

BAHRAIN

A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement

Gulf Leaders Prepare for Their Annual Ritual

- 5 DEC 1994

CENTRE FOR ARAB GULF STUDIES

Manama is the Venue, But Not the Cure

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

It will be illogical to forecast the outcome of the forthcoming summit in Manama to be attended by the rulers of the Gulf countries. There are many variables in the prevailing circumstances that make any such attempt out of place with reality. It is beyond the capacity of any observer to comprehend the full situation in that region which has been troubled by internal and external disputes and controversies.

The fifteenth summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council will have to deal with a list of problems which are often too delicate to tackle without infuriating one or more of the participating heads of state. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the 1994 Manama summit is a more difficult one than the Manama summit of 1988. At that time, the Iraq-Iran war had just come to an end after the Islamic Republic had accepted the United Nations resolution 598. The Gulf rulers felt a sigh of relief and hoped for a more prosperous future. Their hope was short lived. No sooner had the eight year long war ended than the Iraqi tanks rolled through the streets of Kuwait. Although at the beginning, there seemed to exist a degree of solidarity and cooperation among the six GCC countries, cracks soon began to appear in the months following the liberation of Kuwait. The Saudis, motivated by greed and love of domination, moved their forces across the desert in the vicinity of the border post of Al Khafoush which belonged to Qatar, occupying it and killing two soldiers working for Qatar. The relations between Doha and Riyadh were not to be the same again.

In the last three years, the GCC has failed to produce the leadership and guidance to its member states. Although it succeeded in bringing the multi-national forces to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation, it failed to act decisively when the infringement of the rights of one of its member states had been violated by another member state. Having observed the failure of the GCC to tame the Saudi ambitions in the region, the Qataris made up their mind finally and realised their future could not be linked to the Gulf alliance. Since 1992, Doha has improved its relations with both Baghdad and Tehran, sided with the government of President Ali Abdullah Salch and objected to any Saudi initiative to maintain Riyadh's policy of containment and expansionism. Bahrain, on the other hand, has been disillusioned by the lack of action by the GCC to sort out the mess created by the ongoing border disputes in the region. It viewed Qatar's audacious steps to bring out the dispute on the islands of Hawar as yet another proof of the inability of the GCC to put its house in order. Oman, on the other hand, has maintained her policies of independence in her for-

eign policy and international interests. The Omanis have recently rejected Saudi Arabia's border agreement with the United Arab Emirates, and made her position openly at the United Nations. Riyadh has thus become the very capital on whom all regional wrongs are blamed.

Saudi Arabia's internal situation, together with her foreign policy predicament during the Yemeni conflict, have combined to tame the arrogance of the political hierarchy in Riyadh. What has added to the problems of Riyadh, is King Fahd's poor health and his insistence on holding the keys to every vital decision. The kingdom has thus become paralysed. The rising internal tension due to the activities of the Najdi opposition is contributing towards the downward trends of the Saudi position, not only in the Gulf, but in the rest of the Arab world. Today, Saudi Arabia is far weaker than what it had been a decade ago. With mounting internal opposition and a worldwide anti-governmental activities, the Saudis can no longer hope for the unchallenged leadership they have enjoyed in the past. The summit in Manama scheduled to start on 19th December, will definitely exhibit the cracks in the alliance, once cited as the only practical union in the Arab world.

The preliminary ministerial meetings preceding the summit have been characterised by dissent and disputes. The foreign ministers meeting in Manama in the last week of November could not produce a workable draft document for the final communique of the summit. Once again, the border disputes and relations with Iraq have plagued the meeting. Prior to that, two ministerial meetings met with the same fate. The defence ministers held in Riyadh mid November but failed to produce a final statement, an indication of the extent of discord amongst their countries. The Saudis have all along insisted on the Shield of the Peninsula forces as being adequate for the joint defence of the Gulf. On the other hand, Sultan Qaboos of Oman, is furious at the continued rejection of the plan he had submitted to the 12th summit in Kuwait in 1991. He had called for the formation of a 100,000-strong army to work as a practical deterrent force, a proposal never sanctioned by the Saudis. The result is a total chaos in the most sensitive arena. The security arrangements have not fared any better. After fourteen years of quabbling amongst the GCC leaders, there does not seem to be a clear vision on how to organise a working relationship on this vital matter. The ministers of the interior have failed to produce a working paper to the Manama summit, and it is unlikely that any formula will emerge.

