

# BAHRAIN

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## The intifada begins its fifth glorious year Light at the end of the tunnel

As the leaders of the six countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Abu Dhabi this month, the events in the region will undoubtedly dominate their discussions. The Iraqi crisis is by no means the only major challenge to the stability of the region although it is one of the most serious dilemmas of their embattled alliance.

The absence of a unified stand on this issue has been evident ever since the second Gulf war ended eight years ago. Today, the decision with regards to Iraq is not theirs. Furthermore, the dissenting voices from within the ranks of the GCC such as those of Qatar, the UAE and Oman have become too loud to be ignored. Material aid for the victims of sanction in Iraq has been openly delivered to Iraq via its sea port of Basra.

On the other hand the recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia, the largest of the six GCC states and Iran has contributed to the mild tone being used in conjunction with Iran, the largest country overlooking the Gulf. Since President Khatami came to power last year, the relations between the two sides of the Gulf have gone from strength to strength.

Today, Iraq and the dwindling oil resources are the two main common concerns of the GCC and Iran. The anti-Iranian rhetoric which had been in abundance in the eighties have almost evaporated, and mutual relations have improved significantly. The GCC summit may, however, scrutinize Iran for its continued dispute with the United Arab Emirates with regards to the three islands. But the border disputes among the member states of the GCC leave no room for singling out Iran.

One of the most intriguing issues that is likely to cloud the annual gathering of the six rulers is likely to be the internal situation in the each of them. The issue is a sensitive one especially in light of the international focus on the region and the inability of the rulers to introduce the long-awaited democratic changes demanded by large sectors of their societies. The Kuwaitis have a relatively long experience in semi-democratic tradition, and the trend is towards more openness and tolerance of diverse political views. The Saudis are the main player in the region and observers monitor any positive changes towards democratisation. So far, none have been forthcoming, but many observers believe that it is well overdue. They maintain that the Saudis cannot hold out any longer against the introduction of a written

code for some form of civil rights. For the past few years the Crown Prince, Abdulla bin Abdul Aziz, has allowed himself to be seen as a saviour for the values of a modern society, an image that is yet to be tested in practice. The traditional forces in Saudi Kingdom are objecting to any serious change whilst many Saudis are looking forward to a more open discourse with regards to the internal situation in the Kingdom. Whether Prince Abdulla will be the man of change or not depends on how soon he ascends to the throne, and whether he is strong enough to take up the challenge in the face of resolute forces unenthusiastic for change.

The wind has now blown from the tiny state of Qatar whose maverick behaviour over the past six years have surprised many. Its main satellite television station, known as Al-Jazeera, has exhibited openness to a degree unheard of in the region. It has attracted the wrath of most Arab governments for allowing criticism of their political systems. Opponents of Arab governments including Gulf regimes have appeared on the screens of the Al-Jazeera, a phenomenon that has provoked the rulers.

Now came the latest in a series of initiatives by the active ruler, who replaced his father and attempted to modernise the country's political system. On 16 November, he surprised everyone when he told a convened meeting of the Shura Council that he had decided to all for the establishment of a permanent constitution that allows for an elected parliament. He said that he had appointed a committee of thinkers to produce a prototype constitution and that it will legislate for free elections to a parliament in which both sexes would participate actively. The involvement of men and women in this process will make Qatar the first Gulf state to do so. In a country that has denied women the right to drive a car, such as Saudi Arabia, the reaction may not be favourable to the idea of democratisation. However many in the Gulf have welcomed this blatant move to the extent that the Chairman of Kuwait's Assembly, Mr. Ahmad Al-Sa'doun, expressed his joy over the Qatari initiative and told Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Amir of Qatar, that history would "write his name with golden letters".

The people of Bahrain who have been engaged in a four-years old constitutional uprising, have unreservedly welcomed the Qatari initiative and called on their government to follow suit. However, observers clearly saw the contrast between the Bahraini people who are fighting for the reinstatement of their constitution but are being denied it, and the Qatari people who are offered this substantial concession from the Government without shedding blood for it. They have already witnessed the elections of the Chamber of Commerce, and are planning to take part in the first local (municipality)

elections in the country.

Bahrain spearheaded local election in 1919, but the Al-Khalifa of Bahrain stopped such elections more than forty years ago and have refused to reinstate them again. The announcement of the Amir of Qatar that he had decided to draw up a Constitution and hold parliamentary elections contrasts sharply with the daily campaigns of arrests and intimidations being carried out by the mercenary forces employed by the prime minister of Bahrain.

