

BAHRAIN

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Delaying tactics adopted by the government

Autocrat premier rejects reform

The government of Bahrain has been encouraged to continue its violations following its success to delay the intended UN team visit by one year. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention was supposed to visit Bahrain in October. However, the Bahraini government attempted to suspend the visit on the pretext that the new Amir will need time to remedy the situation.

The visit of the UN team was re-negotiated to take place in October 2000. This explains why the government halted the release of detainees and why it had embarked on a new wave of atrocities. It is hoping to play with time and to continue repressing the nation.

The lack of any progress in the field of political reform in Bahrain since the present Amir came to power earlier on 6 March 1999 is being viewed as a catalyst for further unrest in the not too-far future. Instead of heeding the call for political reform including the reinstatement of the country's constitution, the Al Khalifa have embarked on a series of measures aiming to deflect the attention of the masses and deprive the opposition of the means to attack their policies. However, these measures are far from being democratic or in line of the main demands of the people.

The government is keen to be seen to be doing something without addressing the real grievances of the people. Over the past three years many measures were taken to ensure total control by the Al Khalifa over the country. Activities that were not in line with the policies of the prime minister have been banned, and the infamous decision last year to disband the elected body of the Bar Society was such a careless decision, that had to be revoked in the wake of international criticism. The prime minister attempted to exercise absolute control through the establishment of a system that is too bureaucratic. The country was first divided into four districts under the control of a member of the Al Khalifa family, two of whom had already been named. The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs was later formed, the aim of which is to centralise all religious activities in the hands of the minister of justice.

Last month 18 mukhtars (appointed persons), were appointed by the interior minister for monitoring the situation in specified localities. Real change was not forthcoming. Many people are asking: why?

Although it is not easy to provide a definitive answer, few assumptions are put forward. The first relates to the nature of the hereditary dictatorship of the Al Khalifa who oppose change and who allow no public debate of their actions. The second is that the government, on advice from an international network of advisors, is made to believe that situation would become quiet as a result of the use of force and collective punishment techniques. Thirdly, the regime has become so corrupt that none of its senior members would like to be questioned about their behaviour. All share similar crimes and everyone loathes the prospect of being scrutinised by ordinary citizens.

The recent steps taken to woo back foreign businesses and confidence can be understood within the context of the policies of misinformation and deception. The opposition has not so far dissuade foreign investors from coming to the country but they themselves have refrained from returning knowing how bad is the situation.

On the other hand, the Government of Bahrain does not seem to have confined their quarrel with their own people, but others have similar grudges against the government. The relations with Saudi Arabia is cautious, while Kuwait tries to maintain the anti-Saddam policies. Last month's meeting in Cairo saw the flare up of emotions among the delegations indicating the extent of rift in the region, and the Al Khalifa chose to stand by Kuwait, to the dismay of the United Arab Emirates. In return the Kuwaiti authorities arrested two Bahraini exiles in Kuwait and handed one of the to Bahrain for more torture and abuse.

The Bahrain's government is attempting to silence all opposition voices inside the country and outside. According to unofficial reports the Al Khalifa have allocated a large budget for propaganda and public relations activities outside Bahrain. So far, the propaganda machinery has failed

to dislodge the opposition from its international standing and it is likely that the confused situation may backfire against the prime minister and his gang.

It is also difficult to suggest why the new Amir has failed to honour his pledge that he had given to the people when he assumed power last March. It is not too hypothetical to suggest that a bloodless coup took place soon after the mourning period had ended. The prime minister today controls all major activities and strategies of the country. The Amir has accepted the role of a less powerful figure rather than face his uncle on every step he is required to take.

Today, the prime minister controls everything in the country whilst the Amir is busy shuttling in and out of the country leaving the internal situation totally in the hands of his uncle.

It is difficult to see a real change as long as Sheikh Khalifa retains his post as a premier. With the obvious lack of interest on the part of the friends of the Al Khalifa to exercise the role of mediation or that of pressing the government for reform, the waves of protests are likely to emerge once again. Today there is a young generation in the country with enormous experiences. Most have suffered at the hands of the torturers and subjected to all forms of humiliation and ill-treatment. Coupled with the institutionalised racist policies of the prime minister, the scene is set for further outbreaks of public anger.

