either the Sultan did not consider it a worthwhile enterprise from a professional point of view, or it is an indication of the extent of the political divisions among the Gulf states.

The lack of a stable political system in the countries of the Gulf is perhaps the most important factor contributing to the state where no businessman is ready to venture out in the region. Constitutions form the basis of trust between the ruler and the ruled, and is likely to influence foreign decisions whether to come to the country or not. Perhaps the failure of the GGC states and Britain exhibition will start a dialogue within the ruling families on the causes of the fiasco.

A Meeting With Manama Club Turned Miserable The Amir Couldn't Comprehend

Members of the Manama Basketball team met the Amir (Head of the ruling tribe and hence State) last June. They received the shock of their lives. The purpose of the meeting was to give the Manama players the honour of shaking hands with the Amir following their championship of the GCC basketball tournament earlier in the year. The story goes that on a day earlier the Amir met members of Al Ahli Club Handball team for winning the Amirs cup. What bothered the Manama team is that the basketball championship was more newsworthy for Bahrain as it involved the whole Gulf and it took place much earlier than the Ahli triumph.

Maybe the Amir thought his tournament is more significant than that of the Gulf. Certainly no one could tell His Highness of this error in protocols. At any rate, on the day of meeting the Amir, the players and top officials of the club gathered and boarded a bus heading for the Amirs official residence (Rifa's Palace). The group was headed by a member of the royal family; this time it was Shaikh Ali, son of the Prime Minister, the Transport Minister, head of the Basketball Association, not to mention his never ending titles.

The Shaikh presented the champions to the Amir. It is said that what first bothered the Amir and importantly his aids was that none of the Manama team was wearing the traditional Arab dress.

So far so good. Following the successful introduction, Shaikh Ali started explaining to the Amir that the Manama players have won the GCC basketball championship. The Amir seemed to have failed to grasp the communication of Shaikh Ali. One can assume that either the Amirs mind was busy or that the Amir had difficulty hearing or else that Shaikh Ali had difficulty selecting the right terms. To simply matters, Shaikh Ali then started talking to the Amir in a different manner, choosing simple or simpler terms in "Al-Khalifa" bedouin dialect. To Shaikh Alis astonishment, the Amir again failed to get the message. Those who were close to both shaikhs were reported to have said that Shaikh Ali face turned pretty much

reddish and he became quite embarrassed. The Shaikh has realised that he is in trouble and that the Amir just could not comprehend. In order to rectify the trouble, Shaikh Ali then started explaining to the Amir his communication in a more layman and more bedouin terms. It took Shaikh Ali quite a while to deliver the message because he had to describe and use his hands to get the message across. Only then did the Amir understand the content, much to Shaikh Ali delight. Then the Amir smiled. As expected, the team members had to join in the light laughter, with or without reason.

This was not the end of the trouble for the ambitious Shaikh Ali. The turn was now for the Amir to speak. The only choice the audience had was then of listening and may be listening carefully to the Amir, Bahrains head of state.

The Amir started talking and describing his message using his hands. What he wanted to say was that he dislikes volleyball games. He had to describe the matter in action as to what game he was referring to. The assembly then politely told the Amir that he meant volleyball. The trouble was that the Amir has forgotten the name of the game; let's give the benefit of the doubt; but the trouble was that the Amir had to get in motion to get his message across.

Shaikh Ali then asked the Amir what about volleyball; the reply was that the Amir does not like watching volleyball games because they are boring. Why boring? The Amir thought that there was nothing interesting in volleyball games. Many of those who were present wanted to break in laughter, but they would not dare doing so.

In order to change the subject and avoid further embarrassment, Shaikh Ali told the Amir that in the past few days the weather has been quite hot and humid; the Amir agreed. Shaikh Ali then brought to the Amirs attention that he plans to take a vacation if only to run away from the miserable summer heat. The Amir in turn offered his advise. He warned Shaikh Ali to avoid going to London or risk having his wallet stolen or being ripped off. The Amir acknowledged that he too enjoys travelling but made it clear that the world and especially the western world is increasingly not a safe place to visit. He then told Shaikh Ali to stay home and put on an air-conditioning unit. Shaikh Ali had no choice but to agree with his uncles sincere advise.