It is therefore unrealistic to expect great

achievements from the 15th GCC summit. That annual gathering of the heads of state cannot be more productive than the various regional meetings, whether ministerial or experts. Last month, for example, the Kuwaiti National Assembly, gathered the five Consultative assemblies in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Mr. Ahmad Al Sa'doun, the president of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, had toured the Gulf in June to gather momentum for his initiative which aimed at creating a dialogue and a working relationship among the various assemblies. To his dismay, there was neither the enthusiasm nor the courage among the participants whose hands were tied up by the totalitarian regimes in their countries. Even when the Kuwaitis proposed that the final communique should "encourage democracy in the Gulf" none of the participants agreed and they preferred to leave the issue to the leaders. They refused to commit themselves to a time or a place for future conventions, and left it to each country to take the initiative to call such a gathering should the need arise. There was even the unpleasant confrontation between the two delegations of Qatar and Bahrain on the issue of the border disputes between the two countries.

In such circumstances it is beyond comprehension to expect major and frank deliberations in Manama later this month. Hopes must not be raised on the ability of the Gulf leaders to embark on major initiatives whilst the internal situation in each country remains shaky. Last month, for example, Sultan Qaboos had to intervene to prevent the execution of Omani nationals who had been condemned to death by the State Security Court after being accused of belonging to an "illegal organisation". When such an affiliations merits the death sentence, it is left to the conscience of mankind to gauge the human nature of the regimes in Gulf states. The Manama summit is doomed before it is even convened. This is a fact underlined by the continued pickering among member states on trivial issues. The pessimistic view is that the whole Gulf alliance could crumble before another summit is convened next year.

The lack of initiatives within the GCC to contain the rising tensions is one of the reasons behind this deterioration of the situation. Perhaps the Saudi domination over the affairs of the Council has been a hindrance in the way of any good will mission. The Saudi internal troubles may now bring home the idea that the Kingdom is not as stable and strong as its gigantic media attempts to show. The Manama summit could herald an era in the Gulf free of the Saudi hegemony.

How Al Mo'ayyad Messed Up His Reputation If It Were Plato's Republic, You Would Not Be a Minister

Plato's republic has never been realised in any part of the world. This is what any political scientist would tell you if you asked him whether there ever existed such an entity. However, one gentleman would argue otherwise. Mr. Tareq Al Mo'ayyad, Bahrain's Information Minister, would maintain, as he did in London last month, that his government has, over the last quarter of a century succeeded in doing what every government in the world had failed to do; to create a paradise on this earthly planet. He told a congregation of about 200 people at London's Intercontinental on 1st November that "this tiny Gulf island has become a manifestation of Plato's dreams". He did not hesitate to make such a statement to a crowd of politicians, diplomats, journalists and businessmen. This is perhaps why no respected journalist wrote a single word about the "great evening".

It was at the invitation of the Gulf Centre of Strategic Studies, a London-based, Gulf-financed institution, that the gathering took place. Some participants paid some 70 pounds to attend the function. In the grand setting of the Ball Room of the hotel located at the corner of Park Lane and Hyde Park Corner, the people who did pay, thought they would get value for money. It was not to be the case.

The food was nice, thanks to the Italian chef at the hotel. But the intellectual food promised by the organisers was of a far inferior quality, to the dismay of most participants. Mr. Al Mo'ayyad was supposed to tackle the theme of "the New World Order and the Arab World". To give him some credit, he did try to do so. But his performance was less than adequate. He seemed to mix things and concept as he often does in the local media back home.