The delaying tactics being adopted by the government to stop international condemnation in the form of either UN resolutions against human rights abuse or stands by international human rights organisations, may give the government a breathing space until the next move, but it will not end the internal strife. A responsible stand by friends of Al Khalifa should be based on serious calls for political reforms including the reinstatement of the country's constitution, and respect of human rights.

Tactical moves by the government must be rejected and serious reform of the political system must be undertaken. The people of Bahrain have suffered enough under emergency laws and it is time for them to be removed.

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Back to feudalism

The announcement of the interior ministry that it appointed 18 "mukhtars" individuals for monitoring the Capital came after all hops for reforms have been dashed. This move further proved to the nation that the outdated tribal mentality is still living outside this age. The 18 individual appointed by the interior ministry on 31 August are as follows:

1. Faisal Al Dousary - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Diplomatic Area, Beit Al Quran, Exhibition Avenue and Hoora;

2. Ali Al Khozai - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Government House, Manama Port, Ras Roman, Al Thawawdi and Al Awadhi;

3. Mansoor Rajab - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Al Fadhel, Al Hatab, Kamoo, Bab Al Bahrain and Busora North;

4. Hameed Al-Nooh - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Central Market, Nam, Suwaiya, Al Hussaini area;

5. Hassan Al Asfoor - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Seef area and Karbabad;

6. Hussan Al Bu Aiman - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Guest Palace, Shura Council, Al Wihda Club, Gadaibiya, Andalus Garden, Telegraph Area and Al Khedour Mosque;

7. Adel Al Safar - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Al Hadada, Sinkiki, a section of Al Hammam, Busora South, Al Mokharqa and Al Zararai;

8. Ali Mahmood - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Hotat Abul, Sunni Cemetery, Salmaniya Garden, Al Sijad and Salmaniya North;

9. Farouk Hussain - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Gaful, Water Garden, Borhama Ain Gasari and Al Salhiya;

10. Ali Habib - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Shaikh Hamad Palace, Ramada and Gulf hotels area and Gudaibiya South;

11. Khalid Al Mahmood - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Umm Al Hassam North, Adliya, Al Mahooz and Umm Shadum;

12. Mohammed Ammadi - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Salmaniya Eskan area, Pepsi industries, Salmaniya Medical Complex and North Sukaya;

13. Mohammed Al-Saad - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Zinj village and New Zinj;

14. Salim Al Mannai - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: South Sukaya, Abu Ghazal, a section of south Zinj, Ahli Club and area overlooking Tubli Bay;

15. Abdul Aziz Al Bassam - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Umm Al-Hassam, Umm Al-Hassam Eskan and Abu Asheera;

16. Ibrahim Dhahi - Responsible for

monitoring the following areas: Salman port, Industrial Area, Al Guraifa, Old Juffair and Nabih Saleh island.

17. Hussain Bukaman - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: Sanabis, Sanabis Eskan and Exhibition Centre area;

18. Mohammad Bukhammas - Responsible for monitoring the following areas: New Juffair, Al Fatih Mosque, Juffair Dome, Bahrain Museum and Bahrain Club;

According to a decree issued by the late Amir in June 1996, Bahrain was divided to four estates. The governor of each estate would nominate thirty appointed individuals (mukhtars) to monitor the area designated for them.

The decree stated five objectives for the monitoring scheme. Objective No. 3 is to guarantee "order and security of the area". Objective No 4 is to guarantee the "loyalty" of the people in these areas.

On 2 May 1997, a member of the ruling family, the torturer Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa, was appointed the Governor of the Capital. On 21 February 1998 another police officer and member of the ruling family, Isa bin Ahmed Mohammed Al-Khalifa, was appointed as the Governor of Muharraq. Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa, has now stated to local papers that the individuals who had been appointed by the ministry of interior as "mukhtars" would work closely with the security forces for maintaining law and order. He confirmed that the main role of these people would be to act as guards responsible for monitoring the situation.

By this announcement, the medieval tribal autocracy moved another backward step to reverse Bahrain's governance to the period before 1923.

