

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" for promoting Human and Constitutional Rights

Declining oil-prices shakes up the region

Khalifa versus a tripartite alliance

A converging pattern of alliances seems to be developing in the Gulf, and is likely to shape the regional political scene in the foreseeable future. With the sharp decline in oil prices, the region, and specifically the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are now exposed to political upheavals due to the anticipated economic crises. The net result will be a tendency towards either more liberalisation or more serious repression. The western countries which enjoy good relations with the GCC rulers are anxious to avoid a dramatic change in the political map of the Gulf. They have, so far, refrained from bringing down the regime of Saddam Hussain of Iraq and improving relations with Iran. However the situation appears to be different when it comes to the Gulf.

The continuing decline of oil prices, which is the main income in the Gulf, is threatening the stability of the region and is likely to have serious economic and political consequences unless the situation changes. Oil from GCC states now sells for as low a price as \$9 per barrel, less than half its prices two years ago. This means the total oil revenues for these countries will be almost half the anticipated values. The economies of these states cannot sustain this sharp fall in their main source of revenue, and it is likely that their budget will have a serious deficit. This will undoubtedly be reflected on the development plans and could lead to freezing or abandoning social projects. The overproduction of oil by states inside and outside OPEC has led to a glut in the market thus forcing the prices down. On the other hand the financial crisis in South East Asia and Japan, has contributed negatively to the oil prices, the net results being the dramatic fall that has precipitated a major crisis.

Over the past quarter of a century, the lid was kept on the boiling political situation using the heavy weight of oil revenues that enabled the rulers to take a more robust attitude against political reforms. Now that the inherent weakness of an economy based on a single commodity has been exposed, it will be difficult to visualise the extent of the anticipated problems. What is certain, however, is the fact that the financial rewards made possible by large oil revenues throughout the past two and a half decades are likely to disappear, thus paving the way for discontent. Expression of this discontent could take any form, the most likely of which is political agitation. Reform of the traditional

political regime is thus more pressing and only wise rulers will pre-empt upheavals by introducing political reforms gradually and sincerely.

It is now reported that a new axis is gradually taking shape in the Gulf. Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia has been seen as being keen on some reforms in his country, a step that has been awaited for long. The advent of the Consultative Council has done little to satisfy the aspirations of a rapidly-rising middle class, and a move toward a more open and representative regime has thus become a necessity. Prince Abdulla has forged a new friendship with the Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who is reported to have taken personal interest in the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia during last year's emergency session of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital. The two worked together and have apparently succeeded in pulling Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, along the path of reforms. The three have thus become a strong alliance within the GCC, an eventuality that has not been received well by the prime minister of Bahrain.

Over the past twelve months Sheikh Zayed has undertaken two major initiatives; one to mediate in the political in Bahrain, and the other to improve the relations between Qatar and Bahrain. The prime minister of Bahrain has not reacted positively to either, thus angering Sheikh Zayed and causing the relations between the UAE and his government to cool. This may not necessarily lead to hostility between the two countries but the impact on the regional alliance is not to be underestimated. The tripartite alliance seems to have several features in common; strong economies (before the recent downfall in oil prices), less hostility towards Iraq, an improved attitudes towards Iran and a more receptive attitude towards political reforms. Bahrain, however, does not share any of these criteria. The dependence by the AlKhalifa on financial support coming from Kuwait prevents them from going all the way towards Baghdad, whilst their sensitivity towards political reforms means they are less receptive to mediation.

The Government of Bahrain has embarked on a road that does not necessarily lead to a more stable situation on the internal front. The policy of no-dialogue with the constitutional movement cannot lead to the required aim and the likelihood is that a more aggressive opposition will eventually emerge. The Bahraini government has lost both financially and politically as a result of the prime ministers' policies. The realignment of the three governments are being watched carefully to assess the nature of the new status quo in the Gulf which is vital for the interests of the western world. The Bahraini opposition has been moderate and has not called for a

fundamental change in the region. The governments that are friendly with the Al-Khalifa are wise to take certain steps to bring home that the time for totalitarian regimes has gone. It will be a major mistake on the part of Bahrain's regime to assume that repression alone could win the day against the constitutional movement. The requirements of modern civil society are based on the needs for more openness, more respect of human rights and more political freedoms. It is a futile exercise to attempt to change the course of history. The wise step to take is that which leads to the settlement of the crisis on the basis of the demands articulated by the Popular Petition of 1994. Failing to do so could only lead to more instability especially in light of the weak economies exacerbated by the dwindling oil prices.

