

Strains in U.S.-Saudi Arabia ties

18-14 By Kesava Menon *Arif Kame*

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), OCT. 31. A warning from Saudi Arabia that it could ask all their citizens to quit the United States if they continued to be harassed, has come as the latest sign of strain in the relations between Riyadh and Washington.

The Government-controlled Saudi press has been relentless in its criticism of the U.S. bombing raids on Afghanistan and there are other signs that the Kingdom could be pushing its own agenda in respect of the war-torn country.

The Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Nayef bin Abdelaziz, in expressing his distress at the harassment that the Kingdom's nationals and other Arabs are being subjected to by U.S. officials and private citizens, has said his Government was working strenuously to put an end to this situation. If, however, there was no improvement to the treatment that Arabs faced in the U.S. the Kingdom would ask its citizens to return home or shift to some other country. There are thousands of Saudi citizens at any given time in the U.S. who are studying there, looking after their business and professional interests or merely visiting.

Prince Nayef's statement might not be much more than a warning to the U.S. that the Kingdom could toughen its stance. But there are a few other stray signs that the Saudis might not continue to be as acquiescent partners of the U.S. as they were throughout the 1990s. According to reports in the U.S. media, the Kingdom's *de facto* ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah, has written to the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, that there are times when nations, like people, have to part ways and that the time might have now arrived for both countries to look after their own interests in their own ways.

These signs of Saudi estrangement might be attributable in part to the steady stream of anti-Saudi news stories and analyses appearing in the Western media, on the basis of information sourced to Western officials. In general, the Western media has fo-

cussed on the Saudi contribution to the spread of Osamaism through the export of the Wahabi interpretation of Islam, financing of mosques where this interpretation is imparted all over the world and the provision of a large number of recruits to fundamentalist organisations.

Underlying this pique at what the Kingdom would consider anti-Saudi propaganda is a harder factor. In slowly consolidating the idea that Wahabism underwrites extremism in the Muslim world, the ideologues of the West have posed a challenge to the ideological underpinnings of the Saudi regime.

The Saudi monarchy came to power and retains it through a symbiotic relationship with the Wahabi sect and the descendants of the sect's founder, Sheikh Abdul Wahab (the al Sheikhs), constitute the second most important clan in the Kingdom.

The Saudi regime's beliefs and baser interests converge on the issue of Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia has invested a lot over two decades, in terms of money and political effort, in trying to ensure a hard-line Sunni dominance in Afghanistan. This policy appeared to have blown up in the face of the Saudis when the Sept. 11 terror attacks took place.

An Arab League and an OIC meeting that took place soon after were devoted to the effort to ensure that causes dear to the Arab heart — Palestine especially — did not suffer collateral damage from the newly launched U.S. war on terrorism. The problems of Afghanistan and Pakistan were largely ignored at these meetings.

Since then, the Saudis appear to have taken a second breath perhaps emboldened by the manner in which Pakistan has been able to insert the idea of "a moderate Taliban" into the U.S. thinking. The Saudis now apparently feel, especially after the Foreign Minister, Prince Saudi Al Faisal's visit to Islamabad, that the stakes they have invested in Afghanistan are not totally irretrievable. In order to have their own input in Afghan affairs, the Saudis have to mark out a difference from the U.S. while reaffirming their links with Pakistan.

THE HINDU

1 NOV 2001

Choosing sides: Arab world fights its private battle

Patricia Cohen
New York, September 30

describe as a "sprawling army of nearly 11,000", cannot.

SINCE THE end of the First World War when the French and British willy-nilly carved up the decaying Ottoman Empire, opinion has been divided over who is to blame for the misery that shrouds millions of people across the Arab world.

The question has been bubbling up since September 11, as people grope to explain the virulent radicalism that has been growing across the region. For while a single madman can be dismissed as an evil aberration, what Intelligence reports

respond to the attack. All are horrified at the senseless deaths. But on one side are those who argue that it is essential to understand how United States policies created the conditions that produced such monstrous fanatics. On the other are those who insist that any attempts to link the attacks to grievances against the West play into terrorist hands.

