

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrain-Qatar Dispute and the Failure of GCC Politics

The next few months will be crucial to the future of the Gulf security alliance that has operated over the past twenty years as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). One of the most difficult dilemmas is now unfolding as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) begins its deliberations on the Bahrain-Qatar border dispute.

The outcome of this court case is likely to have reverberations throughout the Gulf. This may still be few months away but the region has embraced itself for a major rift in relations among the Gulf states regardless of the outcome.

The two countries have had stormy relations for decades. In fact they have only recently exchanged ambassadors. This goes back to the time when the AlKhalifa moved to Qatar in the eighteenth century.

For them the Al Thani (the present ruling clan in Qatar) are not yet the landlords of Qatar. Over the decades the relations remained sour, with the tensions often expressed in terms of border problems.

Although the Al Khalifa claim sovereignty over a the small village of Zebara in Northwestern Qatar, the claim was never taken seriously. They themselves have never taken any steps to claim it back knowing the absurdity of their claim.

What was at stake was the ownership of the Hawar islands. The British, who were in charge of protection of the area prior to 1971 had arbitrated in the early 20th century and decreed that the islands were part of Bahraini territory, but the Qataris have never accepted this.

The dispute over ownership has remained a sour reminder of the futility of the relations among the small Gulf sheikhdoms, whose borders have never been demarcated in a proper way.

Almost all Gulf states have border disputes of one kind or another, and have failed to achieve a comprehensive settlement of these disputes. The most outrageous manifestation of the dangers of these disagreements was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait ten years ago.

Although the borders between the two neighbouring states have been defined by

the United Nations after the second Gulf war, it is expected that Iraq will not settle for them and thus the reasons for its invasion may still lead to further hostilities.

Last month when Iran started exploring the Al Dorra oilfield in a disputed area between Kuwait and Iran the outcry that followed led to an immediate halt to the exploration, a step that was received well by the Arab side.

However, such gestures cannot always be guaranteed in a region notorious for its border disagreements.

The United Arab Emirates has its own border dispute with Iran over the three small islands in the Gulf. The islands were occupied by Iran in 1971 within an understanding involving Britain and Saudi Arabia. Now the UAE is calling on Iran to agree to a jurisdiction by the ICJ on these islands.

Thus its position is in line with that of Qatar and does not agree with Bahrain which has opposed taking the case to the Hague.

At the same time the Saudis have always preferred "brotherly solution" in line with that of Bahrain, but they have also been successful, to a certain extent, in settling their borders with Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Their sea borders with Kuwait are still outstanding, so are their borders with Yemen. The Bahrain-Qatar dispute is thus becoming a pan-Gulf problem with pros and cons to all the parties involved.

The problem came to the surface in 1986 following an armed intervention by Qatar against some thirty foreign workers building a marine outpost on a sea reef known as Fasht Al Dibel within the Bahraini sea borders. From then on, the Saudis tried in vain to keep emotions at bay but without success. At the height of the crisis of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the problem was presented to the GCC summit in Doha, but a Saudi intervention succeeded to contain the situation. A memorandum was reached by which the two parties agreed to give the Saudi mediation a chance after which the case could go to international jurisdiction.

Over the past ten years the two parties

tried to reach an amicable solution but to no avail. It is clear that Bahrain was not ready to give away this territory which is believed to contain enormous gas reserves. At the same time the Qataris were not ready to give up what they see as their land.

When the Qataris took the case to the Hague in mid-nineties, the Bahrainis tried to block their move by arguing that the ICJ had no jurisdiction over the case. The ICJ ruled that the case was within its jurisdiction. A time was thus set for final proceedings at the end of May 2000.

Meanwhile the new ruler of Bahrain felt he could bid for time and undertook a charm offensive towards Qatar. The Amir of Qatar responded by visiting Manama at the end of last year. The outcome of the visit was the forming of a high-powered joint committee comprising the two Crown Princes of the two countries.

The Qataris have all along maintained that they would only withdraw if a "brotherly" solution was reached. As the time of the court proceedings approached the Bahraini government wanted to express extreme anger by announcing the freezing of the activities of the committee, to the annoyance of other GCC states.

