

Dialogue claims dismissed

By SANDEEP SINGH GREWAL

A TOP government official has denied claims that Bahrain's National Dialogue initiative is doomed to failure.

The talks, which began in February, failed to reach consensus on any key issues before the sessions stopped last month for a break ahead of Ramadan.

They were blighted by claims that opposition participants were deliberately trying to stall the process to suit their own political agendas.

Sessions are due to resume on August 28 and Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa is confident they will produce results.

"I am fully convinced that the dialogue will eventually reach a consensus that is acceptable to all parties and which can maintain the balances within the state and the society," he told the pan-Arab daily newspaper *Asharq Al Awsat*.

"By achieving national reconciliation and a consensus on the list of priorities things will go well.

"Our main ambition as Bahraini citizens is to reach national consensus that protects the country's existence, legitimacy and stability as well as the development of people and the state's national security.

"Personally, I will remain optimistic that we will ultimately reach one agreeable solution because we are one nation in one boat and we have no solution but to reach a consensus."

Shaikh Khalid "disagreed" with claims the Dialogue had reached an impasse.

"There are difficulties that could be overcome gradually by means of dialogue, as manifested by the experiences of nations in modern history. We must be patient and persistent," he said.

"In the past few months, we made some progress in our discussion of several agreed points such as the

Plan to fast-track justice system

EFFORTS are underway to speed up Bahrain's justice system.

As part of reforms being carried out in connection with the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report, the government is considering creating a new system to fast-track cases.

"We are also working on new alternatives for litigation, such as arbitration and

mechanisms of managing sessions and our agreement that the results of sessions must be definitive."

Opposition groups taking part in the talks have repeatedly protested about the inclusion of MPs, claiming they were not neutral.

But Shaikh Khalid said it



■ Shaikh Khalid

Our main ambition is to reach a consensus that protects Bahrain's unity and stability

was unreasonable that after four months of negotiations one side should suddenly attempt to change the structure of negotiations without proper reason.

"This raises significant questions about the goal of such a discourse, which in my assessment seems to be an obstacle to progress towards the objectives of the dialogue," he said.

Shaikh Khalid said excluding MPs and Shura Council members from the talks "would be an insult to the legislative authority and to the individuals who represent it, as well as

to the role it is performing in Bahrain's political arena".

"This must be clear, particularly as MPs, for example, are elected individuals whose legitimacy is unquestioned," he said.

"The current parliament represents 52 per cent of eligible voters, hence it is clear that such discourse does not serve national consensus."

The minister also rejected calls by opposition societies for Bahrain to imitate the dialogue experience in Yemen, describing it as "unsound, unacceptable and illogical".

"The dialogue experience in Yemen is a special one in terms of nature of the society and type of the problem," he said.

"The issue in Bahrain is related to some parties who seek to impose a specific solution on the state and society, sometimes by means of pressure, sometimes by blackmail, and sometimes by using external support."

Speaking about opposition demands for "genuine democracy" Shaikh Khalid warned the actions of some groups were creating divisions and instability.

mediation," said Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa.

"Among significant issues undertaken by the ministry is training in freedom of expression and freedom of association, principles of fair trial and the promotion of rules of inspection of judicial institutions and places of detention."

"Democracy does not come out of the blue; rather, it can only be established by adhering to a number of rules integral to the democratic process," he said.

"The problem is that some have veered off the track and adopted revolutionary ideologies

that contradict the concepts of progress and co-operation.

Shaikh Khalid said Bahrain's challenge was to ensure its multi-party system is not abused again in a way that could harm the rights of people, state or jeopardise national unity.

"During such catastrophic occurrences, it was clear that some have abused and exploited political pluralism by using it as an approach to undermine democracy and foundations of the state, aiming at demolishing pillars of society," he said.

"What is more dangerous is that some have slid into the maze of sectarianism."

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Special market set to open at Bab Al Bahrain

A SPECIAL market taking place during the first week of Ramadan opens today at Bab Al Bahrain.

The Ramadaniyat souq follows the successful "Bab Suq" organised during the Spring of Culture.

It will continue until July 20 from 9.30pm to 12.30am every night, featuring kiosks and stalls selling a variety of items including Bahraini handicrafts, food, clothing and jewellery.

Local folk bands will entertain shoppers with traditional Bahraini music.

There will also be special Ramadaniyat nights at Bahrain National Museum, with live folk music every Tuesday and Friday during Ramadan.

A musician will play the qanun, a traditional instrument, at the museum's Darsen Café.

Meanwhile, a special exhibition showcasing 25 years of Arab art will open at the museum on Monday and run until September 15.

The exhibition is a collaboration between the Culture Ministry and the Arab World Institute in Paris and includes paintings, photography, video, installations and sculptures.

Museum timings for Ramadan are 8am to 2pm and 8pm to midnight daily, except Mondays.

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■ Two student tutors at the Bahrain Polytechnic were honoured for their dedication and contribution. They completed their term as Peer Assisted Study Scheme (PASS) leaders, which is a student-to-student tutoring programme. Zainab Mohamed and Taher Ahmed were presented with certificates by student services director Hend Bucheery during a ceremony at the polytechnic in Isa Town, which was attended by acting chief executive officer Dr Mohamed Al Aseeri, PASS co-ordinator Naheed Al Akber and Library Learning Centre manager Dr Nawal Zawayed. Above, front row, from left, Ms Zawayed, Ms Mohamed, Ms Al Akber and Ms Bucheery.