"I say that's wrong," author Kanan Makiya said. "Of course there's injustice, but we should be at the forefront of separating those issues from what happened Sept. 11." Islamic extremists have appropriated "anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric" to

erase the distinction between themselves and the "broader Muslim world", he said.

Fawaz A. Gerges, a professor at Sarah Lawrence College and the author of "America and Political Islam", agreed. "This terribly hideous act, you can never justify it, never rationalise it, regardless of what American foreign policy has done. This is not the time to condemn US policy. It's time Arab intellectuals rise to the occasion."

To Edward Said, such logic is flawed. "The appropriation or hijacking of language by self-appointed spokesmen goes on all the time," he says. "But why should we simply accede to the

hijackers? To understand is not to condone."

This split among the community of Arab scholars mirrors the long-running — and at points bitter — discussion over America's responsibility for the wretched conditions in most Arab countries. Vigorously defend the US (and Israel) and risk being labelled an "Uncle Abdul", the "Arabs' Uncle Tom", keep quiet about the absence of freedom and rights and risk being called a silent accomplice.

"I think blame can be distributed pretty evenly," Said said, adding. "The main problem with the Arab national movement

throughout the century has been the lack of attention to democracy and democratic rights."

Still, he offered a blunt summation of America's shortcomings. "To most people in the Islamic and Arab worlds, US is synonymous with arrogant power, known mainly for its sanctimoniously magnificent support not only of Israel but of numerous repressive Arab regimes and its inattentiveness even to the possibility of dialogue with secular movements and people who have real grievances", he wrote last week in "The Observer".

"Anti-Americanism in this context is not based on a hatred of modernity or technology envy," he continued. Rather, "it is based on a narrative of concrete interventions, specific depredations and, in the cases of the Iraqi people's suffering under US-imposed sanctions and US support for the 34-year-old Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, cruel and inhumane policies administered with a stony coldness."

Said sees imperial designs in America's threatened military attack on Afghanistan as well, arguing that it would help solidify its control of oil "from the Gulf to the northern oil fields."

The New York Times

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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Wednesday. -- AP

Saudi Arabia cautions U.S. on campaign

Arab news
10-16

5/10

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), OCT. 4. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, today touched down in Oman for what could be the relatively easiest part of his tour of four Western Asian and Central Asian States. Mr. Rumsfeld held talks with the leadership of Saudi Arabia yesterday and though both sides expressed satisfaction with their discussions, there are reports that some of the underlying tensions have been merely papered over. The U.S. Defence Secretary is likely to encounter problems of a somewhat similar nature when he goes to Cairo and difficulties of a different sort in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Rumsfeld, who spoke to the media delegation travelling with him late last night, was reported to have said that he did not specifically request the Saudi Government for the use of the kingdom's military facilities in the anticipated campaign against Al-Qaeda. Senior Saudi leaders, including the Defence Minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdelaziz al Saud, said no specific requests had been made of them either. But the U.S. is known to be interested in using a command and control facility located in the kingdom for any operations that may be mounted over Afghan air space. Given the heavy military investments that the U.S. has made in the Gulf region since the 1991 Gulf War, it is probable that the command and control and other facilities available within the kingdom are superior to equipment aboard the four carrier task forces that have been allocated to the anti-Al-Qaeda operation.

The usual pattern for the U.S. is to isolate the facilities that they operate on a regular basis inside the territories of their Gulf allies from the activities of the regional militaries though joint exercises,

etc., are carried out on a regular basis. As such the U.S. could probably use these facilities in the fight against Al-Qaeda provided it did not attract too much attention and publicity. The U.S. would, of course, be in an embarrassing position if the governments of the Gulf States specifically opposed the use of these facilities for the Al-Qaeda operations.

Saudi officials are also reported to have said that they would not like the current campaign by the U.S. to be directed against an Arab country. One explanation for this statement is that the Saudis are worried that the U.S. administration will listen to the counsel of some senior officials and strike at Iraq as if in a continuation of the current operations. Another interpretation is also possible. The Saudis, together with Egypt and Jordan, are also reported to have told the U.S. that their current operations must stop with the elimination of Al-Qaeda and must not extend into a campaign against terrorism wherever it is found.

