



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

BAHRAIN

28 MARCH 2008

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1. Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Bahrain has been produced by COI Service, Border and Immigration Agency (BIA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 14 March 2008.
- ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any BIA opinion or policy.
- iii For BIA users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Bahrain is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

- x The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information was established under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the BIA's country of origin information material. The Advisory Panel welcomes all feedback on the BIA's COI Key Documents and other country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk

- xi It is not the function of the Advisory Panel to endorse any BIA material or procedures. In the course of its work, the Advisory Panel directly reviews the content of selected BIA COI documents, but neither the fact that such a review has been undertaken, nor any comments made, should be taken to imply endorsement of the material. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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2. Background information on Bahrain

Area: 665 sq km

Population: 698,585 (including over 230,000 expatriates)

Capital City: Manama (Al Manamah)

People: Arab, Muslim majority, of whom some 33% are Sunni and 66% are Shia

Languages: Arabic is the official language; English is widely spoken and is the main commercial language

Religion(s): Islam is the state religion; places of worship for other faiths exist

Currency: Bahraini Dinar (BD); 1 Bahraini Dinar = 1,000 fils (tied to the US dollar)

Major political parties: Political Parties are officially banned but Political Associations have been allowed to expand. These include Islamic groupings (Sunni and Shi'a), as well as secular and liberal associations.

Government: Monarchy with appointed upper and elected lower chambers of Parliament

Head of State: His Majesty Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa

Crown Prince: His Highness Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa

Prime Minister: His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa

Deputy Prime Ministers: His Excellency Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, His Excellency Jawad Al-Arrayed, His Excellency Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa Al Khalifa

Foreign Minister: His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa

Membership of international groups/organisations: Arab League, Gulf Co-operation Council, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, United Nation (Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile: 23 May 2007) [4] (Basic information)

GEOGRAPHY

“Bahrain is a group of 33 Gulf islands off the east coast of Saudi Arabia, the largest of which is Bahrain Island. Causeways connect the four main islands. Bahrain Island is also connected to Saudi Arabia by the 16 mile long King Fahd Causeway. The population is concentrated in the north around the capital, Manama. The climate is hot and humid, with minimal rain. Maximum temperatures average 30-40°C between May and October and 20-30°C for the remainder of the year.” (FCO Country Profile, 23 May 2007) [4] (Geography)

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Map



(United Nations (UN) Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section, Map of Bahrain, January 2004) [39]

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RECENT HISTORY

“Bahrain was the first Gulf country to discover petroleum in 1932. Oil provided the Ruling Family with an independent source of income, with which they developed a modern state administration, and Bahrain became strategically and commercially more important. The UK’s naval forces in the Persian Gulf established their base port at Al Jufayr in Bahrain.

“On 14 August 1971, following Britain’s decision to withdraw its armed forces from East of Suez, Bahrain announced its Independence from the UK. In 1973, a National Constitution was introduced, together with a democratic National Assembly; the Amir dissolved the Assembly in 1975 after it refused to pass a proposed State Security Law.

“In the mid-1990s, Bahrain suffered a spate of anti-government disturbances stemming principally from the disaffection of the Shia majority. The situation calmed during the summer of 1995, but in early 1996 a number of hotels and restaurants were bombed (7 people died in one of the restaurants). As a result of the disturbances, over 1,000 people were held in detention without trial (since released - see below). There have been few major disturbances since then, and recent political reforms have widened the opportunity for all sectors to participate in political life (see below). Nevertheless, demonstrations which turn into low-intensity riots are still common.” (FCO Country Profile, 23 May 2007) [4] (History)

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

“Bahrain held parliamentary and municipal council elections in two rounds in November and December 2006. Voter participation in the first round was 73 percent of all registered voters. In second round runoff races, 69 percent of eligible voters cast ballots. Although a small group of eligible voters boycotted the elections, all political societies, including the four that boycotted the 2002 elections, participated in the elections.

“Although no international observers participated, the government permitted nine local civil society groups, including the BHRWS [Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society] and the Bahrain Society for Public Freedoms, access to poll stations to observe voting. Bahrain Transparency Society and the BHRS [Bahrain Human Rights Society] joined efforts to form the Election Monitoring Joint Committee (EMJC) and trained over 200 local observers. The government asked a foreign political party training and election observation organization to leave the country during the campaign process and elections.

“In its final report issued on February 10 [2007], EMJC reported that there were no reports of widespread attempts to influence the outcome of the elections. Official polling station observers did not report significant problems during the voting process, although there were allegations that general poll center vote counts were manipulated in some cases against opposition candidates in close races.

“In the first round of elections, officials in the 40 district polling stations announced results to observers and candidate representatives immediately following ballot counting. However, votes from the 10 general polling stations were taken to central facilities and folded in with those of other general stations before vote counts were made public. After the first round, EMJC presented this lapse in transparency to the

High Commission for Elections. Election administrators corrected this problem in the runoff elections and announced all vote counts prior to moving ballot boxes.

“EMJC reported other violations, the most serious being that candidates did not cease campaign activities 24 hours prior to the polls as required by law. Campaign volunteers continued to pass out fliers and lobby voters in the vicinity of polling stations on election day. In addition observers reported many campaign posters and billboards moved closer to polling stations than allowed by law just prior to the election. Most other violations were minor and procedural.

“The government drew the unified electoral districts for both the municipal council and the legislative elections to protect Sunni interests by creating several districts with small populations likely to elect a Sunni candidate. In contrast districts where a Shi'a candidate was likely to win were drawn to include large numbers of voters, a formula that diluted the voting strength of the Shi'a community. According to voter lists for the elections, divergence in the electoral population per district is significant—the number of eligible voters per elected representative can vary by as much as a factor of 13.