Many ideas were put forward, and few argument were thrown out, but there seemed little in common. There may be "New Grocery Order", "New Pharmacy Order", etc. He did go back in time to the mid-eighties to explore the idea of the "New Information Order" championed then by the former Director General of Unesco, Ahmado Mukhtar Ambo. That idea was in clear contrast to what Mr. Al Mo'ayyad wanted to convey to the audience. Mr. Ambo's doctrine was to give a fair share of the flow of information to the third world countries and to relax the western monopoly in that important sphere.

Mr. Al Mo'ayyad was attempting to show how he had brought down the walls obstructing the flow of information from the west to his country. He was explaining how he allowed the transmission of CNN and BBC on local channels, thereby making it easy for the local audience to receive them without any restriction. It is a total misconception and loss of direction on the part of the Bahraini minister. He failed to list the tangible achievements of his ministry in the creation of a local strong media, and reducing the dependence on foreign experts in the fields of production, reporting, montage and filmmaking.

In a country where there are only two three daily newspapers, two Arabic and one English,

indirectly owned and financed by the government, there could hardly be a place to defend the freedom of expression. Infact anyone who had attempted to express his or her views openly had only himself to blame for whatever harsh consequences that had befallen him.

Mr. Al Mo'ayyad's arguments on the New World Order revolved on the premise that this order is based on respect of the status quo vis-a-vis the existing international border. Now and again, he came back to this argument, to which the Qatari Ambassador reacted angrily after the Bahraini Minister had finished. Mr. Ali Mohammad Jaide, countered by saying the New World Order was not based on the dispute between the two small countries of Bahrain and Qatar over the ownership of Huwar islands. He requested the audience to ignore the Minister's contention on this issue and wanted them to think of the Order as a much wider concept. Mr. Al Mo'ayyad failed to respond with a convincing logic.

Furthermore, when one of the participants asked about the political situation in Bahrain, Mr. Al Mo'ayyad messed up the situation. The question was about whether the government of Bahrain was ready to restore the Constitution and allow back the political exiles without preconditions. The reply was an expression of internal frustration and pre-supposed ideas. He ignored the first part of the question. He claimed that the political exiles were no more than violent people who wanted to shoot diplomats like himself with their guns.

He failed to produce any evidence that the Bahraini opposition had ever used violence to achieve their political aims. For the record, we can claim that the last known violent incident took place in 1968, when a bomb exploded in a car carrying three members of the British special branch. Since then, no such incident took place and the people of Bahrain have used only political means to express their views. It is the government that has often resorted to the use of force to suppress the people. Torture, often to death, took place in detention centres throughout the eighties, and few people died as a result. These claims are well documented by international human rights organisations.

The Bahraini opposition took full advantage of the occasion, and distributed their literature outside the hotel. Almost everyone who attended received a copy of the numerous leaflets on the human rights abuses in Bahrain. The Minister, who was accompanied by the son of the Heir Apparent, expressed his anger as he left. He asked the young men why they were doing this, and the reply was that he would do the same if he were in their place. He could say little else. When he was handed an envelope containing the literature he refused it straight away. But his aides did take them, and he could have given them to his mentor, the Prime Minister, as a gift from the sons of Bahrain who are denied their basic right of residing in their homeland protected by a constitution. It was a necessary message for the arrogant minister who has always pretended to be liberal.

Pro-Democracy Activists Face Persecution

Mr. Saeed Abdulla Al-Asbool is one of the fourteen people who sponsored the writing and distribution of the petition being submitted to the Amir calling on him to restore parliamentary democracy. Mr. Al-Asbool heads an engineering section within the Ministry of Works. At the beginning of October, the Intelligence department summoned him. Two options were tabled: either he quits the committee of fourteen and removes his signature or be sacked from his post. Mr. Al-Asbool refused to bow to the pressure. Next, he was out of work. This dictatorial action was not the only one the government is implementing.