On 17 November, a day after the Qatari announcement, the appointed Shura Council in Bahrain was summoned for publishing a statement calling for more imprisonments and harsher laws against the people of Bahrain declaring "people caught with illegal explosives in public places in Bahrain face life imprisonment in a new crackdown on terrorism". Cabinet Affairs and Information Minister Mohammed Al Mutawa presented amendments on the unconstitutional 1976 Penal Code, and brought with him the torturer (so-called Governor of the Capital) Abdulaziz bin Attaitallah Al Khalifa, to frighten the appointed and powerless members of the Shura Council. He said "harsher punishment would safeguard Bahrain and guarantee its development". Moreover one stooge member, Abdulrahman Abdulsalam, was quoted "Harsher punishment would allow people to become more creative".

As the people of Bahrain prepare themselves to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the popular uprising that erupted on 5 December 1994, the situation seems more grim than ever before. Thousands of people remain in detention with attacks on women and children, collective punishments, ransacking of houses have become routine, and harsh sentences by the notorious State Security Court are on the rise.

The Qatari initiative have done a great damage to the logic being employed by the Al-Khalifa of Bahrain that democracy and elections are alien to our societies and values. It will fuel stronger demands for the reinstatement of the Constitution especially as the most basic of human rights are routinely abused by the Al-Khalifa. It is an uphill struggle which will surely be won by the people. The fifth year of the popular uprising (intifada) could prove critical for a regime that has been criticised even by governments considered to be friendly with the Al-Khalifa. What the people of Bahrain are sure about is that they will not stand still and accept a situation of repression, flagrant human rights abuses, and denial of constitutional rights.

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## Nov 98: Three Women Abused ; New Plot Announced by the Regime;

17 Oct-2 Nov: A series of hunger strikes by detainees swept through Jaw prison, in protest against the inhuman treatment they endure in prison, and calling on the Bahrain regime to respect their human rights set both in national constitution and international conventions. The number of those on strike tripled in an unexpected escalation of events, undeterred by the effort of prison authorities to diffuse and quell the strikes by means of torture.

1 Nov: Mohammed Ali Al Ekri, 17, who was arrested a few times before, was again arrested by police. Amnesty International and the British government had intervened two years ago to secure his release after he was sentenced to 10 years jail for throwing a bottle on a police car. His father has been in jail for two and a half years now and the family are very worried about Mohammed's fate.

3 Nov: fire gutted out a flower shop in the Al Adlia area, in an act of vandalism by the regime. Fortunately, no one was injured.

2-4 Nov: Daih attacked; houses ransacked, sons and daughters snatched. Security forces launched repressive attacks against the residents of Daih, west of the Capital Manama, where at night they conducted raids against houses, destroying furniture, walls, and ceilings and arresting the sons and daughters of citizens. The house of Mahdi Al-Bazaz was under siege for three days, his son, Isa (16), was taken as hostage. Walls of the house were demolished and the contents ruined by the torturer Khalid Al-Wazzan and his contingent. The car of the family was also towed away. A cousin of the family Yousif Ahmad Al-Yatamah was also taken a hostage, and the security forces are looking for Ali Mahdi Al-Bazaz. The security forces attacked the family again and arrested, Layla Mahdi Al-Bazaz, 20, and took her as a hostage.

4 Nov: University girl, Hanan Salman Haider, 20, was arrested following a dawn raid on her parents house. Her family was ill-treated and the contents of the house were ruined. The torturer Adel Flaifel led the attack on this family. Hanan has two other brothers who are already in detention, Ibrahim and Haider.

The same contingent launched a second attack on the same house, arresting Salwa Hasan Haider, 30, and Mona Salman Haider, 29, a mother of three, one of them is few days old. The latter was later released in a state of shock and her body carried signs of torture.

The house of Saeed Al-Aradi was attacked and both his son Amir, 19, and daughter Maryam were detained. Dozens of other houses were raided and many have disappeared with the raiders. Amongst those known to have snatched away were: Jamil Al-Saaf, 24, Yousif Al-Saaf, 15, Saeed Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, 28, Haltham Ali Al-Sheikh, 18, Seyyed Hassan Seyyed Jaffer, 23, Mohammed Ali Al-Ekri, 15, Hussain Jaffer Haider, 35.