There was a frenzy of activity to contain the situation. The result was a sudden visit by the Amir of Qatar to Bahrain on 24 May. Although no breakthrough was achieved the two sides agreed to freeze the committee until the ICJ has reached its verdict. The expectation is that this verdict will not please either side.

The Bahraini opposition has called both sides for restraint. Since the formation of modern administrations in the Gulf, the Hawar islands have always been under Bahraini jurisdiction.

The government of Bahrain has made repression against the people its priority and ignored other issues. It adopted an arrogant attitude in line with its lack of political soundness inside Bahrain.

While Bahrainis hope the ICJ will rule in their favour, they also believe that their relations with the people of Qatar are more important than anything else.

Sheikh Al-Jamri leaving hospital

The health of Sheikh Al-Jamri deteriorated critically on 3 May and he had to be transferred to the intensive care unit at the International Hospital of Bahrain. Sheikh Al-Jamri has been under house arrest since his release last July with security and paramilitary personnel increasing their siege every day. No one is allowed to visit him or enter his house other than his wife, sons and daughters.

Sheikh Al-Jamri remained in critical condition requiring a heart operation. The opposition lays the blame for deterioration of his health and his continued suffering (even when he is at bed in hospital) at the government of Bahrain that has denied him all his rights.

* Sheikh al-Jamri: The open heart surgery was successfully carried out on 11 May at the military hospital in Bahrain. Four by-passes were needed and for rest of the day Sheikh Al-Jamri is expected to be unconscious.

Sheikh Al-Jamri left hospital on Friday 19 May and was placed again under siege. The security forces surrounded his place of residence in Bani Jamra and prevented people from visiting him. The Amir visited Sheikh Al-Jamri on 14 May and the visit was widely reported in local media. The next day, 15 May, the prime minister visited Sheikh Al-Jamri, but the media did not mention anything. The continuation of siege on the house of Sheikh Al-Jamri is not encouraging and gives an indication of ill-intention.

* May 14 (Reuters) - A prominent Bahraini Shi'ite Moslem opposition leader, Sheikh Abdul-Amir al-Jamri, is recovering in hospital after undergoing heart surgery, his family said on Sunday.

"An Irish doctor supervised his surgery on Thursday. He has now been moved from the intensive care unit to another ward and his health is improving," his son Sadiq told Reuters.

The official Gulf News Agency said Bahrain's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa visited Sheikh Jamri on Sunday after the successful surgery.

Bahrain-Qatar Dispute

War of words was re-ignited on 19 May between Bahrain and Qatar following the decision of the foreign ministry to suspend talks on border dispute. A foreign ministry statement said Bahrain would suspend talks at a committee, headed by the two states' crown princes, which was formed to help resolve the dispute over Hawar islands.

On 20 May, an unknown Bahraini official stated to Asharq Al-Awsat that Bahrain is "considering withdrawing its membership from the GCC". The unnamed official attacked the way the GCC responded

to the dispute between Bahrain and Qatar. Local media, including TV, launched a series of attacks on Qatar leaving citizens bemused as the governments tones continue to swing between words of "love and hate" with Qatar. The International Court of Justice in the Hague is due to start its sessions on the dispute on 29 May.

* DOHA, May 20 (Reuters) - Qatari officials said on Saturday the Gulf Arab state would continue to seek the help of the International Court of Justice to resolve a territorial dispute with Bahrain after bilateral talks broke down.

"We don't know at this moment whether we will react to the Bahraini statement, but we continue to seek the world court's arbitration to settle the islands' dispute," an official said.

Bahrain said on Friday it was suspending talks with neighbouring Qatar on the long-standing dispute over the Hawar islands in the Gulf because Doha failed to respond to its proposals to resolve the matter.

A foreign ministry statement said Manama would suspend talks at a committee headed by the two states' crown princes which was formed to try to resolve the dispute over the small but potentially oil and gas-rich islands in the Gulf.

"Bahrain made serious attempts to reach a brotherly solution to all matters of the boundary dispute, through the work of the high committee," the statement said.

"Bahrain submitted suggestions, but surprisingly, has so far not received a positive response," it said without giving details of the proposals.