When two ladies took the petition for signing at Jidhafs girls school, the police was called to round them-up. The headmistress spotted the two students collecting signatures. She then rushed to the signed petition, tore it to pieces and alerted the police. The latter rounded-up a group of students, who were subjected to intimidating interrogation. Then, the two girls were isolated and received further intimidation before being release. Miss Mariam Hassan Al-Madeh was threatened with detention. Miss Al-Madeh protested that there are tens of thousands who signed the petition, and she was only one of them.

He Is Back, But For How Long?

Mr. Karim Al-Shakar returned to his post in London following the abrupt departure three months ago. Then, the visiting prime minister sacked Al-Shakar on the spot after the latter failed to show-up at Heathrow Airport to receive the premier. The way Mr. Al-Shakar was dealt with raised eyebrows in diplomatic circles. Usually, when an ambassador leaves his post the protocols call for some farewell party, not a sudden disappearance. Furthermore, there was panic as to who should represent Bahrain while a replacement is identified. It is rumoured that the return of Al-Shakar is merely a stop-gap and to enable the ambassador to pack-up. The opposition finds the way Bahrain's representatives are treated degrading and not compatible with modern and civilised way of life.

Human rights Violation

* Mr. Abdul Karim Mohammed Amin Al-Arab, aged 20 years, from Bani Jamra village, had his residence stormed and turned up-side down. He was taken for interrogation by the Intelligence department regarding some books he had acquired from abroad.

* On 2nd November, Mr. Mahdi Sahwan was detained and subjected to interrogation. Mr. Sahwan had been arrested many times in the past years. He remained in detention for further interrogation and was later released after his passport was confiscated. Similarly, Mr. Fakhri Rashid, 26 years old, from Sanabis, was detained and had his passport confiscated.

The Tribal Doctrine Has to Go From The Gulf One Man, No Vote

One of the most fundamental questions regarding the shape of government in the Gulf is whether the tribal hereditary regime that has been dominating the region for the last two centuries, could survive present day challenges. It had been an accepted form of government at times of illiteracy and ignorance, but now that the people of the Gulf have come of age and attained the highest degree of education, it is simply unfair to expect them to accept the chronic diseases associated with this type of management. In other countries where monarchy has survived so far, the regime has refined itself to the extent that it has retained only symbolic role. The real government has shifted to the people themselves through the process of elections. In Britain today, the institution of monarchy has so much weakened that the debate has escalated on its future. This is despite the fact that parliamentary democracy has been the order of the political system for more than three centuries. It is the resilience of the monarchical system in Britain that has enabled it to survive so long. Still strong voices are often heard calling for the abolishing of this historic institution.

In contrast, however, the tribal system, which is an extreme form of monarchy, has failed to develop with time. It has resisted any attempt of improvement whether from within its hierarchy or from outside. It is an extreme form of despotism because it leaves no room for any participation by the people in the running of their affairs. Moreover, the lack of any form of rules or regulations has caused enormous rifts within the tribal hierarchy. There have been many bloody confrontations among brothers and cousins in their fight on the throne. Opponents were dealt with without mercy, and no human value was observed in putting down mutinies against the despotisms of the tribal regime. A brother killed his brother, a cousin butchered his cousin and so on.

In the Gulf states, this fact was substantiated by many incidents. In 1867, the ruler of Bahrain, Ali bin Khalifa was killed by his brother, Muhammad, who became the ruler. The British intervened, and two years later, ousted Muhammad and installed, the son of the murdered sheikh, Ali in his place. Many such incidents took place throughout the last two centuries. In 1962, King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz ousted his brother, Saud, and replaced him as the king of Saudi Arabia. In 1968, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, the president of the United Arab Emirates, ousted his brother, Shakhboub, in a white coup. In 1970, Sultan Qaboos of Oman overthrew his father, Saeed bin Teimour, who had become a liability on the country due to his old age. As recently as 1986, conspiracies by one member of the ruling tribe against another continued unabated. The ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi was overthrown by his brother, Abdul Aziz. A regional understanding thwarted the attempt, and Sultan was re-installed. Abdul Aziz had to leave the country. Abdul Aziz bin Ahmed Al Thani is an aspiring Qatari prince who believes he should have been made the heir apparent by his

father, and is collaborating with the Saudis against he present ruler of Qatar.