5 Nov: the security forces arrested Ali Al Jaziri, 23, and Ali Hassan, 18. Both from Daih. They were taken to Budaya torture centre where they have been subjected to brutal torture by the mercenary Faruq Al Mawda.

6 Nov: the security forces arrested Farid Abdul Nabi, 18, from Daih, and raided the house of Aqeel Al Jaziri in Daih then his house

in Nabih Saleh, destroying their contents and taking his two brothers, his sister and brother-in-law as hostages until he gives himself up.

7 Nov: An assault, led by Adel Flaifel was launched on Duraz area (some 15 miles west of Manama) leaving peoples' properties in total ruin. This assault is similar to the previous ones mounted against Daih and Nabih Saleh. The inhabitants were intimidated, arrested and their properties vandalised. Pillage and plunder have characterised the Duraz assault. The security forces conducted a house to house daylight theft in Duraz. Jewelry, cash and all valuable objects were stolen during the intrusions. The identity of some of the persons arrested during the assault include Seyyed Majeed Seyed Mahdi and his sons (Seyed Murtada, Seyed Hashim, Seyed Hassan, Seyed Hussain, Seyed Ebrahim, Seyed Ali, Seyed Fahdil. From Daih, Fahdil Sheikh Abas Al Rayis, 19 had also been arrested.

8 Nov: Scores of Saudis football fans were injured and arrested by the Bahraini security forces. The Saudis fans were celebrating following their soccer team's victory 1-0 over the United Arab Emirates last Sunday as part of the Gulf Cup Tournament. The security forces were armed with 'shotguns and truncheons', said an eyewitness. Journalists and camera crews were prevented from covering the security forces attack and were forced to stay in the stadium for an hour. Later, reports revealed that a Saudi citizen was killed during the assault conducted by the Bahraini security forces on the Saudis fans. The victim whose identity is still unknown died in Salmaniya Hospital after unsuccessful attempts to save his life.

Dubai TV Channel aired the news of the assault by the Bahraini security forces against the Saudis fans attending the 14th Gulf soccer tournament. Scores of Saudis were indiscriminately and brutally beaten. A Kuwaiti citizen was brutally assaulted by the security forces, for carrying a poster with the phrase "May our prisoners be released", expressing his hope for the release of Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq.

9 Nov: On the eve of a scheduled visit to Bahrain by George Robertson, the British Defence Secretary on Monday 9 November, security forces launched an assault on the Nabih Saleh Island (5 miles south of Manama) and arrested scores of the Island's inhabitants. Amongst the persons known to have been arrested during the assault are: Abbas Khamis, 26 (4th arrest), Mahdi Isa, 22 (3rd arrest), Ahmed Ashur, 22 (2nd arrest), Saeed Isa, 20, Abdul Amir Hassan Mansoor, 35 (married with children and this is his 2nd arrest), Mohammed Fardan, 28 (married with children and this is his 4th arrest). Nabih Saleh overnight siege was only lifted following the ruining of several houses, and intimidation of several families as part of the collective punishment policy adopted by the Al-Khalifa government in Bahrain.

10 Nov: The Bahraini ladies, Salwa Hasan Haider, 30 and Hanan Salman Haider, 19, were reportedly tortured in prison at the hands of the three notorious officers Khalid Al Wazan, Baqir Adnan Al-Weda'and Adil Flaifel. Reliable sources confirmed that, Flaifel had personally supervised Salwa's sessions of torture. Salwa was tied up and suspended by her hands and

legs then subjected to barbarous flogging and was beaten and kicked all over her body. Both Salwa and Hanan are being detained in Qala prison after being transferred from Al Khamis detention centre. Another lady, Mariam Al-Aradi, was released on 6 November after cruel and degrading torture.

Moreover, arrests continued to take place on a regular basis in Daih village. Of those known to have been arrested Dr. Isa Ibrahim Matar, 27, whose house was ruined by the savage forces.

10 Nov: All uprising areas in Bahrain turned lights off at 8.00pm. Starting from Dair in Muharraq, through Sanabis and Daih to Duraz in northwest of Bahrain, from Bani Jamra through Aali and Karzakkhan to Dar Kulaib, from Bilad al-Qadim, through Tobli, Jerdab to Nuwiedrat and Ma'amir, all Sitra residential areas, the people responded to switching the lights off on the 40th day commemoration of the martyr Mohammed Al-Sayyah, who died following his detention in a solitary cell filled with asbestos.