If the U.S. were to carry forward their campaign to target terrorist groups wherever else they might be found (as senior U.S. officials are reported to have promised India they will do) then there are organisations within the Arab world which may become possible targets. The Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the Lebanese group Hizbollah are already on the U.S. list of terrorist organisations and Syria is among the Arab countries that figures in the State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism. In this context, the Saudi warning that the campaign should not extend beyond Al-Qaeda can be taken as a caution against proceeding against Hamas, Hizbollah and the countries that support them.

THE HINDU

2005 OCT 04

Saudis feel pain of supporting America

FROM PATRICK E. TYLER

Washington, Sept. 24. The US announcement that it would use Saudi Arabia as a headquarters for air operations against Afghanistan has further strained relations between Washington and the conservative rulers in Riyadh. But senior administration officials said yesterday that they remained confident that the Saudis would agree to provide critical bases for offensive operations.

Saudi leaders continue to voice public support in the struggle against terrorism, but are showing extreme sensitivity to beginning military operations against another Muslim state from their territory, as they did during the Gulf War in 1991.

Members of the Saudi royal family also are taking seriously the threats

against their rule from Osama bin Laden, an outcast from one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent families whose al-Qaida network is accused of mounting the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11. From exile, he has called on Muslims to overthrow the monarchy for allowing in "infidel" forces. Several terrorists who struck the United States carried Saudi passports or documents, although many might have been forged.

Some officials say that the Saudis have privately offered millions of dollars to the Taliban rulers in Afghanistan to expel or turn over bin Laden.

The current crisis has caught the United States without a seasoned ambassador in the Saudi capital. Former Sen. Wycbe Fowler Jr, who served President Clinton, has departed, and the White

House candidate to replace him, Robert W. Jordan, an oil industry lawyer and Bush family friend from Houston, was hastily nominated September 12, the day after the attacks.

with American actions toward Iraq, where civilian suffering has stirred the emotions of many Arabs. In recent days, secretary of state Colin Powell and Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington,

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami has warned of a catastrophe and a clash between the West and Muslims if the United States retaliates unilaterally for suicide attacks against it, state television said today. The reformist President, whose country has supported US calls for a "war on terrorism" but insists it must be under the umbrella of the United Nations, urged Muslims to agree on a definition of terrorism and work together to avert disaster. Any US action risked a confrontation between the Western and Muslim worlds, Khatami said.

In the decade that has followed the war to roll back Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Saudi royal family has become disenchanted with American mediation in the Arab-Israeli dispute and

American-led military campaign. "They will do almost anything we ask them to do as long as we help to minimise the damage from their extremists," said one specialist. The Pentagon announced last week that it was dispatching a top Air Force commander, Lt. Gen. Charles F. Wald, to Saudi Arabia to oversee air attacks against Afghanistan from a command post at the Prince Sultan Air Base at Al Khaurj. The public announcement may have preceded any direct negotiation with the Saudis, several officials and specialists said. "I don't want to say," said one senior Defence Department official, "but my understanding is that it is still an open question."

Another senior defence department official said Saudi sensitivities were inflamed by news reports but expressed confidence that the Saudis would uti-

imately grant the access and military latitude that Washington seeks.

US military aircraft that take off daily from Saudi Arabia to enforce the no-fly zone in Iraq are used exclusively as patrol craft, under a longstanding agreement. If fired upon, the patrol fighters await US warplanes launched from aircraft carriers or bases outside Saudi Arabia to strike Iraqi targets.

Powell said yesterday that an article in *The Washington Post* on Saturday was incorrect in asserting that he was engaged in negotiations with the Saudis to change their policy banning offensive air operations from Saudi bases. Powell said he had yet to place "that kind of a demand on the Saudi leadership because nobody asked me to -- there was no requirement to."

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

THE TELEGRAPH

25 SEP 2001

PAK. WON'T FOLLOW SUIT

UAE snaps ties with the Taliban regime

23/9

Arab world
10-1

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (Bahrain), SEPT. 22. The United Arab Emirates today cut diplomatic ties with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, asked them to close its embassy in Abu Dhabi within 24 hours and repatriate the staff.

(Meanwhile, a Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman said Islamabad played a key role in communicating between Kabul and the rest of the world and had no plans to follow the UAE in severing relations with the Taliban.)