Qatar took the case to the International Court of Justice in the Hague in 1991, angering Bahrain which favoured regional mediation. The court is expected to start hearings this month on the dispute over the islands, controlled by Bahrain since the 1930s but claimed by Qatar.

AGREEMENT TO IMPROVE TIES

The two Gulf Arab states recently agreed to improve ties by exchanging ambassadors, easing travel restrictions and studying construction of a causeway over a channel between them.

They went to the brink of war on the dispute in 1986 which was averted by the intervention of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have since made several attempts to resolve the dispute.

Bahrain and Qatar had agreed to withdraw the case from the ICJ if they reached a settlement before the tribunal began hearings on May 29.

"The Bahraini side wants the hearing postponed indefinitely, which Qatar does not want," a Qatari official said.

"This may have irked our brethren in Bahrain, but Qatar cannot help unless regional or bilateral negotiations move ahead," he told Reuters.

Diplomats said Qatar had always

wanted the case to be decided through arbitration.

"It has been their position all along to seek arbitration, rather than politically-motivated regional mediation," a Western diplomat said.

"Efforts to settle the dispute bilaterally were welcome, but the suspension of talks might revive the chill in their relations and hamper their growing economic ties," he said.

Qatar's Arabic language al-Raya daily said in an editorial that Bahrain acted hastily in suspending talks.

"We believe that this decision was a hasty one which should not have been taken at a time of joy over the rapprochement between the brotherly nations," it said.

Jailed ladies ill-treated

A member of the Al-Khalifa family (presiding over the State Security Court) sentenced three Bahraini ladies to 1-year imprisonment on 13 May. The three ladies are:

1. Leeda Ahmed Isa Al-Oreibi, 27.
2. Hanan Salman Ahmed Haider, 21.
3. Salwa Hasan Ahmed Haider, 35.

The court was held in the militarised village of Jaw near the 4 prisons that have been constructed by the ruling family for jailing Bahrainis who demand their rights. The three ladies had been arrested in 1998 and had suffered ill-treatment and torture. They were then released under mounting local and international pressures. On 13 May, the three women were led back to prison to serve the sentences issued against them.

News from inside the detention centre in Isa Town said that the three ladies were being ill-treated and subjected to various forms of torture.

A policewoman by the name Moza Sultan is in-charge of the ill-treatment inflicted on the three women. During a family visit, the ladies looked exhausted while the policewoman, Moza Sultan, was shouting at them forcing them to speak loudly so that she can hear and understand what is being said between the imprisoned ladies and their families.

The International Secretariat of OMCT issued an urgent action on 18 May stating that it is "gravely concerned for the physical and psychological integrity of Leeda Ahmed Isa Al-Oreibi, 27, Hanan Salman Ahmed Haider, 21 and Salwa Hasan Ahmed Haider, 35, who were sentenced to one year imprisonment on May 13th 2000."

OMCT urged the government of Bahrain to "take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the above-mentioned persons and order their immediate release;

Guarantee an immediate investigation into the allegations of torture and ill treatment,

Identify those responsible, bring them

before a civil competent and impartial tribunal and apply the penal, civil and/or administrative sanctions provided by law;

Put an immediate end to the use of arbitrary detention of people by the police and abrogate 1974 State Security Law and all national laws which are not in compliance with international human rights standards;

Guarantee the respect of human rights and the fundamental freedoms throughout the country in accordance with national laws and international human rights standards."

Daih area witnessed an upsurge of protest activities following the unfair sentencing and jailing of three ladies. Tyres were burnt and shops closed on 14 May. More protests were reported on the following days and lights were switched-off to indicate the extent of anger amongst the people. On 16 May, columns of fire were reported in Daih and Sanabis areas as protest continued.

Government urged to end abuse

The International Secretariat of OMCT issued more urgent actions on 23 May. OMCT said "Mohammed Hassan Mohammed Jawad, 52 years old, was detained last year. News from inside the jail confirmed that Mr. Jawad had been transferred to solitary confinement where he has been held for more than 50 days. OMCT is gravely concerned for his physical and psychological integrity."

The International Secretariat was also informed that the condition of Najji Ahmed Salman, an 18-year old boy from Kawarah, has deteriorated. He was detained on 5 January 1997 and was placed in administrative detention (in the Dry-Dock prison camp). He was transferred to Salmanya Hospital on 31 March 2000 suffering due to the torture he had undergone. Najji was arrested at the age of 15.