Budget deficit declared

The finance minister Ibrahim Abdel-Karim said on 7 June that the 1998 budget deficit is expected to be 80 million dinars (\$212 million). On 26 May, the same minister reported that the budget had a surplus of 2.2 million dinars (\$5.8 million). The deficit of 80 million dinars amounts to 3% of gross domestic product (Projected 1998 income = 630 million dinars, and spending = 705 million dinars).

Bahrain produces 40,000 barrels per day from in-shore fields and receives (since 1996) the entire production of 140,000 bpd from an offshore oil field (Abo Sa'afa) it shares with Saudi Arabia. Before 1996, Bahrain received 75,000 bpd from Abo Sa'afa, but income was not registered in the budget. In 1996, Saudi Arabia informed international circles that the government of Bahrain receives oil income of 140,000 bpd. This was aimed at curbing the escape of income to unchecked "private pockets". Also, the UAE offered financial assistance to spend 1.15 billion dinars on development projects in the next five years. They include a power and water plant to produce 250 megawatts of eleand 30 million gallons a day of water, a port [in Hidd], a new hospital and several new schools. Reuters reported that "Bahrain is expected to borrow 70 million dinars from Arab and Islamic funds to finance its infrastructure programmes this year".

The Finance minister declined to say whether the interior ministry would stop importing Bedouins from the Syrian desert who are now numbered between 40-45 thousands (between 8,000 - 10,000 families). The government provides free accommodation and monthly salaries of 500 dinars (\$1,325) for each family. These are draining the resources.

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June 98: Re-arresting released people; "Microphone Licensing"

3 June, the security forces attacked Shakhroa and arrested Seyed Taqi Marhoon Adnan, 22, Seyed Abdul Zahra Saeed Salman, 16. On 6 June, another attack was mounted against Shakhroa and the following were arrested: Haider Abd Ali Salman Al-Asfoor, 15, Sadiq Abdul Rasool Habib, 18, Mosa Jaffer Mohammed Juma' a, 19 and another twelve persons from the same area. In Hamad Town, the security forces stormed several houses and arrested Mohammed Ma' atooq Ali, 14, Ahmad Mahdi Mahfoodh, 17, Shakir Moslem Ibrahim, 16, Hussain Moslem Ibrahim, 13, Seyyed Faisal Ali Adnan, 13, Jaffer Saeed Zuhair, 13, and several other unknown children. The following were known to have been arrested towards the end of May. From Dair: Hussain Ali Own, 25. From Duraz: Abdul Razzaq Ali Hassan, 23, Ali Abdul Nabi Abdul Karim, 18.

4 and 6 June, the residents of Sanabis went out and blocked the main highway in commemoration of the martyr Abdul Zahra Ibrahim Abdulla, who was murdered by the security forces last year. Similarly in Daih, Karbabad, and in Demestan, the citizens blocked the main highway and declared their protest.

6 June: The following are known to have been arrested from Muqsha' a on 6 June: Hussain Hassan Ali, 17, Mahmood Ali Abdulla Mohammed Ali, 17, Abbas Jasim Mohammed, 18, Abdul Hadi Mohammed Ali, 18, Ibrahim Abdulla Mohammed Ali, 22. The last two were released after received an exhausting amount of shock-torture.

7 June: The residents of Daih went out and blocked the main highway. Similar actions were reported in Sanabis and Karzak. Loud sounds of exploding gas cylinders were heard around the country. These activities were in commemoration of the martyrdom of Abdul Zahra Ibrahim Abdulla, 27 years old, Sanabis, who died on 6 June 1997, as a result of the severe beating he received from the security forces that attacked the residents of Sanabis on 1 June 1997.

8 June: From Bani Jamra: Ali Mohammed Ali, 22. From Jedhafs: Hussain Ahmad Mahdi, 18, his brother Ibrahim, 18, and Ali Abdul Aziz Abdulla. They were arrested on 8 June and tortured severely, in solitary confinement, for 12 days. From Duraz: Mohammed Hussain Jaffer Abu-Rowais, 20. He is detained in Al-Budaya' a prison. From Bilad al-Qadim: Ali Abdulla Ahmad Al-Qassab, 18. From Schla: Seyed Ali Abbas Shubbar, 16, Seyed Abbas Abdulla Al-Fardan (the head of the community). From Hamad Town: Hussain Abdulla Ahmad Marhoon, 23.