After this swift surgical strike, which followed on the Taliban's failure to hand over Osama bin Laden, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are the only two countries which maintain diplomatic ties with the Islamic outfit in Kabul.

The UAE's decision can have several implications. The President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, is one of the senior-most leaders in the Arab world and

while the UAE does not have the religious prestige that Saudi Arabia does, its decision will cast a deep impression on the rest of the Arab world. Whether it will lead to a similar decision by Saudi Arabia is not certain since the Kingdom's rulers will have to assess how the Taliban sympathisers in their country will react. Osama might have been disowned by Saudi Arabia and his own family but the idea of handing over someone they had considered one of their own might be too much to bear for fervent Islamists in the Kingdom.

What will be watched is whether the UAE's decision would signal a seminal shift in respect of the militant Islamic movement as a whole. Rich businessmen in the Emirates have been among the foremost sources of funds for the Islamic movement worldwide, including some of its most virulent forms. This is an accusation lev-

elled not just by the West or others victimised by fundamentalist terrorism, but also by diplomats from Muslim majority countries like Algeria that have had to contend with the scourge.

It is noteworthy that the U.S. administration has twice called in the envoys from West Asian states for a joint meeting at which the need to cut off funds to terrorist groups was said to have been the main topic discussed. Unprecedentedly, the U.S. State Department has also let the news leak that very tough language was used from their side during these meetings. While the U.S. President Mr. George W. Bush's remarks about going after terrorist groups "with a global reach" might have caused confusion, it would appear that the U.S. was far more clear-minded about the need to hit at the sources of funding.

SEE FILED

23 SEP 2001

Rage of the moment dominates Arab summit

THE Arab Summit in Amman at the end of March once more concentrated attention on the Middle East and events in that region. It is a discouraging picture. Arab-Israeli strife and violence show no abatement, the peace process is moribund and Arab unity on many crucial issues is difficult to attain. It is not easy to see where the next step lies.

The contrast with the waning months of the Clinton administration is striking. Then, a breakthrough in the Arab-Israel peace process seemed to be in the shaping. America was strongly committed and pushed hard for the different parties in the region to compromise with each other. Israel was led by a renowned dove who was prepared to sink or swim with peace.

But somehow it failed to come together in the end. The issues proved too intractable, the fading US administration lacked the command, and perhaps the target was too ambitious. A comprehensive settlement, which would have given Mr Bill Clinton a splendid exit, was not attainable, though several useful smaller agreements had been put together.

And ultimately Palestinian anger on the streets, a new and intransigent Israeli government, as well as a new, less committed US administration, all served to bring the peace talks to a halt.

In passing one can note that the moment of hope in the Middle East served as an encouragement in south Asia. If Arab-Israeli problems could be negotiated to a settlement, than why not Indo-Pakistani?

There is no direct connection, of course, only a question of atmosphere and expectation. All that is scarcely relevant in today's circumstances.

The summit, then, took place against an adverse background, dominated by the reality of strife on the streets and by lack of effort among the parties to engage together in trying to revive the negotiations. A harsher US line at the UN towards the Arabs had its own impact. True, the summit agenda was a comprehensive one, not

confined as several previous such meetings have been to one issue alone, more often than not the question of Palestine.

But unavoidably it was events in Palestine that took centre stage. The ground situation being as unfavourable as it was, there was not much that the summit could do to give a positive lead. The emotions of the moment dominated events, so that the summit found itself endorsing the Arab call at the UN for stationing international observers in the occupied territories, even though this demand was subjected to the US veto.

The demand itself only emphasised the distance between the parties and highlighted US detachment from Arab requirements, as a result of which the peace process seems more remote than ever.

The Palestine issue may have induced a show of

WIDE ANGLE
SALMAN HAIDAR



The Arab summit took place against an adverse background, dominated by the reality of strife on the streets. In Hebron recently. — AP/PTI

unity, but a meeting of minds remained elusive on the Gulf situation.

In the run up to the summit, the Gulf Co-operation Council, led in this matter by Kuwait, had lobbied extensively to ensure that its grievances against Iraq would be fully supported by the parti-

cipants. Kuwait was in no mood to lower its demands, and indeed it had little alternative so long as Iraq remained deliberately ambiguous on the issue of Kuwait's sovereignty.