Before 1923, the ruling Al-Khalifa family used to segregate the country into estates. Each estate used to be arbitrarily governed by a member of the Al-Khalifa family (sheikh). This sheikh used to appoint individuals for monitoring the names of people and for passing information about the community. Each sheikh used to have a group of terrorists called "fedawayah" which were used for imposing the arbitrary rule of the feudal sheikh. The "fedawayah" have also returned these days in the form of the imported mercenaries from the deserts of Syria and Arabia.

A misinformation campaign

Differences on the way to conduct a massive misinformation campaign resulted in the stripping of a deputy of information minister from his authority. Abdul Hassan Abu Hussain had fundamental differences with the Egyptian advisor (who controls the ministry of information) Seyed Abdul Adeem Al-Baboli. Al-Baboli has embarked on a campaign for turning all news about human rights upside down. In the past, the ministry kept silent about all matters concerning human rights. For the past three months, this policy was changed. All news-

papers are ordered to publish false statements attributed to human rights organisations. These false statements say that human rights organizations "are very happy about respect of human rights in Bahrain".

This campaign of misinformation followed the failure of the government for creating a fictitious organisation to glorify dictatorship. A London-based Iraqi individual was charged with issuing press releases under a fictitious name of a human rights organisation glorifying the dictators in Bahrain. Since the failure of this Iraqi individual, Al-Baboli took over those tasks and ordered the two national newspapers to publish fictitious statements that had never been uttered by any respected human rights organisation or leader.

Al-Ayyam demands money

Last month the information minister decided to dismiss one of his deputies, Mr Abdul Hassan Ibrahim Abu Hussain, following the rejection of the latter to accept the misinformation campaign led by the Egyptian advisor to the ministry, Seyed Abdul Adhim Al-Baboli. Mr. Abu Hussain (the only Shia deputy minister in the government) was responsible for convincing many of the Shia community to open their centres for mourning the late Amir who died on 6 March. He also sponsored the publication of statements and adverts on behalf of the Shia community centres in Al-Ayyam newspaper.

Now, and after the dismissal of Mr. Abu Hussain, Al-Ayyam newspaper contacted the Shia community centres and demanded that each pay BD 400 (\$1068) in return for the publication of adverts of mourning. The heads of community centres replied that those adverts were instigated and published by Mr. Abu Hussain as part of a gesture to calm down the situation and open-up a new page in Bahrain politics.

Nabil Al-Hamar who was made an advisor for the new Amir controls Al-Ayyam and his decision to reverse that of Mr. Abu Hussain can not be innocently explained. Mr. Al-Hamar announced on 11 September that he will launch a special web page for glorifying the Amir, the prime minister and crown prince. It is believed that he is intending to counter what the prime minister did when he ordered one of his stooges (Tawfiq Al-Hamad) to publish a book glorifying the prime minister only and ignoring the Amir and his sons.

The Economist Intelligence Unit said in its 2nd Quarter Report: "the Amir authority is being challenged by the PM". "The personal ties between the two leaders (Amir & PM) are poor." "A power struggle is likely to take place".

Religious discrimination

The US State Department issued the first annual report on religious discrimination throughout the world. It reported the following on Bahrain: "The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion;

however, while the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion, the Government does not tolerate political dissent from religious groups or leaders, and subjects both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to governmental control and monitoring. Most world religions are represented in the country, and their followers generally practice their faith privately without interference from the Government".

Playing with demography

Members of Saudi-based Dowsari tribe are being granted free Bahraini passports and many of them are being asked to record their residence addresses in Hawar islands, although they might not reside permanently in Bahrain.

In the meantime, it was reported that a group of Al-Bu-Ainain tribe has migrated to Abu Dhabi protesting at the way the government has imported tribesmen from the Syrian Desert and settled them near to Al Bu-Ainain tribe in Askar and Jaw villages, south of Bahrain. It is also reported that skirmishes and clashes between the Bahraini children and those of the imported people are on the increase in Rifaa, Jaw and Askar.

The journalist Ali Saleh raised the issue of the citizens who are denied from their rights for citizenship. He said in Akhtar Al-Khalij (6 September), that "we have to admit that we have a problem regarding the "bedoon", those people who have not been given passports".