10 June, the security forces attacked Sanabis, stormed the house of Seyed Amin Ibrahim Ali, 18, tortured him severely, and released before dying in their hands. In Bilad al-Qadim. The security forces arrested Mohammed Jasim Al-Askafi, 18, and Yonis Ali Mansoor, 18. Nothing is known about their fate.

13 June, the authorities re-arrested 8 persons who had been released two weeks ago. The eight were sentenced for three years but were kept in jail for three and a half years. The persons who were summoned to the Adleya Police Station were: Seyed Ahmed Nema, Raed

Al-Khawaja, Majid Milad, Jaffar Selail, Jawad Marhoon, Nizar Al-Qarea, Jaffar Al Sayah and Abbas Al-Aradi.

14 June: Ramlah Mohammed Hassan, 22, who had been arrested on 30 May was released on 14 June after payment of 500 dinar (1335). She was tortured by security officers and was told that she would be re-arrested or be brought before the state security court.

The residents of Daih went out and blocked the main highway in a show of protest against the atrocities of the foreign security forces. Similar protests were reported in other places, such as Nuweidra. The security forces had wiped out the pro-constitution slogans from the walls, but within a very short time, the citizens re-painted more slogans. In Zinj, Shakhroa, Karzakkan, Dar Kulaib, Demestan, Bori, Duraz, Ma'amir, and other towns and villages, the posters of the jailed leaders and martyrs as well as slogans calling for restoration of parliament.

18 June: The London-based "Al-Quds" newspaper quoted Saleh Ahmed, the lawyer defending the Bahrainis held by the Kuwaiti authorities, saying that he "anticipates that they would be released in the next appeal session, which is due on 4 July". Mr. Ahmed said that it was a mistake to have sentenced them in the first place, as they had not broken the Kuwaiti laws.

19 June: The security forces attacked Sehla while the people were participating in a traditional religious programme. This attack is aimed at continuing the unconstitutional policy directed against the peaceful nation. The government has been engaged in a systematic crack-down against all public functions emanating from clubs, societies, professional association, mosques or community centres. Scores of people had been arbitrarily arrested from Tobli and Isa Town. Amongst those detained from Isa Town were: Faisal Abdul Majid Al-Nashabah, Abdulla Ibrahim and Ammar Al-Haddad.

22 June: The following are known to have been arrested; From Sitra: six children aged 7 (amongst them Khalil Ali bin Ali, 7 years old) were detained in mid June and tortured for one day. Abbas Hussain Dhraboh, 22, from Sitra had been arrested following the ransacking of his parent's house several times in search for their son. The following persons from Abu-Saiba' a: Fuad Hassan Abdulla, 22, Taqi Ahmad Salman, 21, Ismail Hasan Salman, 21, Hamza Saeed Zuhair, 18, have all completed their jail term of three years (completed in March 1998) but had not been released. Abdul Jalil Ali Al-Nakkas, 48, father of eight children, from Al-Salheyya, has spent two years in jail without any charges. His family had been denied their breadwinner as part of the collective punishment programmes adopted by the interior ministry.

23 June: Hussain Khamis, 24, was re-arrested. He had already spent more than a year without charges and trial.

23 June: It was reported by local press on 23 June that "ten people (Africans, Europeans, Latin Americans and Arabs) have been arrested and imprisoned in Paris for their role in counterfeiting BD20 notes". The police said that they had been able to seize forged BD20 notes worth \$8 million last week. Bahrain Monetary

Agency had issued a statement on 8 June, warning people of the existence of bogus BD20 notes in the country. The announcement created havoc in the market and amongst the people.

24 June: The local newspapers reported that the prime minister decided to go ahead with this plan (which he abandoned in the mid-1980s) to construct a bridge linking the Hawar Islands with the main Bahrain Island. The sovereignty of Hawar Islands is being disputed between Qatar and Bahrain and the International Court in The Hague is continuing to hear the case. The prime minister also intends to construct a town in south east of Bahrain (at the start of the planned bridge) and to name it "Madinat Khalifa", after his initial name. The government has imported between 8000-10,000 families (about 40,000 - 50,000 population) from the Syrian desert in an attempt to change the demography of the country. Many more families are being imported and the government plans for constructing houses are reserved for this evil-minded programme.