There are also several matters left over from the Gulf War of a decade ago, among them the return of missing Kuwaiti personnel. Despite the entrenched attitudes on both sides, an agreed form of words on the dispute in the Gulf was worked out by the ministers. But this was not confirmed at the top most level for reasons that are not altogether clear.

In effect, this means that the problem remains on the agenda for the future.

Sanctions against Iraq have UN authorisation and are relentlessly imposed by the US and its western allies.

Some breaking of ranks among these countries has occurred recently as the

harm done by sanctions to vulnerable sections of Iraqi society — infants, children, women — has become more widely acknowledged. But this is not enough to break the stranglehold.

The summit gave a call for lifting the sanctions though it is not clear how much this will affect the issue.

So long as US policy remains unrelenting, Iraq's misery is set to continue.

It will have to make do with limited oil exports under close supervision which go to pay off creditors, including some Indian companies and individuals, and buy inadequate quantities of food and medicines for its civil population.

Out of the summit came promises of economic assistance for Palestine. There must be great need for it, as the aid from the oil-fed economies of the Gulf has trailed off since the Gulf War.

In Kuwait, for instance, the number of expatriate Palestinians is now only a fraction of what it used to be, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation leadership has been kept at arms' length.

President Yasser Arafat has been unable to pay a visit despite several overtures from his side.

It will take a long time before the sympathy and support provided by Palestinians for Iraq when it was in occupation of Kuwait is forgotten and forgiven.

For all that it broke little fresh ground, the summit was an important and significant event.

But in India it has been seen with a curious detachment, as if it were something remote from us, even though the Arab states lie next door. Perhaps the decline of the Non-Aligned Movement has had the effect of reducing interaction between the developing countries.

Moreover, our currently diminished role at the UN takes us away from the forefront of global events. It will take conscious effort and a more active diplomacy to redress the balance.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary)

100 YEARS AGO TODAY

APRIL 8, 1901

A RAILWAY GRIEVANCE

SIR, — With your permission I desire to draw the attention of the E.I.R. authorities, through the medium of your paper, to the great inconvenience caused to passengers for up-country stations arriving at the Bankipur station by the Digha Ghat Branch train No 6 at 18.40 hours. There is an up train (No 1-15 Mokameh-Buxar Local mixed) which leaves Bankipur at 18-30 hours. It happens not infrequently that this up train leaves Bankipur as soon as the 6 Digha train steams in. The passengers have therefore to wait in the station for more than five hours — the next train available being that which is timed to leave Bankipur at 23.49 hours. The inconvenience to passengers could be easily removed by a little manipulation of the time figures, so as to make the up local train leave Bankipur after the arrival of the Digha train. Will the railway authorities see to this?

— CONSTANT PASSENGER.

THE STATESMAN

Arab summit brings no hope for Iraq

Amman, March 29

THE LANDMARK Arab league summit ended yesterday without a consensus on a way to end Iraq's isolation and its decade-old animosity with Kuwait.

Many saw the Amman summit as the first in a promising new era as Arab countries planned to resume annual meetings, interrupted by years of regional bickering and tension after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The appointment of Egyptian Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa, as the next Secretary-General of the Arab league was an encouraging step, as he is expected to reinvigorate the 56-year-old Cairo-based institution.

The summit reached easy accord on several issues like financial support for Palestinians and a commitment to the West Asia peace process. But by failing to reach a unified stance on how to end Iraq's regional and international isolation, the leaders may have lost credibility in their effort to boost the importance of the league, criticised as being ineffectual and unassertive.

Arabs also missed out on the opportunity to influence the new US policy toward Iraq. President George W Bush's administration has indicated its willingness to slightly revise the sanctions to alleviate hardships on ordinary Iraqis.

Arab leaders walked a tight rope as they tried to meet Iraq's demands while not violating UN sanctions or anger the USA and its allies.

AP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 MAR 2001

Arab summit to focus on Iraq sanctions

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MARCH 25. Arab Foreign Ministers met in Amman on Saturday in preparation for the summit that is to be held on March 27 and 28. While Iraq's Foreign Minister, Mr. Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf, attended the meeting, it is unlikely that his President, Mr. Saddam Hussein, will be present at the summit. Mr. Sahaf's presence and Mr. Hussein's absence gave an indication of the state of play in the Arab community in respect of one of the most contentious issues before them.