11 Nov: Two teenagers, Hussain Al Mulah, 16 and Isa Abdula Yousif, 18 had been transferred to the emergency hospital in Salmaneya. It is reported that Mr. Al Mulah had one of his hands amputated in hospital, and the other person is in critical conditions.

11 Nov: Massive campaign of assaults and arrests have characterised the past few days in Bahrain. The assaults happened just days before the commemoration of the martyr Mr. Al Sayyah on 10 November. Raids were first launched at Daih Village then covered the nearby areas and further to the south towards Sitra and Nabih Saleh. Scores of young people have been rounded up and shipped out to various torture centres.

The raids on Sitra and Nabih Saleh islands continued while more ruin was brought to peoples' properties and arrests of the islands' inhabitants have increased. One of the arrested is Abas Khamis Imran, 26, Nabih Saleh, who was brutally tortured and was threatened by the officer Adil Flaifel to assault his wife. Mr Khamis had his hands and legs both tied up and was kept suspended upside-down for 8 hours. Others who have been arrested from the same island are: Ahmed Ashur Ali, 20, Abas Yousif Mihsin, 18, Abdul Wahab Abdul Amir Mirza, 20, Jum'a Ali Uthman, 20, Hassan Ahmed Hassan, 20, Mahmud Ahmed Fardan, 28, Mahdi Isa Abdula, 22.

In Daih, more arrests were reported: Mohammed and Qasim Al Daihi are brothers aged 20 and 22 respectively were arrested during one of the security forces raids. The brothers' father is in detention for almost three years without charge.

Three arrested children from Sanad area are being subjected to savage torture in detention. The children are: Ali Jaffar, 15, Seyed Murtada Seyed Majid, 15, Hussain Mahfud, 16.

11 Nov: Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action, expressing concern over the arrest of the aforementioned women. It condemned their torture by the regime and said that they were beaten on the soles of the feet (Falaqa) and suspended by their limbs. It went on to say that the security forces "ransacked houses, destroyed or confiscated personal property and arrested a number of people". It continued "

## SSC Pass Life Sentences Against Citizens

some people are believed to have been detained as "hostages" for relatives sought by the authorities." It urged that "all detainees be granted immediate access to their families and legal counsel and that the reasons and legal basis for their arrest be immediately clarified."

A second Urgent Action by Amnesty International on 11 November expressed its fears of torture of the teenager Mohammed Ali Al Ikri, 17, who was re-arrested at his mother's home in Al Qadam village on 1 November 1998. Amnesty called for his immediate release and the assurance that he is being treated humanely.

14 Nov: Several citizens sentenced to life by an Al-Khalifa judge. The State Security Court convened on 14 November under the presidency of a member of the ruling Al-Khalifa family and sentenced several citizens under the arbitrary justice system that has been condemned by all international legal and human rights organisations. The Al-Khalifa judge issued arbitrary sentences resulting in the following: Case No. 217/1997

Mohammed Redha Al-Sayyed Ali, 27, Employee. Life sentence

Ali Darwish Ali Redha, 28, Engineer. Life sentence

Haji Khalil Darwish, 54, Businessman. Life sentence (in absentia)

Jamil Abdul Hussain Abd Ali, 35, Traditional Pharmacist, 15 years sentence

Mohammed Abd Ali Jasim Isa Yousif, 24, Teacher, 10 years sentence

Ali Obol Al-Qasim Abdulla, 26, Teacher, 10 years sentence

Yousif Habib Hussain, 29, Labourer, 10 years

Hussain Abo Al-Fadl Ahmad Al-Mosawi, 26, Electrician, 10 years (in absentia)

Ismail Khalil Darwish, 23, Fisherman. Acquitted.

Saeed Abdulla Majid Abdulla, 31, Electrician. Acquitted.

The State Security Court was condemned by both the UK Bar Human Rights Committee and the Parliamentary Human Rights Group on 28 October following the publication of a 75-page legal report proving -without a doubt- that this court is an illegal one in accordance to Bahrain's Constitution and in accordance with all international conventions.

The continuation of this court is an affront to civilisation and further evidence that the Al-Khalifa ruling family disregards all its publicly stated obligations before any respected international personality or body.