27 June: The four chambers of the State Security Court, presided by members of the Al-Khalifa ruling family, handed down arbitrary sentences against a number of Bahrainis following prolonged detentions and torture. The trial for a group of 16 people was adjourned until September. Those sentenced on 27 June included: Ibrahim Yousif Abdul Rasool Hamadi, four years jail, Mohamed Abdul Karim Ali Jawad, 3 years, Mahdi Ahmad Ali Salman, 3 years, Fadhil Abdulla Abdul Karim Ali Jawad, 3 years, Abdulla Isa Ibrahim Al-Mahhari, 3 years, Hussain Mirza Hamza, 1 year, Abdul Allah Mahdi Hussain Hamada, 1 year. Another group: Ahmad Hassan Ali Al-Ajami, 1 year jail; Raadhi Abdulla Khalfan, 1 year; Ali Hassan Al-Hayki; 15 months jail; Mohammed Ibrahim Ahmad Al-Hayki, 15 months. Another group comprised the following: Abdul Aziz Salman Abdulla, 1 year; Ahmad Mansoor Hassan Sha'aban, 1 year; Hani Hamza Yousif Mohammed Hussain, 1 year; Salman Ibrahim Abdulla Hassan Al-Haddad, 1 year; Ali Ja'afar Abdul Hussain Al-Qassab, 1 year, Abdul Adhim Abdul Hadi Rajab, acquitted. All these people have been detained for more than all the periods they were sentenced to. No one has been released yet.

28 June: The security forces snatched Haj Mohammed Ali Al-Qare' a, 55, from the doorstep of his house in Daih. He is being held as a hostage to force his son, Nizar Al-Qare' a, to hand himself to the torturers. Nizar was released a month ago after staying three and a half years in jail, six months more than the sentence passed against him in 1995. Nizar was one of eight people, all of who were re-arrested shortly after their release from detention.

30 June: The local papers reported that the cabinet will be issuing a law restricting or banning the use of microphones in public places. This action is aimed at codifying the dictatorial policy which has been imposed on the people for at least two years. Security forces have consistently stormed religious assembly halls and mosques to order switching off the microphones. This policy is aimed at restricting the freedom of people from practicing their religion and is aimed at clamping down on potentiality of the community to congregate.

Los Angeles Times: The US must support democratic reforms in Bahrain

Los Angeles Times, 3 June 1998, By: GRAHAM E. FULLER

"The ongoing agonies of Indonesia bring home once again the dangers of complacency in watching authoritarian regimes violate political and human rights over the years, eventually resulting in an explosion that can hurt everybody. Bahrain is another such case waiting to happen.

While the emir of Bahrain, Sheik Isa ibn Salman Khalifa, is in Washington this week for a state visit, what kind of message will he get? Unlike Indonesia, Bahrain is only one smallish island, sitting in the middle of the Persian Gulf. But its deteriorating situation deserves attention by Washington policymakers. Stronger action now in favor of reforms may avert a more serious explosion later in that critical region.

Bahrain matters to the U.S. because it is home base to the Fifth Fleet. It is also a major offshore banking and financial center; it has always been one of the more liberal and open Arab states toward foreigners. Its population is two-thirds Shiite. But Bahrain is dominated by a Sunni Muslim ruling family that runs the country like a personal fiefdom. Recall news coming out of Bahrain is subject to tight government control—most foreign correspondents have been expelled—it is not widely known that Bahrain is undergoing its own mini-intifada, a smoldering ongoing revolt of the majority of the population who happen to be Arab Shiite Muslims. Since the invasion of the Sunni Khalifas in the 18th century, the Shia have largely been treated as a subclass, even though occasional tame Shiite ministers are brought into the Cabi-

net in nonsensitive positions.

In 1975, the Khalifas decided that the elected Parliament was flexing its muscles too vigorously in trying to hold the ruling family to the constitution. The Parliament was closed and never reopened. As the U.S. State Department 1997 Human Rights report on Bahrain indicates, "Citizens do not have the right or ability peacefully to change their government or their political system, and political activity is strictly controlled by the government."