Iraq is already on an all-out effort to get the League to endorse its call for a lifting of the sanctions. The situation is propitious with the sanctions regime having eroded considerably after most Arab and other states resumed diplomatic and commercial relations with Iraq. Free trade agreements have been signed between Iraq on the one hand and Egypt, Syria and Tunisia on the other and diplomatic exchanges have reached a state of near-normality unthinkable a decade ago. Almost all Arab Governments, bar that of Kuwait, are increasingly sensitive to the sentiment on the street that opposes the continuing of a sanctions regime that mainly hurts the common Iraqi citizen.

Regional Governments are no longer prepared to be shut out of the trade and investment opportunities in Iraq especially when

powers from outside the region are stepping up and broadening their presence in Iraq. Of late, there also appears to be a greater urgency in the Arab world over the need to bring about economic integration in the face of the impact of globalisation. Economy and Trade Ministers of the Arab bloc held a meeting on Friday to discuss plans for greater economic co-operation and Egypt's President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak, has said that he will summon an economic summit by the end of the year if plans for economic integration have not acquired impetus by the time. So far effective action to bring about closer economic ties have fallen far short of the rhetoric but there is no guarantee that this situation will continue for ever.

The U.S. administration's new stance on sanctions also provides an escape route for Arab Governments that have been caught between the demand of their main ally and the sentiment on their streets. As articulated by the Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, the U.S. will seek to change the sanctions regime so that the emphasis will shift from the generality of Iraqi imports to the import of military material. While easing restrictions on Iraq's imports of consumer goods, the designed sanctions will restrict the ability of the Iraqi Government to re-equip itself militarily.

These plans have not been fully formulated and it is unclear how they will address the key question of "dual use" machinery and materi-

al. But such a change in plan will enable the Arab Governments to please both their main ally and their people. Incidentally, Iraq's Trade and Industry Minister, Mr. Mohammed Mehdi Saleh, has been quoted as saying that the U.S. should concentrate its efforts on the international arms industry and try to restrict what they sell or to whom instead of focusing on what Iraq can buy.

Iraq has cleverly tied its main concern with the other issue that is expected to dominate the summit — the situation in the Palestinian territories. At Saturday's meeting and during the summit, the Iraqi delegation will urge the Arab world to issue a resolution asking the Security Council to authorise Iraqi aid for the Palestinians. Iraq has promised to give 700 million euros to the Palestinians for food and other humanitarian imports and another 300 million euros to be paid as compensation to the families of those who have been killed in the course of clashes with Israel.

All the Arab Governments are very agitated by the continuing violence in the territories, the continuance of the Israeli occupation which they see as the primary cause for the same and the collapse of the negotiation process. Moderate Arab Governments are under pressure from the hardline ones and from their people to take a tougher stance towards Israel.

THE HINDU

27 MAR 2001

26 MAR 2001

Bahrain's ownership of islands upheld

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MARCH. 17 A ruling by the International Court of Justice yesterday sustaining Bahrain's ownership of a group of islands has raised expectations of a prosperous future among the residents of this country. Paradoxically, the ruling has also raised hopes of improved relations with the neighbouring emirate of Qatar which had challenged Bahrain's control over the Hawar islands before the International Court.

While the Court upheld a 1939 decision by the then colonial power, the United Kingdom, awarding the Hawar islands to Bahrain, it rejected Bahrain's further claim to sovereignty over Zubarah enclave on the Qatar mainland. The court also accorded sovereignty over a smaller island to Qatar and upheld its right to free navigation through the waters between the Hawar islands. Both emirates have welcomed the decision, promised to abide by it and declared that the disputes were now ended. Both the Governments also declared today a holiday in celebration.

The territorial dispute between the two emirates has its origin in colonial times and the movements of people in areas that sustained mainly pearl diving and fisheries till the discovery of oil. Before the turn of the last century, the ruling al Khalifa family of Bahrain controlled the main archipelago of Bahrain, the Hawar islands and the slice of the north western portion of the Qatar peninsula called the Zubarah bloc. At that point of time, the al Thani family that rules Qatar today was based mainly on the eastern part of the peninsula. Over time the al Thanis were able to extend their power and a 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention acknowledged that the Qatar ruling family had suzerainty over the Zubarah bloc.