15 Nov: Leeda Ahmed Al-Oraibi, 23, was in bed when the dawn raiders stormed her family's house in Sanabis on 15 November at 5.45 am. Members of the family pleaded with the raiders to leave the girl alone until the morning and that they would take her to the specified police station. Non of the requests were listened to. Instead, the foreign-staffed security forces stormed all the bedrooms and snatched the young girl from her family. Leeda was taken away to the Al-Khamis Police Headquarters where several citizens had been tortured to death in the past 4 years.

When the family of Leeda approached Al-Khamis Police Station to enquire about their daughter, the controlling police officer said to

them "we do not have your daughter here".

20 Nov: Three women, Hanan Salman Haidar, 20, Salwa Hassan Haidar, 30 and Leeda Ahmad Al Oraibi, 23, were made to depict role-play acts and impersonate characters in public places in Rifa. The Women were forced after sessions of torture (included flogging, threats of assault and indecent treatment) to sign pre-fabricated confessions of unfounded allegations which would incriminate them.

The OMCT (World Organisation Against Torture) has issued an urgent Intervention regarding the arrests of the women and children in Daih village. The intervention called on the Bahraini regime to take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the adults and children aforementioned held in detention and order their immediate release. It called for a full and impartial investigation into the alleged arbitrary detentions and physical abuse.

21 November: Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah, member of the dissolved Bahraini parliament congratulated the people of Qatar following the announcement made of 16 Nov by the Amir of Qatar. The latter declared his intention to formulate a State Constitution and to introduce an elected parliament. Mr. Sabah warmly welcomed the move on behalf of the Bahraini people. He hoped that it would persuade the Bahraini regime of the need to introduce similar democratic reforms in the country.

22 Nov: The unconstitutional SSC has passed arbitrary sentences against four young Bahrainis, issued after summary trials held in camera in which the judiciary is presided by members of the Al Khalifa ruling family. The persons sentenced are: Sadiq Abdul Hussain Al Shu'la, 23, Jaffar Mohammed Jaffer Al Qatari, 22, Seyed Wasam Seyed Alawi Al-Mahroos, Mohammed Ali Al Aradi, 23. All four sentenced for 5 years jail.

The security forces continues it arbitrary arrests of Bahrainis in a gross violation of the national constitution and international conventions. Seyed Jaber Seyed Adnan Seyed Shubar, 33, Karbabad, was arrested lately. His brother Seyed Fahdil was sentenced for 10 years after unfair summary trial by the SSC. Also, it was reported that Jameel Sa'af and Ali Al Jaziri have been taken back to Al Khamis torture centre after brutal sessions of torture in Al Qal' prison.

23 Nov: The foreign-staffed security forces announced the "discovery" of a plot against the autocratic tribal regime. The announcement was designed in such a way to justify the discriminatory and hate-based policies against a wide section of Bahrain society. This time, the list included the name of a Lebanese as one of six people arrested "on suspicion of planning to carry out acts of sabotage and to try to smuggle arms and explosives into the country". The names picked up, this time, by the interior ministry for announcement were:

1. Suhail Mahdi Shehade, Lebanese
2. Ali Mahdi Ahmad Yousif
3. Mahmood Mohsin Mansoor Hussain
4. Yousif Hassan Yousif Folah
5. Abdul Amir Ahmad Saeed Al-Aradi
6. Hesham Ali Hasan Ahmad.

Two possible explanations for the inclusion of the Lebanese in this stage-managed play.

One, to link events in Bahrain with the Shia of Lebanon. Another objective would be to avenge the death of a person, suspected of being a member of the Bahraini intelligence service, in Lebanon last July.

Many of those arrested this month had been forced to sign confessions to save their female relative that had been taken hostages for extracting confessions.

## British Government on Bahrain

16 Nov: Lord Avebury, Vice-Chair of the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group submitted several questions to the British government concerning the situation in Bahrain. He asked Her Majesty's Government "following the recommendation by the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth office (Mr. Fatchett) that the authorities in Bahrain should open a dialogue with the Committee for Popular Petition, what action will take over the summons for questioning of former MP Ali Qasim Rabia and Sheikh Essa Abdulla Al Jawder, members of the CPP, for writing to the Amir about the proposed dialogue." Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean replied "When we receive that Ali Qasim Rabia and Sheikh Essa Abdulla Al Jawder have been summoned for questioning we shall consider what, if any, action should be taken."