Shiite grievances have been building for a long time. The government allows rich Sunni merchants to import tens of thousands of cheap laborers from South Asia, taking jobs away from native Shia. There is no freedom of the press to write about these grievances. In 1991, the Shia combined with Sunni liberals in a petition campaign to ask the Khalifas to reopen the 1975 Parliament and implement the constitution. The Khalifas quashed the campaign and played on Sunni fears by calling it "Shiite extremism." Inevitably demonstrations and disorders broke out, which the regime attempts to stifle but has never contained.

What is striking about this intifada is the relative lack of bloodshed due to a basically moderate political culture of Bahrain over the years. Stones, Molotov cocktails and burning tires, not firearms, have been the main weapons, and only 40 people have been killed since the intifada began four years ago. Inevitably there have been a few Shiite radicals who have gone off to Iran for ideological training, but most of the Shiite opposition movement, including its clerics, do not associate with Iran and have

called strictly for the secular goals of reopening the Parliament and the holding of elections. A number of Sunni liberals who have not been sufficiently intimidated by the government support the call.

In the meantime, efficient British (usually ex-colonial) security officers serve to keep the political lid on for the Khalifas, with the help of imported police and militia members who have few compunctions about publicly cracking heads of Shiite protesters. Large parts of the island are under virtual garrison rule to keep political protest limited to Shiite ghettos and out of the international spotlight. Economic conditions in these areas are poor.

So far, the Shia of Bahrain have not been anti-American, despite U.S. public support for Bahrain's rulers. But U.S. public disregard for violations of this sort surely will lead the Shiite movement in the direction of greater radicalism. Is it subversive to call for restoration of a once free Parliament? If the U.S. does not live up to its democratic ideals, how will the Shia react when they do eventually gain power as the majority?

The visit of the emir is a good time to address this question. We can't let every authoritarian ruler in the region simply invoke the word "terrorism" as the catch-all label for any political opposition. Serious violations of democratic and human rights are involved with real consequences for U.S. interests and regional stability. U.S. pressure has brought dramatic and encouraging liberalization in Kuwait over the past six years. Let Bahrain be next or else face an inflammatory Gulf".

Amir's visit to US: Abuse of Bahrainis must stop

A leading story on the front page of Al-Quds Al-Arab on 5 June reported the statement of an American PR consultant who said "the Bahraini government does not know how to present its image to the world".

Al-Quds said this implies that the Bahraini government had employed an American PR company to polish the image of the Amir which has been "smeared by the practices against democratic freedoms to the extent that there was not a single human rights organization which did not denounce or criticise the Bahrain government". Despite all this, the foreign minister, Sheik Mohammed bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa said in a press conference on 2 June in Washington DC that "his government had appointed a Consultative Council four years ago". But he did not mention to the journalists that his government had disbanded the elected parliament in 1975". The minister added in a reply to a question about the democratic representation in his country saying "do not expect from us to be like Sweden or Denmark. This is a matter that does not apply to us and its is difficult to exist in our country".

The Amir had not been well received and had not been honoured as a head of a state. And to compensate for this fiasco, six American leading companies with interest in the Gulf area, hosted a dinner for him. These include Caltex, Turner, Lockheed, City Bank, and Chevron. Several Arab Ambassadors told Al-Quds that the meeting did not exceed 15 minutes

between entry to and exit from the hall. It was just to shake hands with Amir without spelling any word.

Mr. Hanny Megally, of Human Rights Watch issued a letter on 29 May, to the US President and the Secretary Albright urging them to raise Bahrain's poor human rights record saying, "the government of Bahrain routinely denies most fundamental civil rights and liberties".

C. Anne Massagee of "Amnesty International USA" said on 2 June "On the eve of the state visit of the Amir of Bahrain, Shaikh Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Amnesty International USA renews its concerns about ongoing human rights violations in the Gulf state. "Security cannot be built on human rights violations," the organization said today. Bahrain has experienced an eruption of widespread protests since December 1994, when people began calling on the government to restore democratic rights by allowing the National Assembly to reconvene and to respect the country's constitution.