Bahrain and Qatar had concluded exclusive protection agreements with the U.K. in 1892 and 1916 respectively and both were granted independence in 1971. In 1939 the U.K. had ruled that Bahrain had suzerainty over the Hawar islands. Disputes rose between the two emirates over the granting of concessions to oil companies and in 1991 Qatar took the case to the International Court over-ruling Bah-

rain's objections that the matter be settled bilaterally. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had sought to mediate but gave up these efforts two years ago when Qatar persisted with its litigation before the International Court.

With the Court awarding it the small island, Qatar will be able to consolidate its hold over the northern fields which is one of the main depositories of the natural gas reserves that have been discovered in recent years. While the Court's reaffirmation of its rights to the Hawar islands is important from the point of view of Bahrain's economy, it is uncertain whether the monetary value is commensurate.

Bahrain's Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, in a broadcast to the nation last night, called upon drilling companies that stopped their activities in the Bahrain off-shore on account of the uncertainty to resume their oper-

ations. In the context it would appear that Bahrain has hopes that reserves of natural gas if not oil will be discovered in the vicinity of the Hawar islands.

Even if such discoveries are not made the decision is still of significance of the Bahrain economy. If Qatar had been awarded the islands, Bahrain's shipping, fisheries and pearl diving industry (in decline though it is) would have been affected. More importantly, the Hawar islands have great potential for being developed as a tourist resort.

These islands are a great haven for migratory birds and the Bahrain government hopes that they will be able to develop eco-tourism in a major way. In any case the islands have already become a fledgling beach resort but plans to develop this sector further have been stalled on account of the dispute with Qatar.



A Bahraini boy, Ayoob Adel (9), kisses a map showing the Hawar Islands in Muharraq, Bahrain, on Friday. — AP

THE HINDU

18 MAR 2001

Israel warns of conflict with Arab countries

417-13

Jerusalem, January 5

US PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's frantic push for a Middle East peace deal was continuing today, as Israel warned of "wide-ranging confrontation" with Arab nations unless agreement was reached with the Palestinians.

Addressing a gathering in Tel Aviv, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak today said his country risked a "wide-ranging confrontation" with Arab countries if no agreement is reached with the Palestinians.

"The alternative to an accord is an infinite cycle of violence, the application of agreements we have signed with Egypt and Jordan and even a gradual degradation, which will end in Israel's isolation in the world and a wide-ranging confrontation," Barak warned.

"One shouldn't expect a miracle," Barak said of negotiators' upcoming talks in Washington with the Bill Clinton administration.

"We're entering a minefield and

Sharon leads in opinion polls

ISRAELI RIGHT-winger Ariel Sharon increased his lead over prime minister Ehud Barak in two opinion polls today, a month before they face each other in a February six national election. The polls, in Israel's two biggest newspapers, showed Nobel peace laureate Shimon Peres, Barak's predecessor as Labour Party chairman, would run neck-and-neck with Sharon if he were the party's candidate instead of Barak. **Reuters, Jerusalem**

there are risks of explosion; It's like a surgical operation that hurts. But this is the only way to stop the hurt from getting worse," he said.

Barak also said that Israel's refusal to allow the return of Palestinian refugees is absolute,

leaving little room for compromise on a key peace plan point that has Arab nations pressing Yasser Arafat to hold firm.

Barak underscored the no-return position after Arab foreign ministers meeting yesterday in Cairo called Palestinian refugees' return a "sacred right."

"We will not accept under any circumstances the right of return to Israel," Barak said, adding that Israel would never cede sovereignty of the holy site to Palestinians.

Arafat had submitted US proposals for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks to the Arab ministers for their review, on his way home from a Washington meeting with Clinton in which he conditionally accepted the terms as a basis for talks.

Clinton's proposals call for Palestinians to give up their demand for the resettling of millions of Palestinian refugees and descendants in Israel. In turn, Israel would cede control of a disputed Jerusalem holy site. *(Agencies)*

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6 JAN 2001