At this point, Shaikh Ali certainly felt that the meeting was nothing short of a disaster and that the Amirs performance was degenerating to a total failure.

Worse yet, the Amir has been talking in front of a group of young players who are meeting the Amir for the first time and were prepared to be impressed not otherwise.

The team members were unanimous in their view that the Amirs knowledge, education and human skills are disastrous. The implication was that if such is the mentality of the head of the state, then who actually runs the country?

Al-Shakar: Sacked on the Spot by the Prime Minister

Mr. Karim Al-Shakar was up until a month ago the Ambassador of the State of Bahrain in London. Before then, he had been Bahrain's permanent representative at the UN in Geneva.

When the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, visited London last August on one of his private holiday trips, he expected to be officially received by the top official in the Bahrain Embassy.

The Ambassador, Karim Al-Shakar, made it to Heathrow Airport with ample time before the arrival of the plane from Bahrain. Waiting is not the best thing a person would like to do, if that can ever be avoided. Moreover, the Ambassadors are bored to death with having to travel to Heathrow many times in every month of the summer holiday to receive members of the royal family. To kill boredom, the Ambassador nipped in at the Bar near to the VIP lounge. There, he found himself drinking more than his usual. He got drunk and managed to forget all about the Prime Minister and the mandatory bowing and "nose-kissing".

On his arrival, the Prime Minister asked about Karim Al-Shakar, but no explanation was given. He was furious. Sometime ago, the Ambassador prepared a VIP reception for the Amir's wife (Sheikha Hussah). The PM took the matter seriously and was convinced that the Ambassador regarded the wife of his brother (the Amir) as more important. The next morning, Karim Al-Shakar rushed to the hotel and submitted an apologetic letter pleading pardon. By then the PM had already made-up his mind. Without reading the letter with its explanation, the PM threw the envelope at the face of Al-Shakar and waived his hand implying that nothing can be done to rectify the matter. Karim was sacked. He had to leave to Bahrain without even a farewell party. He was replaced by the Consular, Adel Sater, until a replacement is decided. Possible replacement candidate is the Bahrain's Ambassador to China.

Karim Al-Shakar was a dissident and spent two years in jail. After his release he joined the government in return for relinquishing his political opposition. Yet, he was quoted by Bert Mapp (in his recent book, *Leave Well Alone*) page 377, answering the question "What's the prospect of an elected assembly?" Al-Shakar replied: "Non definitely. You know what it would mean? He tapped a finger on his wine glass. "The end of this. The fundamentalists, both sunni and shia, would ban alcohol and make the veil obligatory. They would put the clock back", Al-Shakar said. "The religious people are dangerous, but I believe in ten years they will be finished. The people don't want them".

Well, may be Mr. Al-Shakar is sorry that his zealotness about alcohol would calm down now that his career is "finished" because of it, and within a year of his statements. Had there been an elected parliament, the question might have been raised why the Ambassador is required to perform officially on private visits of members of the royal family, and why is the Ambassador stripped from any power to represent Bahrain. The role of all Ambassadors is limited to receptions and handling diplomatic bags (as postmen). An Ambassador is not allowed to comment on or reply to any question raised by a journalist or a group regarding Bahrain's internal or external policies.

Subscription to Voice of Bahrain

You can subscribe to "Voice of Bahrain" by sending a cheque of 10 pounds sterling for 12 issues per year. Write your cheques to VOB and send with your name and address.

For receiving previous issues, please send one pound sterling for every two issues. You can also acquire the Arabic newsletter for the same prices. A bound volume of all Arabic "Voice of Bahrain" issues between 1983 to 1993 is available at a price of 10 pounds.