OMCT urged the government to put an immediate end to the use of arbitrary detention of people by the police and abrogate 1974 State Security Law and all national laws which are not in compliance with international human rights standards; and to guarantee the respect of human rights and the fundamental freedoms throughout the country in accordance with national laws and international human rights standards.

On 8 May, the security forces mounted another attack against the residents of Daih and arrested Sadiq Hassan Abdul Wahab, 16, who is now being tortured in Al-Khamis police station. Two weeks earlier, the security forces had attacked the nearby area of Sanabis and arrested Mirza Salman Ali, 22, and Yasir Abdulla Khamis, 22. Both were ill-treated and tortured for one day before they were release.

On 9 March, the security forces mounted several dawn raids against the

residents of Jed-Ali and arrested the following persons: Ali Hassan, 16, Abdulla Saleem, 22, his brother Saleh Saleem, 16, Redha Al-Oreibi, 18, Yonis Al-Adhim, 20, Mostafa Al-Mukhtar, 23 and several other youths

Forcible deportation

A Bahraini, Hani Abdulla Saleh Al-Banaa, 29, from Jedhafs, returned to Bahrain from Qatar on 11 May only to be detained in the airport, intimidated and then forcibly deported back to Qatar. The government of Bahrain is the only "national" government in the world that forcibly deports the natives of the country while at the same it imports mercenaries from abroad and grants citizenship.

Tortured boy in hospital

A 16-year old boy is in critical condition in Salmanya Hospital (Ward No. 44) since the 5th of May. Jassim Hassan Al-Nakkal, 16, was walking in Sitra when a group of security personnel surrounded him and savagely kicked and punched him until he fell down.

By-passers took him to hospital after the departure of the torturers. The interior ministry has been adopting this method of intimidation against the citizens in the past months. None of the torturers has ever been held accountable for such crimes that are regularly conducted with full authority from senior commands in the interior ministry.

Human rights abuses

The State Security Court, presided by a member of the Al-Khalifa family, sentenced another batch of citizens on 3 May. The sentencing took few minutes in a third session for a group of people who had been arrested in November 1998 and who had suffered extensive torturing. The unfair sentences were as follows:

1. Ali Mahdi, 22 years old, 7 years imprisonment, and a fine of BD 500 (\$1350)
2. Aqil Al Jaziri, 27, in absentia, 7 years imprisonment and a fine of BD 500 (\$1350).
3. Saeed Al Sheikh, 33, 5 years imprisonment and a fine of BD 500 (\$1350).
4. Hesham Ali Hasan 18, 2 years imprisonment and a fine of BD 200 (\$540).

The court could not fix sentences against Hussein Haider, 35, Sayed Jaber Adnan Shuber, 40 (who had already been sentenced in 1999 for 6 months accused of distributing pamphlets), Yousif Folath, 20, Abdul Amir Al Aradi, 20, Mahmood Muhsin, 22, and the Lebanese person Sohail Chehade, 27. The poor Lebanese was initially labelled the "leader of a terrorist group" in 1998 and the government carried several racist-driven stories in 1998 accusing him and the group of "major crimes".

On 2 May, the security forces attacked

an mosque located in western Bilad al-Qadim and destroyed its contents. This atrocious act is part of the official policy aimed at intimidating the citizens.

On 6 May, the unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced two citizens. Abbas Khamis Omran, 27, and Mahdi Isa were both sentenced to one-year imprisonment and fines of BD 200 (\$540 each). The two had been in detention since November 1998.

On 6 May, the security forces attacked Al-Mussalla and detained Mohammed Saeed Jassim, 21, Jamil Ahmed Hassan Al-Bonni, 21, and his brother Nabil, 19. A similar attack on Iskan-Jedhafs on 6 May resulted in the detention of Sadiq Jaffer Al-Sheikh, 17.

On 4 May the security forces attacked the house of Haji Hassan Rashid in Karzakkan, terrorised and ill-treated all members of the family. The foreign-staffed security forces rampaged through all the rooms of the house at 3.30 am without any respect for human rights.