It is worth noting that the government has started an ethnic cleansing policy as from this month to deny the children of these people education and healthcare. Moreover, parents of newly-born babies must pay BD100 (\$267) as a tax for birth. At the same time, the racist government is opening-up three large schools for the children of the mercenaries who had been imported from the deserts of Syria and Arabia.

Human rights abuses

Several detainees have been subjected to intensive torturing in the past weeks. Mahmood Al-Halwachi and Mohammed Khatem had both been transferred to solitary confinement following their protest against their ill-treatment. Similarly, Ali Al-Asfoor and Sheikh Sadiq Al-Durazi are being tortured for their request to have their cases looked into. Shakir Jasim Mazal, 32, from Da'ah, is in detention for more than three years without charges. His health condition had deteriorated and is frequently suffering from comma. The prison authorities refused all requests from the prisoners of conscience to release him.

6 September: Sheikh Ali Al-Sadadi was brought before a court. Al-Sadadi was arrested earlier in the year as part of the repressive campaign aimed at silencing the nation. In court, he was accused of delivering sermons calling for political reforms

and release of the then jailed Sheikh Al-Jamri. The session was adjourned until 3 January 2000. It is believed that the government will be rushing scores of citizens through the courts so that when the UN team visits Bahrain for investigating arbitrary detention, it could be said that the arbitrarily detained citizens are being tried.

6 September: Ramlah Mohammed Hassan Mohammed Jawad, 21, who had suffered detention two times in the past three years was summoned by the notorious torturer Abdul Salam Al-Ansari. The torturer interrogated the young woman and informed her that she will be repeatedly interrogated in the coming period. This method of torturing follows the attempt by the Ms. Hassan and other women to submit a letter to the Amir calling on him to release their husbands and relatives.

21 September: The detained pro-democracy leader, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain was transferred to the military hospital suffering from exhaustion and drop in blood pressure. The health condition of Mr. Hussain has continuously deteriorated in the past weeks.

Detainees are protesting at the way they are being treated after every visit. A new rule requires that they are stripped totally after each visit on the pretext of looking for possible leaked items. The detainees are refusing to meet their families for this reason and have been protesting for several weeks.

Collective punishment

A 4-year old son of Mr. Omran Hussain Omran (Sheikh Al-Jamri's neighbour) was playing with his 7-year old twin sisters on 12 September in front of their house.

The kids were throwing harmless items at each other, and one of these items hit a police jeep that happened to be passing-by.

In the middle of the night of 13th September, and while the family was sleeping the security forces attacked. They smashed the front gate of the house and then the main internal door of the house. They terrified the entire family and beat the eldest son Hussain (23 years) together with the 19-year son Redha in front of other members of the family. They ransacked the house and turned it upside down.

Then, the police turned to the 7-year old twin girls and the 4-year old toddler and started harassing. At the end of this ordeal, Hussain and Redha were handcuffed and taken to the Budaya Police Centre for further torturing.

The following morning, a relative went to the police station to enquire about what happened during the night only to find out that the entire family was to be dragged to the police station.

The mother is suffering from back problems and her husband is inside the jail, and now the entire family is subjected to torture and interrogation. They were then released on bail.

Abused in Kuwait

14 September: The Kuwaiti authorities handed the Bahraini citizen, Abbas Darwish, 32, to the torturers in Bahrain. Human rights activists, including members of parliament, campaigned against the handing-over. However, the Kuwaiti authorities have always sacrificed dispossessed Bahrainis for satisfying the dictators in Bahrain. Mr. Abbas Darwish, 32, (from Abu-Saiba'a) who is married to a Kuwaiti woman and had lived for many years in Kuwait was arrested by the Kuwaiti interior ministry when he visited the passport section to renew his papers.

This is not the first time the Kuwaitis have oppressed dispossessed Bahrainis. Last year several Bahraini were sentenced to five years imprisonment for possessing pamphlets calling for the restoration of parliament in Bahrain. Four years ago, the Kuwaitis detained a Bahraini (married to a Kuwaiti woman) and handed him to Bahraini authorities.