Of related interest, you can also purchase Abdul-Rahman Al-Baker's memoir (in Arabic) for 10 pounds from Voice of Bahrain. Al-Baker led the national movement between 1954-56.

The recently published book on Bahrain written by the British journalist Bert Mapp, entitled "Leave Well Alone" is available from "Voice of Bahrain" at a price of 7.50 pounds sterling.

While the Al-Khalifa Continue Importing Cheap Labour:

Jobless Citizens Are Arbitrarily Arrested

Hundreds of jobless youth picketed in front of the Labour Ministry, near Isa Town, on Saturday, 3 September. This is the third time a picket takes place after earlier ones of 29 June and 2 July (see last two issues of Voice of Bahrain).

This time, the security forces anticipated the picket and implemented a carckdown. Tear gas and rubber bullets were deployed. Some demonstrators left the scene to board a public transport bus. The bus was chased by police, stopped in the middle of the road and all young passengers were arrested. Arbitrary arrests continued throughout, and the prison cells were packed with detainees picked-up from the picket area. Forty people were reported missing after the incident.

As the arbitrary arrests were taking place, a group of security officers raided the flat of Shaikh Ali Salman at Bilad-al-Qadeem, overturning private belongings and detaining the religious figure. Shaikh Ali Salman is the imam (religious leader) of the grand Khawajah Mosque in the capital, Manama. He has been critical of governmental policies regarding unemployment. The security forces suspected him as central organising figure.

Directly after detention, he was interrogated by intelligence officers who accused him of belonging to an underground organisation (a punishable act in Bahrain with 5 years jail sentence). Mr. Salman replied that as far as he knew he didn't belong to any underground organisation. He was implying that the intelligence department decided to fix him with a fabricated offence.

As the news spread, a group of religious scholars gathered in the mosque located in front of Mr. Salman's flat. They were joined by hundreds of people picketing and demanding the immediate release of Mr. Salman.

Afterwards, the group of religious scholars (amongst them Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri) formed a delegation and went to the notorious Qala'a Fort, where the Interior Ministry and intelligence department are located and where detainees are interrogated and tortured. The delegation demanded to meet the Interior Minister and called for the immediate release of Mr. Salman. The delegation was met by a security officer who requested them to come back the second day for meeting the minister.

Reuters transmitted the news of the unrest and detention of Mr. Salman on the same day. This has cornered the security forces, who know that Reuters news are distributed in all Bahrain's five-stars hotels. As the protest of the youth and religious leaders continued, the security forces had no alternative but to release Mr. Salman on Sunday 4 September.

At the same time, the security forces continued their siege of the Labour Ministry. This was lifted on 6 September. On that day, the young picketers returned to the ministry to the disappointment of the security forces. On 17 September, a further picket was organised in front of the ministry, but this time the security forces couldn't implement another crackdown.

What is behind the intensity of these pick-

ets is the fact that the unemployment problem has reached such a level that indict the government. A recent confidential report issued by a government agency indicated that while population rate increased to 3.3% (Bahrainis) and 2.8% (non-Bahrainis resident in Bahrain for work), the GDP growth rate has lagged to the effect of creating 30,000 unemployed in 1990. Note here that the total labour force in Bahrain is 242,600 (1993 figures) with Bahrainis forming only 39.4% of this figure. 60.6% of the labour force are foreigners imported for various reasons, amongst them cheap rates. The government's economic policies follow the business practices of members of the ruling family and a small circle of opportunists.

These people import cheap labour from the sub-Indian continent and the Far-East and have by this created a new form of slavery. The imported labour are paid around \$80 per month, barely enough for a baby in today's Bahrain. However, these workers are packed 5 or 10 people in small rooms. They transfer most of the monthly pay to their countries' currency and benefit (marginally) from the higher exchange rate and purchasing power. The indigenous population suffer from these policies, but this is of no concern to the ruling family, whose members are reaping profits from these practices.