Apart from the persistent intrigues by members of the ruling tribes, the sensitivities and fighting for posts has never ceased. Prince Abdulla bin Abdul Aziz, the heir apparent of Saudi Arabia, is being challenged by his brother, Sultan, the defence minister, and both are against King Fahd who refuses to go. Both men are ageing and worried that they might not make it to the throne if Fahd clings any longer to it. Sultan has strengthened his position by appointing both his sons in powerful positions. During the Gulf War 2, his son, Khaled, was appointed the commander of the Arab forces alongside the allied forces. Although he was outweighed by Norman Schwartzkopf, his assumption of that post was a credit to his father. The other son, Bandar, is the Kingdom's ambassador to Washington, a post that is necessary to enhance the chances of Sultan in his bid to succeed his brother, Fahd. The Kuwaiti ruling Al Sabah tribe is not an exception, and clamouring for power amongst members of the ruling tribe has never ceased. There is an increasing resentment against the present heir apparent, Sa'ad Al Abdallah, on the premise that his of a slave origin.

The Al Khalifa of Bahrain, have fared badly in the contest for power by members of the ruling tribe. In 1923, their elder, Sheikh Isa bin Ali was ousted by the Major Daily, the British political agent in Bahrain, in favour of his son, Hamad, the grandfather of the present Amir. The old man never ceased his intrigues against his son, according to the British documents. Since then, the issue of succession has always been a sour problem. Today, the Amir, who is in his sixties, suffers from several diseases, but has managed to install his son, Hamad as his successor. Khalifa, his elder brother and the prime minister, had objected to that and had always dreamt of becoming a ruler. The relations between the two men, the prime minister, and the heir apparent, have never been positive. Hamad had been the defence minister until two years ago, when he was replaced by another Al Khalifa member. There was a chronic problem in the earlier arrangement in which Hamad was both the heir apparent and the minister of defence. In normal times, he would be under the prime minister since he had a lower rank in the cabinet. But when the Amir went abroad, he would assume his place, and thus become of a higher rank than his uncle. This is why Khalifa had always left the country as soon as his brother travelled abroad. With the present arrangement, the tension is less. However, Khalifa still aspires for strong positions to his sons. Last year, his son, Ali became the minister of transport, but he has since acted in a wider capacity. He would receive foreign guests, and open new institutions. The clamour for power will remain for a long time because it is linked to the way members of the ruling tribes are brought up.

While the tribal chiefs compete for posi-

tions, the rest of the people compete to survive. Without institutionalising political participation of the people, it is difficult to see how the political identity of the countries of the Gulf may be defined and recognised. The tribal regimes have resisted to develop in line with everything else. They have opposed any call for improvement of the people's status in the political hierarchy and insisted on the old concepts and norms. They prefer to ignore the fact that the people of the Gulf have reached a high degree of education, and their appetite to assume their natural role as citizens with values has improved. Despite all this, the tribal regimes have insisted on carrying on as before; no political participation, no elected bodies, no freedom of expression, no right of opposition, ... etc. The Saudi national, who had attained the highest degree of knowledge from the most advanced American universities is denied the right to choose his own representative at an elected legislative body, whilst he witnesses how his Yemeni counterpart who has never been to school able to cast his vote at the ballot box. This state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely. The region needs an overhaul of the political system, and it may be time that the tribal chiefs are made to submit to the logic of the new era.

Banned Islamic Society To Pay For Its Closure

The Islamic Enlightenment Society was one of the leading social institutions in the country housing three girls schools and two university-level courses. In February 1984 the government attacked the schools and savagely closed down the Society. Since then, the huge building on the Budayaa Highway (at Duraz) has been deserted. The class rooms are nothing but ghost places, with broken windows and scattered pieces of things. After ten years of desertion, the Khamis Police HQ summoned Mr. Abdul Hussain Al-Mutghawwi on 26 October 1994. Wondering about the reasons, the police officer started questioning him why the Society never paid the municipality rates. Mr. Al-Mutghawwi was arrested when the Society was banned and served seven years in jail accused of running anti-government activities from the Society. The astonishing issue is that the Intelligence department had confiscated all the books, equipment, money and belongings of the Society. The worrying matter is that the Intelligence is probably preparing for an orchestrated manoeuvre to confiscate the buildings.