The mercenaries later claimed that they had been searching for a group of youths who carried posters of the martyr Fadil Abbas Marhhon. A unit belonging to the Bahrain Defence Force (who have a base nearby) killed the Mr. Marhoon on 6 May 1996. Non of the killers of citizens had ever been brought to justice.

Further abuses

The security forces attacked Nabih Saleh island on 13 April and arrested Abdul Zahra Isa Mohammed, 22, and Qasim Hassan Abdulla, 16. Earlier, the security forces had attacked Sitra-Sfalah and arrested Haji Ibrahim Tawwash and on the next day they re-attacked his house and arrested his son Mahdi Ibrahim Tawwash, 24. The latter remained in detention.

In Duraz, the security forces arrested Seyyed Hussain Majid Fadhil, Nadheer Hassan, 20, Seyyed Hassan Saeed. Only the latter was released after suffering exhaustion from the torture he had been subjected to. The security forces re-attacked Duraz on 14 April and arrested Mahmood Thabit, 17, Mahmood Jamil, 17.

On the same day, the security forces attacked Massallah and arrested Ali Mirza, 20, Hani Mirza, 19, Seyyed Fadhil Al-Massali, 16, Makki Ahmed Hassan, 16, and Nabil Ahmed Hassan, 17. All Massallah's persons were tortured in Al-Khamis police station and released after several days.

A similar attack on Iskan-Jedhafs resulted in the arrest of the 12-year child Ahmed Makki. The child was tortured for in Al-Khamis police station and then released after 2 days.

The case of seven citizens from Shakhora confirm the arbitrariness of the interior ministry and the extent of its violation of human rights. Ali Mulla Mohammed Al-Madhi, Osama Saeed, Abdul Jalil Mohammed Kadhim, Aqil Ali, Seyyed

Mohammed Jaffer, Abbas Salman, Seyyed Yasir Marhoon, have spent more than two years in administrative detention.

They were brought before the State Security Court 14 times. During these fourteen times, the interior ministry accused them with three different charges/cases. The court acquitted them on all charges during all the sessions. However, the interior ministry refused to release them.

Government's action criticised

On 9 May, the Bahraini journalist Hafedh Al-Sheikh, wrote an article in Al-Quds Al-Arabi condemning the decision of the government to establish a society for journalists that will have no independence and will be used for serving governmental PR purposes. Mr. Al-Sheikh, in a length article, condemned the intervention of the government, especially the British officer Ian Henderson, that is aimed at controlling the media and ensuring that all journalists tow the government's line.

Hafedh Al-sheikh was then banned from writing in the press inside Bahrain. He wrote another article in Al-Shaerq of Qatar exposing the decision taken against him and as a result of the exposure he was allowed to resume writing.

Lords Ahmed & Janner

The government has invited both Lord Nazir Ahmed and Lord Graville Janner (members of the British House of Lords) to visit Bahrain during this month of May. It is believed that the visit is part of the PR campaign conducted by the ruling family to whitewash its stained image abroad.

PM Corruption

The increasing corruption of the prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa is creating frustration among Bahraini business community. Business people and the big companies in the country are implicitly forced to pay 12-15% commission to the prime minister if they ever hoped to win any of the projects controlled by the State. The prime minister has several people who act on his behalf and these convey the message to contractors and companies.

The top hotels in the country are suffering because all official delegates are accommodated in the "Regency" or the "Meridian" hotels, both owned by the prime minister. Moreover, work is in progress for constructing "Bahrain Shopping Mall", also owned by the prime minister. The land was appropriated and the prime minister ordered the housing ministry to construct the surrounds of the complex at a cost of BD 300,000 (\$800,000).

The corruption is going deeper everyday. Most ministries are forced to purchase travel tickets from Al-Fateh Travel Agency, which is owned by the son of the prime

minister, Ali (who is also a transport minister). The son is imitating his father and has imposed a commission of 20% on a computer company contracted for the transport ministry for some IT services.