More alarming, the confidential report mentioned above predicts that by 1995 there will be 50,000 jobless people, amongst them 14,300 foreigners. These foreigners are called in Bahrain "Free-Visa". The arrangement was invented by agencies importing the cheap labour. In this case, the agent imports the workers and dump them in the local job market. These foreign workers search for work and employment. When they earn some money, a percentage of this earning goes to the importing agent in return for the Free-Visa to continue. The government can do nothing, since it is the ministers and members of the ruling family who practice Free-Visa imports.

The Consultative Council (appointed by the ruler) has been discussing the problem for sometime. One member informed "Voice of Bahrain" that it is unlikely any proposal will come out to curb this or other practices. Basically, nearly all the members are businessmen benefiting from cheap labour. The are not accountable to the public. Their boss is the Prime Minister. The PM himself is a main factor in the problem. His empire (Unitag Group of Companies) is a main beneficiary.

The rate of unemployment is unbearable. Presently, 30% of nationals (working age) are unemployed. Combined with foreign work-force the rate is 20%. The rate of 30% is on the increase and the importing of foreign cheap labour is on the increase as well. Agencies continue to grant Free-Visa every month and continue to flood the job market. Bahrainis have spread all over the other Gulf countries looking for work.

The situation is funny. But the ruling family is cunning. The PM once met a group of dignitaries few years ago (amid fears of an invasion of Hawar islands by Qatar, which is in dispute with Bahrain over ownership of the islands). During

the meeting, one of people raised a question to the PM stating that: if the government wants the loyalty of the people, then could it not be possible to employ them in the important ministries of the Interior and Defence? It was pointed out that these ministries are full of foreigners who patronise and alienate nationals. The PM turned to the enquiring person (who was also a businessman) asking him: How many Indians and Pakistanis do you have in your companies? The businessman answered: Most of my workers are from these countries. The PM in turn said: Did we ever demanded that you sack them?

The above is a clear explanation of the philosophy of the ruling family. To them, the government is a private property. It is up to them to employ who ever they wish to serve their selfish interests. The other businessmen can do the same and shut-up. As for the public, well, there is no publicly elected legislative or executive institution, so why bother. And those who object to these settings, the ruling family has commissioned a group of ex-colonial officers, headed by the British General Ian Henderson, to clamp down on opposition.

The government is incapable of solving Bahrain's problem, because it is part of the problem. In today's world, nation-states are governed by professional and public institutions accountable to the people though the ballot boxes. Tribal rules can never be modernised. The way the tribal sheikdoms are behaving have no relation to the culture and traditions of the region, despite all the official claims.

Emile Nakhleh, in his treatise about Bahrain published in 1976 (ISBN 0-669-00454-5) states in page 93 that the government of Bahrain has failed "to comprehend the new forces of social change that usually characterise the improving economic conditions in a modernizing community. More significantly, these governments have not yet paid sufficient serious attention to the direct relationship between economic conditions and political stability. Since the time of Aristotle, social scientists and political philosophers alike have agreed that the economic factor is a sensitive barometer of sociopolitical unrest. The government of Bahrain must in the long run modify its view of labor and trade unions, for in a developing society, tribal or otherwise, the labor force is the cornerstone of modernity - the only path to a truly functional political democracy". It is unlikely that the Al-Khalifa understand the logic presented by Emile Nakhleh..

Human Rights Violation

Haji Abdul Rasool Al-Sabah, a 47 years old, from Ras Romman was detained by the police on 25 August. He spent one day in detention and was not released until he signed a statement barring him from organising meetings in Ras Romman. Mr. Al-Sabah was elected to head the local religious premises "Ma'tam" replacing the person who worked for the intelligence department. During his detention, he was interrogated by Abdul Salam Al-Ansari (chief of Manama Police). The latter threatened Mr. Al-Sabah of the grave consequence awaiting him as a result of challenging a member of the intelligence.