The closure ten years ago caused anger and frustration amongst the people. This is a legitimate and registered establishment run voluntarily by citizens with declared aims and objectives. Yet, the government used the tense situation in the Eighties to justify a blatant crackdown on social activities that do not come under the wings of the ruling tribe.

The way the government treated the Islamic Enlightenment Society is an indication of its intention. If it chooses to improve the relation with the people it is likely to remove the banning of the Society. Otherwise, the closure represents the continued policy of repression.

Massive Subscription to the Popular Petition

Disenchantment is the Order of the Day

A British political observer read the petition being submitted to the Amir calling for the restoration of the National Assembly. His comments were as follows:

"The petition to the Amir is a step in the right direction. Restoring the National Assembly is essential. But how much backing is there from the mass of citizens? How united is the opposition? How many different interests are there? Can religious and secular groups work together? Is there a Sunni-Shia divide? Has anybody got a manifesto, or policy statement of aims, to put to the people? Is there a charismatic leader who could speak out not just to Bahrain but to the world?"

These are serious questions. The core question being: is the opposition geared-up for the consequences of a political battle or not? Bahrainis have long debated these issues looking back at historical events that took place in the previous decades.

The backing of the mass of citizens to the petition being submitted is not questionable. Indeed, tens of thousands have already registered their names calling for the return of parliament. The grass roots are subject to grave consequences. By signing, they risk their safety and livelihood. This is true because the ruling tribe finds the notion of people demanding rights is unfit with its culture. The latter believes that people must bow and thank the tribe that granted them "schools, houses, salaries, high-ways, food, water, and utilities". Hence, how dare anyone raise a voice claiming some "rights".

The opposition in Bahrain takes two forms. Organised movements and parties are prime targets for the secret police. In the Seventies, the two main leftist parties suffered severely from oppressive crackdown. So did the main two Islamic parties in the Eighties. Suffice to mention that Bahrain's penal code (which is not in accordance with the constitution) prescribes a minimum of five years sentence for any member of an organised political part. Hence the organised groups stay underground and can only speak out publicly outside the country. The other form of oppositions are the groups of intellectuals and religious scholars who function through semi-political institutions, like clubs, mosques and other social circles. These groups represent the mainstream political tendencies with the country. They can be classified in terms of Islamic tendency (Shia and Sunni) and National tendency (Nationalists and leftists). The petition being submitted and the one that was submitted in November 1992 were signed by leading and authoritative personalities of both the National and Islamic tendencies, both of which encompassed their main strands.

It is worth mentioning that these were the same groups that existed in the National Assembly between 1973-75. Then, they were termed as the Religious Bloc and the People's Bloc. Both had won their constituencies after campaigning for programmes that could be reformulated as manifestos. Indeed, both Blocs stood against the imposition of the State Security Law. When the government failed to win

'allies, the Amir and the prime minister resorted to dissolving the parliament.

The explicit and implicit demands of the petitions form an initial manifesto. These include the return of parliamentary life and public accountability, preserving Bahrain's independence, the rescue of economy (to relieve unemployment, inflation, trade restrictions, etc.), end of corruption, respect of human rights, and inevitably popular-participation in the executive. However, Bahrain's political map is characterised by several features that influence the current and forthcoming events. Here are some of them:

1. The small size of Bahrain as compared to its neighbours provide super-size Saudi Arabia to enforce a certain form of politics and governance. The Saudis provide the political cover for the backward political system in the Gulf. Nevertheless, this factor is not eternal. Nowadays, the Saudi system faces its most critical phases as the people of Arabia (especially from the rulers' base of Najd) are openly staging their political actions. The Saudi economy is in the red, and can not continue buying loyalties by extra subsidies to a high standard of living. The Saudi budget has bought most of the Arab media. London, the new capital of Arab journalism, witnesses the dominance of Saudi petrodollars. Newspapers, weeklies, monthlies, radio and TV are all elements of a massive Saudi media empire. This empire serves the Saudis by providing a propaganda tool and by implicitly and explicitly defending the Saudi political system. These media are engaged in what is termed "analysis-paralysis". The Saudi opposition is thinking of establishing their counter media tools, including a possible TV station. The Saudi dominance on media may not, hence, be sustainable. The demise of the Saudi power is a matter of time, if anything.

2. Bahrain's relations with both the US and Britain are intriguing factors. The US military bases in Jufair, south of Bahrain and the old airport, provide the ruling family, Al-Khalifa, with a sense of external security. On the other hand, the internal security system is handled by a group of British officers, who implement merciless crackdowns on opposition. The ruling family has long generated the feeling that both the US and Britain are there to protect them against the legitimate demands of the Bahraini people. The presence of both the American military and British security officers will have to adjust to new regional and global political environments. It is doubtful that the US would risk deploying its soldiers to kill Bahraini citizens calling for the return of democracy. At the same time, British officials are distancing themselves from the like of Ian Henderson. The latter is an embarrassing person to HM Government which denies seconding him to the Bahraini government.

3. The ruling family has forged a dubious relationship with a group of dominating businessmen. The basic understanding between the two is that as long as these businessmen allow the lion-shares of business returns to flow towards the ruling family, then the latter would provide free hand for them in generating profit

without the need to go through the rigid bureaucracy. Most of these businessmen reserve certain percentages for commissions and profit-sharing with members of the ruling family. However, while these businessmen are natural allies, increasingly, all other businessmen are outraged and eager to see the end of unfair trading practices.

4. Another section of the society that has provided a greater service for the ruling family is represented by a group self-styled dignitaries. These are a collection of religious men and community elders who visit the palaces of the Amir, Heir Apparent and prime minister every week. During their visits, they gain special favours. These range from plots of land, gifts in the form of cash or cars, tickets for touring the world, positions for relatives, etc. The return for these unwarranted rewards come in the form of combating any social, religious or political activity that aim for change. This group may resort to traditional tactics such as inciting Sunni-Shia divide to break the resolve of political and social action. However, they are becoming so outdated that they are facing mounting criticism and scandalous revelations that is increasingly isolating them from the populace.

5. The human rights records of Bahrain are some of the worst in the region. All international organisations have full details of the oppressive campaigns and the inhumane treatment of political prisoners. This has resulted in the imposition of UN Human Rights monitoring between February 1992 and February 1993. This was lifted after the US representative sponsored the ending of monitoring claiming that Bahrain had improved its records. Nonetheless, the Opposition has shown its capability to take the issue beyond the national boundaries. Having reached thus far, the opportunities are open for the Opposition to further its aims by exposing the repressive and dictatorial nature of the regime.

6. Unemployment is a problem that will not go away. Amongst Bahrainis, the rate is as high as 30%. These young people are increasingly alienated and becoming fearless. They have staged several demonstrations in the past few months and have shown their determination. What makes the situation worse is the fact that members of the ruling family and their allied businessmen continue to flood the country with cheap labour from the Far East and the Sub-Indian continent. A confidential report submitted to the Cabinet speaks of foreigners joining the unemployed. These are the Free-Visa who are imported by agents and dumped in the job market in return for a percentage-return from their wages when they gain employment. The report states that up to 25% of the unemployed (12,500 out of 50,000 jobless) will be from these foreigners. Certainly, this is the back-firing of a non-responsible policy.

What's worse is that oil is running out in the year 2005. How could the ruling family attract foreign investment and tourism with a country liable for political instability. Tourists do not go to countries that may erupt politically. Foreign firms have other safer and friendlier places to go. The government will be cornered more and more, while the Opposition drives its campaign to conclusions.