Security forces detain children

The security forces committed further atrocities. On 24 April, at 2.00 am after mid-night a large group of security forces attacked four houses in Duraz and detained children aged between 14 and 17 years old. The following person were snatched from their parents' houses: Nidhal Ismail Mahdi, 15, Ammar Ali Mansoor Al-Shehabi, 15, Isa Mahdi Abdul Nabi, 17 and Sadiq Abdull Qassim, 14. The 14-year child is the brother of Hamid Qasim who was killed by the security forces in 1995.

The 14-year Sadiq Abdulla Qassim was detained in a manner that characterised the nature of the forces that had been imported by the Al-Khaifa family for the sole purpose of repressing and torturing Bahrainis. When these forces attacked the child's parent's house he had been suffering from a broken leg for some time.

The child was treated in hospital with gypsum cast on his leg. He has been using crutches as an aid for walking. Later on, the father of the child was summoned for interrogation and the father came to know that his son was accused of writing pro-democracy slogans on the wall.

The father protested that his son could not walk without assistance, and how could he paint slogans on the walls of Duraz. The father also requested the torturers to take the crutches to his son as per the medical advice.

On 30 April, at 8.00 am, the four children were dragged by the security forces to Duraz and were forced to paint slogans while being filmed by them. Later on all the four children were returned for further ill-treatment. All four are detained by the Criminal Intelligence Directorate (CID).

One of the citizens who were administratively detained and later released exposed the government's lies. The citizen wrote to Ali Saleh, the columnist who writes in Akhbar Al-Khalij (the letter was published on 30 April). The citizen said that although the government claimed that all those released were re-admitted to their previous employment, he had been refused to go back to his previous job and that where ever he went he was told that the interior ministry rejects his employment.

Activities at the UN

The Al-Khalifa government was denounced last month in Geneva by non-governmental organisations and UN experts. Both the UN and Swiss representatives called on the Bahraini government to allow the UN Rapporteur on Torture to visit Bahrain. Two requests for inspection visits (one by the UN Rapporteur on Tor-

ture and the other from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention) have been resisted by the Al-Khalifa government.

Human right activists in Geneva organised a seminar on Bahrain inside the UN compounds on 25 April. The documentary film produced by Channel 4 on the role played by the British officer Ian Henderson in repressing Bahrainis became the centre-point of discussion held in one of the halls as part of NGOs activities during the 56th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Four international human rights organisation, FIDH, OMCT, Interfaith international and Nord-Sud sponsored the show. It was attended by scores of delegates and Dr. Charles Grave of Interfaith International chaired the meeting. At the end of the show a debate was opened where both Dr. Grave Mr. Abdul-Nabi Al-Ekry of CDHRB, answered the questions raised by the audience.

Showering honours on British officers

Several names were honoured (on 29 March 2000) by the Al-Khalifa including (names are re-translated from Arabic and hence may have different spelling):

1. Ian Henderson,
2. Raymond Michael Mather Lou,
3. N. C. G. Raffle,
4. J. Stone,
5. Fernon Barry Wamsley,
6. A. B. McInt (or MacKent),
7. Donald Joseph Bryan,
8. Samuel B. Ishaq,
9. James Windsor,
10. David B. R. Darby.

The honouring of these intelligence and interior ministry officers by the Al-Khalifa shows that they are intent on continuing to repress the citizens of Bahrain.

More than 50 other security officers honoured by the Amir for their inhuman services. They included:

- Ibrahim Mohammed Al-Khalifa
- Rashid Khalifa Al-Khalifa
- Khalid Mohammed Al-Khalifa
- Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa
- Isa Ahmed Al-Khalifa
- Farooq Salman Al-Maawdah
- Abdulla Isa Jabr Al-Mussalam
- Javid Latif Kalon
- Abdulla Salman Al-Maawdah
- Isa Mohammed Al-Dowsery
- Adel Jasim Mohammed Flaifel
- Soud Haji Abdulla
- Salim Khalifa saad Moftah
- Abdul Rahman Saqr Al-Khalifa
- Mohammed Hamad Al-Maawdeh
- Ibrahim Habib Al-Ghaith
- Ali Abdulla Al-Khalifa
- Naji Fahad Al-Hashel
- Sultan Ali Al-Suleiti
- Abdulla Seif Al-Nuaimi
- Mahmood Hussain Al-Akkori
- Abdulla Abdul Latif Al-Sadeh