The Bahraini interior ministry then released Mr. Abbas Darwish, after failing to identify a single reason for the handing-over.

Other news

6 September: The interior ministry announced that the Amir had "pardoned" a member of the ruling family, Naser Majid Naser Al-Khalifa, who fled to Qatar with his helicopter three years ago. He had been sentenced by a military court -in absentia- for a long period of imprisonment. The ministry said that Mr. Al-Khalifa had returned to Bahrain.

6 September: A government source was quoted by Al-Jazeera Satellite TV saying that the fire, which gutted part of the Central Market in Manama, was caused by an "electric fault". The fire took four hours to extinguish.

9 September: Another large fire was reported in Karbabad Road in front of Seef Mall. There were burnt tyres on the main road and the heavy traffic in the area was affected.

10 September: MEED magazine said that the Bahrain Navy has given a contract worth 12m dollars to Luerssen Werft of Germany to re-fit a petrol boat for the Bahrain Navy. The government is spending lavishly on a military boat at a time when there is an acute budget deficit mounting 160 million dinar (\$427m) in 1999. Military news in the local media increased since 6 March. Frequently, there is news about some military activities as if Bahrain were preparing for a confrontation.

7 September: The military officer controlling the University of Bahrain has issued an order for raising extra taxes from those accepted to enter the University. All new entrants must pass a medical check-up (that lasts few minutes) and pay fees ranging between BD10-20 (\$\$27-54) before entering the university.

Bahrain Human Rights Review - Part 1

Introduction:

Bahrain is an archipelago of 36 islands roughly located in the middle-south of the Gulf, 22 km off the East Coast of Saudi Arabia and slightly further from the western coast of Qatar. A causeway (opened in 1986) links Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. Bahrain is the smallest amongst its neighbours with a total area of 695 sq. km (about 270 sq. miles) versus 674 sq. km in 1976. The slight increment in size is due to land reclamation.

In 1997 Bahrain's population grew 3.6 percent in the year to 620,378 on June 30, 1997 from 598,625 a year earlier (of these, 379,955 locals or 61%). Foreigners are mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippine, and make up almost 39 percent (240,423) of the population. Foreign workers, mainly low-paid and unskilled hold around 130,000 jobs in Bahrain out of a total workforce of 239,000.

"Business Middle East" newsletter (1-15 June 1998) reported that official figures from the Bahraini Labour Minister says unemployment is 1.87% (less than 2%). That's 5318 Bahrainis unemployed. The Labour Minister also said that 8349 persons found jobs in 1997. However, the newsletter said that foreign estimate put unemployment rate at 15-18%. Others reported that unemployment likely exceeds 30%. This is worsened by the influx of "free visa" workers, where estimates put them in excess of 30,000. Under the "free visa" programme "each foreign individual pays his sponsor around \$1,250 annually for his/her work and residence permit. This system is run and controlled by some senior bureaucrats and the elite who amass large fortune from it.

The Financial Times of 31 May 1983 says in its survey on Bahrain "Bahrain is a polyglot state, both religiously and racially. Leaving aside the temporary immigrants of the past 10 years, there are at least eight or nine communities on the island". The ethnic origins of today's Bahrain society are Sunni tribal origins, Sunni non-tribal, Sunni Howala who emigrated from the Persian coast, Sunni of African descent, Shia Arabs (Bahranah), and Shia of Persian origin (Ajam). There are also tiny Christian, Jewish and other groups.

Historical Background

Like most of the Gulf states, Bahrain was a British protectorate between 1820 and 1971. This period witnessed the consolidation of the tribal rule of the Al-Khalifa dynasty that invaded Bahrain from the mainland in 1783. A feudal regime ruled Bahrain until 1923, when Britain intervened to put an end to the serfdom imposed on the indigenous population following an uprising by the latter.

In 1926, Britain appointed Sir Charles Belegrove for creating a modern administration for Bahrain. Modern education had already started in 1919 and in 1926 Bahrain witnessed the first election for the municipality of the capital. In 1932 oil was discovered

leading to the formation of a working class and by 1938 the first modern pro-democracy movement emerged calling for establishment of a parliament and trade unions. The movement was crushed and three of the national leaders were exiled to India.