Lord Avebury also asked Her Majesty's Government "whether they will seek to persuade the authorities in Bahrain to give serious consideration to the recommendation made in the report The Crisis of Human Rights in Bahrain: The rule of Law Under Threat, published by the Parliamentary Human Rights Group and the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales on 28th October." Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean replied "The recommendations are consistent with our human rights concerns we raise regularly with the Bahraini authorities."

Lord Avebury, submitted two further questions (16 November) to HM British government concerning the situation in Bahrain. Firstly, he asked Her Majesty's Government "what information they have received from the Bahraini Government, following their assurances that the death in custody of Mr. Nooh Khalil Al Nooh was being investigated and that the authorities would keep the British Embassy in Bahrain fully informed." Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean replied "Our Ambassador in Bahrain raises this matter regularly, most recently with the Interior Minister on 3 November who said that the investigation is continuing. The Ambassador will continue to raise the matter until the investigation is concluded."

Lord Avebury also asked Her Majesty's Government "whether they will make available to members of both houses of parliament, who go on overseas visits at the expense of their hosts, information in their possession about the antecedents of those hosts." Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean replied "Any member of either houses that intends to travel overseas at the expense of their hosts is welcome to get in touch with the respective government and ask for any unclassified information on their hosts that that department may hold." British government answers questions:

## State and Civil Society in Bahrain - Part 1

# From Fiefdom Rule to Modern Administration

### 1. Introduction:

The declaration of Bahrain's independence in 1971 was meant to have transformed the country from a British-protected Sheikdom into a modern "State of Bahrain". Bahrain had, by then, gone through several political phases that should have contributed to the achievement of a modern state.

Amongst the GCC countries, the State of Bahrain provides one of most contrasting cases, where the process of state formation interacted with critical issues pertaining to tribal political control, civil society and popular participation. Administrative reforms were introduced in

Bahrain in the 1920s, at the peak of British involvement in internal politics. These reforms were subordinated to tribal sovereignty only to create a conflicting political environment.

Economical growth following the discovery and export of oil in 1930s transformed both state and society. As early as 1938, demands for greater participation in public affairs stemmed from all sections of the society. However, these aspirations clashed with two stumbling blocks. Firstly, there was the British Belgrave's administration (1926-57) that imposed limits in order to maintain the supremacy of tribal class. Secondly, many leading members of the ruling family viewed the modernisation of administration as a threat to their status and privileges. This is despite the fact that Belgrave had allocated one-third of oil income to the ruler and reserved all centres of power to the ruling family. Many member of the Al-Khalifa family did not accept the outlawing of older fiefdom arrangements.

By relying on oil income, tribal rulers were able to counter political demands for greater popular participation in decision making. In dealing with the political events that surfaced in Bahrain, the state relied on tribal conception of power politics. Social forces inside Bahrain and the Gulf viewed the events that started in 1994 as a microcosm for the future of the Gulf region.

### 2. Fiefdom Rule

Bahrain had a troubled history. For about a hundred years prior to 1783, the local Bahraini population had been suffering from political instability caused by several factors. Bahrain was one of the richest places in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula region. It was then surrounded by increasingly impoverished mainland. For example, a Bahrain rich with agriculture and pearl trading contrasted the starvation in the mainland around 1722.

Bahrain riches attracted troubles for its inhabitants. Piracy and tribal invasions proliferated in the region and attackers sacked Bahrain several times. The sacking of Bahrain destabilised its political structure and paved the way for a major invasion in 1783 by a group of mainland tribes led by the present ruling Al-Khalifa family.

The relationship between the inhabitants of the Bahrain and the invading tribes was characterised by a "slave-master" pattern. Between 1783 and 1820, the invading tribes had fought against each other in their quest for bigger share of the riches.

By 1820, says Farah (1985), the British had been largely successful in their prolonged effort to impose a Pax Britannica over the whole of the Gulf. "Although acts of piracy still occurred, a relatively high level of law and order at sea had been established under British supervision".

In 1869, Britain intervened directly to appoint the Al-Khalifa ruler, Sheikh Isa bin Ali, and ended the inter-tribal feuding. In 1923, it was Britain, again, that intervened directly to remove Sheikh Isa bin Ali and replace him with his son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa, thus ending a 54-year rule by the Isa bin Ali. The period of Sheikh Isa bin Ali witnessed the growth of effective British control of Bahrain.