The Bahraini Government, stating that "extremist" elements have been responsible for acts of violence, has responded by clamping down heavily on all opposition. Authorities have used the Law on State Security Measures to repress freedom of speech and religion; freedom of the ; and the right to public and private assembly. Several thousand men, women and children have been arrested and held without charge or trial. Hundreds of detainees arrested in connection with these protests have been

sentenced following unfair trials. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees has become systematic and widespread, and there have been several deaths in custody. In a recent report on unfair trials in the Middle East, Amnesty International stated that the procedures followed by the State Security Court have resulted in manifestly unfair trials; the court routinely violated not only human rights conventions, but also the Bahraini Constitution.

In one case, Bahraini authorities are continuing to detain Shaikh 'Abd al-'Amir Mansur al-Jamri, a prominent Muslim Shi' scholar and writer who was a member of the National Assembly before it was dissolved by the Amir in 1975. Shaikh al-Jamri has been detained without charge or trial since January 22, 1996. Amnesty International fears that he is at risk of torture; he has reportedly been subjected to ill treatment, and his health is believed to have deteriorated. "It is time for Bahrain to accept that a government's legitimate right to maintain security can only be carried out with due respect for human rights," Amnesty International USA said. "The United States should make clear that we will not condone human rights violations by our allies."

Mr. McCurry (speaking for the US State Department) said on 1 June: "The President productive working session with the Emir Bahrain continues, and we'll have a long and lengthy readout of the meeting at the conclusion". Conclusions are still unknown

No Labour Rights in Bahrain

In Geneva, on 18 June, the Bahraini government's delegation refused to vote in favour of an ILO (International Labour Organisation) pact for protecting workers' rights. Nevertheless, ILO countries adopted - through majority voting - a political declaration pledging to protect workers' basic rights. The pact aims to protect the right to form and join trade unions and bargain collectively, to eliminate forced labour, end discrimination in employment and to bring about the effective abolition of child labour. It creates a follow-up mechanism for members to report back on their compliance with these core labour standards. The refusal of the Bahrain government is reflective of its violation of the Bahraini Constitution as well as all international civilised standards for basic rights. The adoption of the pact is now mandatory and the government will be made accountable for its continued refusal to allow for labour unions.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights - issued on 9 June 1998, reported the following on Bahrain:

"Trade unions are banned in Bahrain. The partially-suspended 1973 constitution recognises the right to organise, but the labour law makes no mention of this right, nor of the rights to bargain collectively and strike.

Few strikes take place. The 1974 Security Law forbids strikes, which would undermine the existing relationship between employer and employees or damage the economic health of the country.

The law allows for a system of Joint Management-Labour Consultative Councils (JCCs) which can only be set up with government permission. Workers' representatives on the JCCs are elected at the workplace. They are not allowed to hold meetings or campaign for election. Although they represent workers' interests in discussions with management, they can only act as advisors and have no real power to negotiate or bargain. The Ministry of the Interior can exclude worker candidates from standing for election to the JCCs.

There are JCCs in twelve major state-controlled industries and four in the private sector. It is reported that the government wants JCCs in more large companies, although in some cases the JCCs are said to be becoming more effective than the government would like.

The elected worker members of the JCCs vote by secret ballot for the eleven executive members of the General Committee of Bahraini Workers (GCBW), which was set up in 1983 to co-ordinate and oversee the joint councils. It cannot recruit members or collect membership fees and the Ministry of Labour must approve its internal rules.

Bahrain depends heavily on labour from other countries, particularly India, Pakistan and the Philippines. More than two-thirds of the workforce are expatriates. These workers are under-represented in the joint council system.

The GCBW can hear grievances from both Bahraini and foreign workers and can assist them in bringing these to court, or to the attention of the Ministry of Labour. However, the political climate makes this difficult. The official government policy is to try and replace the low-paid Asian expatriate workers with Bahraini nationals.

The government has not yet responded to a 1995 request from the GCBW for a change in the labour law to allow trade unions. The Ministry of Labour has always kept a close eye on the GCBW, and there is evidence that the government has tightened up its surveillance and is tapping the organisation's telephone.

During the year, the GCBW approached textile employers to discuss working conditions for women in the industry. The Ministry of Labour told the GCBW that it was not their function to do this and they must not do it again.

Some officials of the JCCs and the GCBW have been harassed, arrested and detained for several months without charge or trial, or had their passports taken away by the authorities because of their trade union activities. At the end of the year there were reports of a government clamp-down on the GCBW.