In 1954, another major uprising took place calling for a parliament and civil rights. The movement was crushed by the help of the British army in December 1956 and three of the national leaders were exiled to the British islands of St. Helena. In 1957 a state of emergency was declared and a special branch (secret police) was formed for countering the reform movements. In 1965, another uprising erupted led by the oil company workers calling for trade unions. In the following year, the special branch was restructured under a new British officer, Mr. Ian Henderson, who continues to play his role till today.

National demands for parliament and constitution were met in 1971 following the declaration of independence. A Constituent Assembly was half-elected in 1972 for approving a constitution and in 1973 a 30-member National Assembly was elected. In addition to the elected members, 14 minister became ex-officio members. More than half the cabinet are members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family.

In 1974, the government proposed a bill for "state security" empowering the interior minister to detain political activists for three years without charges or trial. The bill also denies the suspects from appeal if they were ever brought before a state security court.

All the elected members of parliament rejected this bill, but the government went ahead in October 1974 and issued it as a law, thus violating the constitution of the country. The debate over the illegality of the law continued until the summer of 1975, when the Amir (Head of State) decided to dissolve the parliament and suspend key articles of the constitution on 25 August 1975. Following the dissolution of parliament, the country went through one of its bleakest periods as the State Security Law replaced the state of emergency that had prevailed since 1957 (which was made more stringent in 1965 following the uprising of that year).

A pro-democracy movement started to develop with the main call for the reinstatement of parliament and restoration of the suspended articles of the constitution. The government began a process aimed at concentrating the powers in the hand of few persons from the ruling family and for this to be achieved the interior ministry was given free hand for persecuting the opposition.

The 1980s witnessed an escalation of repression and sectarianism. The government favoured certain sections of the society for political purposes. Bahrain is inhabited by Muslims of the two sects of Islam, Shia and Sunni. The ruling family adopts a discriminatory policy against the various sections of the society. Such a discriminatory

policy is based on both ethnic and religious backgrounds. All pro-democracy activists, whether Shia or Sunni are ill-treated and many had suffered from detention, torture, banning from work, banning from travel and/or exiling.

Calls for liberalisation

Following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991 a Gulf-wide pro-democracy movement re-surfaced calling for opening up traditional monarchies and greater popular participation in public life. In 1992 a broadly-based committee sponsored a petition calling on the Amir to restore parliament and reinstate the rule of constitutional law. The petition was signed by more than 300 professionals from all sections of Bahrain society. The ruler refused to listen to that call and instead announced the formation of an appointed consultative council of handpicked individuals.

In 1994, another petition was sponsored by a broadly-based group, the Committee for Popular Petition (CPP), that managed to gather some 25,000 signatures from the public in support for the return of parliamentary and constitutional life to Bahrain. The ruler refused to receive the petition until now. In December 1994, the security forces started a crackdown campaign to silence the popular call. This has led to the proliferation of protests and many people were detained. Some forty people have died in detention or during demonstrations and the country was plunged in the most serious disturbances the country has faced for many decades.

The ruling Al-Khalifa family adopted an iron-fist policy and went ahead in 1996 to tighten the security-related laws. Two decrees were issued in March 1996 transferring all acts related to civil protests to the State Security Court that sentence people after summary trials of some three quick sessions, each lasting about half an hour. Also, the two government-controlled newspapers published editorials carrying threats of "wiping out villages" if the protests continued.

On 6 May 1996, one house was blown-up in Sanabis with detonators that are only available to the military forces. A father (Salman Al-Taitoon, 28 years old), a mother (Fadela Al-Mutghawwi, 23) and their son (Ali, 3) were killed in this act.

Moreover, the security forces were doubled by importing a visible number of people from the Syrian deserts (Deir al-Zoor area). The authorities initiated a programme for changing the demography of the country through importing Bedouins from Syria and other places. These were granted full citizenship and recruited in the defence and security forces. Moreover, three main schools will be opened in September 1999, each equipped to host 4500 pupils in Safra, Zalaq, and Hamad Town, the three main areas where the Syrian Bedouins have been housed.

(To Be Continued)