Farah (1985) explains that during this period "tribal traditions and usages contributed to the operation of government in Bahrain, but at the same time, dependence upon the personal element made the system very fragile. An evidence of that period is provided by Kembal "Since 1839, owing to the increased dissension, and subsequent hostilities between the members and relatives of the ruling family, the population, prosperity and commerce of the island have gradually declined. Numbers of the principal and most wealthy inhabitants, to avoid the effects of increased anarchy and confusion, fled upon the commencement of hostilities, to Kuwait on the Arabian, and Lingah and other places on the Persian Coast, where they have since temporarily located themselves, in order to watch the course of events, and return with the first signs of peace and established government, and subsequent security to life and property".

A distinguishing factor in Bahraini's politics is the way the ruling Al-Khalifa family conducted their affairs in Bahrain up until 1923. The regions of Bahrain were distributed amongst the leading members of the Al-Khalifa family. Each local sheikh would then impose taxes and would impose his type of control upon his territorial allocation. These territories, or "fiefs", had different styles of governance from each other, depending on the controlling sheikh.

The worst affected by this type of "fiefdom rule" were the then indigenous inhabitants, locally known as Bahranah. The Bahranah, who are Shia Arabs, were at the bottom of the social strata [see Al-Tajir (1987), Farah (1985), Khuri (1980)]. The Al-Khalifa local rulers stripped the land from the inhabitants and converted them into serfs, supplying free labour "sukhra" and imposing on them various types of arbitrary taxes, such as "rakabeyyah", or poll tax. Oppositions to this form of rule were dealt with swiftly. Having a guaranteed external protection from Britain, the rulers deployed groups of special squads, called "fedawayah", for enforcing their rules. The "fedawayah" were groups of Bedouin fighters brought in from the mainland.

This type of rule was ended in 1923 following an uprising in 1922 and several other disturbances. Britain intervened and replaced the ruler Sheikh Isa bin Ali, with his son Hamad. A British advisor, Sir Charles Belgrave was then appointed in 1926 to form and lead a modernised administrative structure. He was forced

out of Bahrain in 1957, following an uprising lasting between 1954-56.

### 3. Modern Administration

The exploration and discovery of oil between 1928-32 "signalled the beginning of a new order that will gradually replace, but not eradicate the older tribal order", says Khalaf (1998). Revenues from oil weakened the leading role played by the mercantile community, which had traditionally been influential in Bahrain.

The period between 1926-57 witnessed the changing of Bahrain from its "fiefdom" tribal rule into an administration led by the British Advisor, Sir Charles Belgrave. The latter attempted to establish a modern administration that is "subordinated" to tribal control, under British protection.

Despite tribal resistance to the establishment of a modern administration, the events of 1922-23 made the older political order unsustainable. The next step-change in Bahrain was the proclamation of independence in 1971.

Britain declared its intents to withdraw its forces east of the east of Suez in 1968, and this announcement raised several questions about Gulf security and about Bahrain sovereignty in the face of an Iranian claim. As the Iranian claim was being settled through the UN, the Al-Khalifa family had to face, for the first time, the possibility of sharing some of its power with the population. Demands for political representation had repeatedly been suppressed since 1938, but the vacuum to be created by the British withdrawal was a risky one requiring regional and local stability.

As the UN settled the issue of sovereignty in May 1970 in favour of an independent State of Bahrain, the political compass was directing both the ruler and the ruled towards a constitutional monarchy with civil and political rights guaranteed by a constitution. The Constitution of the State of Bahrain was ratified in 1973 and it paved the way for an elected National Assembly. The latter was dissolved in 1975, less than two years after its election.

Thenceforward, the Al-Khalifa consolidated the policy initiated by Belgrave. It is the policy of separating the society into ethnic and religious groups and dealing with each group in a different way. The Al-Khalifa also formalised the distribution of executive powers. All sovereign-related powers were reserved for the ruling family. These include defence, foreign affairs, internal security, security courts, and all other functions that define "who is in charge of the country". Strategic positions were also given to certain ethnic and religious groups with accurate political calculations usually carried out. One distinguishable classification adopted by the ruling family is the reservation of service-oriented positions, which are neither sovereignty-related nor strategically important, to the Shia/Bahamah group.

The State of Bahrain has, therefore, continued to be based on concentration of powers in the hands of the ruling family. Organs of power and means of control are kept out of other social groups. *(To be continued in next issue.)*