Arming dictators

The Honourable Lord Avebury asked Her Majesty's (British) Government "what information they have been given by the Government of Bahrain about the reasons for recruitment of foreigners into their police and armed forces, and the naturalisation of those foreigners and their families; whether they have checked to see whether any of the arms licensed for export from the United Kingdom to Bahrain are to be used by units in which these foreigners serve or may serve; and whether they expect to train any of the those units".

A British Government's spokesperson (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean) replied on 25 June saying, "As in other GCC states, a large percentage of Bahrain's workforce is expatriate. We understand that the Bahraini Government employs a number of foreign nationals in its police and armed forces. Quires about their recruitment and nationality status are a matter for the Bahraini authorities.

All export licences applications are carefully considered against a wide range of criteria. Equipment has been licensed for export to all units of Bahraini security forces, including the Bahrain Defence Force and the Bahrain National Guard, whose forces have received some training from the Ministry of Defence. We have not provided any police training in Bahrain".

of the year. Most were administratively detained under a state security law which permits the Minister of the Interior to detain individuals without charge or trial for up to three years. They included Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir al-Jamri and 'Abd al-Wahab Hussain 'Ali, who, along with six other prominent Shi'a Muslim religious and political leaders, were arrested in 1996 (see Amnesty International Report 1997). All eight were prisoners of conscience.

In February 'Ali Hassan Yusuf, a well-known Shi'a Muslim writer and poet, was arrested at his home in Jidd Hafis; he was a prisoner of conscience. His arrest and simultaneous dismissal from his job at the Ministry of Information were believed to be connected with the publication of a book of his poems entitled *Isharat* (symbols), which was reportedly banned by the authorities for indirectly criticizing the government. He was released in April without charge or trial.

In March Sayyid Jalal Sayyid 'Alawi Sayyid Sharaf was arrested at his home in al-Duraz, reportedly on suspicion of transmitting information about the internal situation in Bahrain to persons abroad. He was believed to be held incommunicado in the al-Qal'a compound in al-Manama, where he was reportedly tortured during interrogation. By the end of the year, Sayyid Jalal Sayyid 'Alawi Sayyid Sharaf was said to be still held without charge or trial in al-Muharraja; he was reportedly allowed family visits. A number of women were also arrested during the year in connection with the political unrest. In March four young women - Ahlam al-Sayyid Mahdi Hassan al-Sitri, Amal Ahmed Rabi', Maryam Ahmad Ali Bilway and Laila Abd al-Nabi Rabi' - were among a number of people arrested in the village of Sitra after participating in a non-violent demonstration held in commemoration of Issa Ahmad Qambar.. "Full text available from AI.

AI Report for 1998: Bahrain's situation worsens

EXTRACTS from 1998 Report: "Several hundred people were reportedly arrested during the year in connection with anti-government demonstrations.... Eight religious and political leaders, all prisoners of conscience, remained held without charge or trial throughout the year. At least 36 political prisoners were convicted and sentenced to prison terms by the State Security Court following unfair trials. Torture and ill-treatment of detainees continued to be reported and two detainees died in circumstances suggesting that torture or medical neglect may have contributed to their deaths. Three people sentenced to death in 1996 remained under sentence of death. Several Bahraini nationals were banned from turning to the country.

Widespread anti-government protests, which erupted in December 1994, continued during the year (see Amnesty International Reports 1995 to 1997). As in previous years, protesters demanded the reinstatement of the National Assembly, which was dissolved by the

Amir, Shaikh Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, in 1975; the restoration of the country's 1973 constitution; and the release of political prisoners. The authorities responded with mass arrests of protesters and other suspected government opponents, especially in the Shi'a Muslim districts of Jidd Hafis, Sitra and al-Sanabis. Several arson attacks targeted restaurants, hotels and shops resulting in the deaths of seven foreign nationals. Among them were four Indian nationals, including two children, who died in June when a shop was set ablaze in al-Manama.

In August the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities adopted a resolution and expressed its "deep concern about the alleged gross and systematic violations of human rights in Bahrain". It urged the government to comply with international human rights standards...

However, over a thousand detainees, including prisoners of conscience, were believed to remain held without charge or trial at the end