“The election law prohibited speeches at most public locations and limited the areas where campaign material could be placed.

“The government did not allow the formation of political parties, but 15 political societies, which received some government funding and operated somewhat like political parties, chose candidates for parliamentary and municipal elections, campaigned for political office, developed political platforms, held internal elections, and hosted political gatherings.

“The 2005 Political Societies Law provides political societies legal authority to exist and defines guidelines within which they can operate. Political societies were highly critical of provisions in the law requiring them to notify the MOJIA [Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs] before contacting political groups abroad. The law also prohibits foreign funding or training, raised the minimum membership age from 18 to 21; and gives the MOJIA the authority to reject an application for registration. Since the government began recognizing political societies in 2002, it has not refused or deferred an application.

“Although the law prohibits civil society groups from engaging in political matters, the government permitted such activity at its discretion.

“Women have the right to vote and run for public office. On April 24 [2007], the government appointed the first female member, Dr. Dhuha al-Zayani, to the Constitutional Court. In the legislative elections 18 women ran, and five ran in the municipal elections. One woman, Latifa al-Qa'oud, was unopposed in her district and became the first female MP. None of the other women candidates were elected. The government did not release percentages of voting by gender.

“While Shi'a amounted to approximately 70 percent of resident citizens, and both Shi'a and Sunni citizens have equal rights before the law, Sunnis dominated political life.

“In December 2006 the king appointed one Christian and one Jewish member to the new Shura Council. Eighteen Shura Council members were Shi'a Muslims and 17 were Sunni. Six of the 23 cabinet ministers were Shi'a, including a deputy prime minister.” (US Department of State Human Rights report 2007 (USSD HR report 2007) [2a] (Section 3)

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ECONOMY

GDP per head: US\$25,300

Inflation: 3.5%

Major Industries: Aluminium, oil and gas, metal and ship building and repair, financial services and tourism.

Major trading partners: Saudi Arabia, US, India, Japan, UK, France, South Korea.

Exchange rate: UK£1 = BD 0.744 (BD is tied to the US\$)

“Bahrain has a small, reasonably prosperous economy with less dependence on oil than most other Gulf states. Having been the first to discover oil in 1932, the economy is now well diversified and one of the acknowledged banking, financial services, and human resources development and training centres of the Gulf. The economic environment is liberal, but well regulated; the authorities have managed recent oil price fluctuations sensibly and successfully trained Bahraini nationals for private sector employment. “Bahrainisation”, a policy employed by industry and government in the last twenty years, is in effect in abeyance and may be replaced shortly by a new, less stringent system of incentives to employ Bahrainis, created by the Economic Development Board.

“In Bahrain, petroleum production and processing account for about 60% of export receipts, 60% of government revenues, and 30% of GDP. With its highly developed communication and transport facilities, Bahrain is home to numerous multinational firms with business in the Gulf region. Financial and insurance services contributed 30% of GDP in 2006.

“Long-term prospects for the small Bahraini market are linked to wider Gulf markets, particularly Saudi Arabia. Bahrain already has a large offshore financial sector serving Saudi and Gulf needs, although Saudi restrictions prevent Bahrain from becoming a more successful base for Saudi investments. Recent Saudi moves towards economic liberalisation and WTO accession could make it easier for Bahrain-based firms to do business in Saudi Arabia. Linked to this, Central Bank of Bahrain is leading the way to establish Bahrain as the premier Islamic banking centre in the Middle East, with 16 Islamic banks and financial institutions already based in the kingdom. The continuing development of the Bahrain Financial Harbour is a key element of the government’s strategy.

“In 2004 Bahrain signed a Free Trade Agreement with the US.” (FCO Country Profile, 23 May 2007) [4] (Basic economic facts)

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HUMAN RIGHTS

The USSD HR report 2007 states:

“Citizens did not have the right to change their government. The government restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association, and some religious practices. Although citizens were not able to form political parties, the law authorized registered political societies to run candidates and participate in other political activities. The judiciary lacked independence, and corruption was a problem. Domestic violence against women and children was common, as was discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, sect, and ethnicity. Trafficking in persons and restrictions on the rights of expatriate workers remained problems. The Shi'a majority population was routinely discriminated against.” [2a] (p1)

Amnesty international's (AI) 2007 Annual Report notes “The authorities imposed restrictions on freedom of expression. A group of detainees complained of physical abuse during their detention. The King ratified a law imposing the death penalty. Three people were executed for murder.” [10] (p1)

Human Rights Watch's (HRW) World Report 2007 notes:

“Human rights conditions in Bahrain worsened in 2007. Although the king, Shaikh Hamad bin `Isa al-Khalifa, undertook important reforms in 2001-2002, the government still has done little to institutionalize human rights protections in law. The government continued to subject freedom of expression, assembly, and association to arbitrary restrictions.

“Bahrain's counterterrorism law as well as a new Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law, enacted in August 2007, prescribe the death penalty for certain offences. In December 2006, the government executed a Bangladeshi man and woman and a Pakistani man convicted in separate murder cases. Except for a single execution in 1996, a time of great political turmoil, Bahrain had not executed anyone since 1977.” [5a] (p1)

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3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	[1]	Europa World Online, accessed 5 March 2008 http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bh (subscription)
	[2b]	United States Department of State (USSD) Background Note, October 2007 http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c3219.htm
	[3a]	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Country Profile, 15 February 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/790690.stm
	[4]	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile, last reviewed 23 May 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744936800
	[7]	Energy Information Administration (EIA) Background Information, April 2007 http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Bahrain/Background.html
	[8]	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook, 28 February 2008 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html
	[9]	Library of Congress (LoC) Country Study, data as of January 1993 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/bhtoc.html
MAPS	[2b]	USSD Background Note, October 2007 http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c3219.htm
	[8]	CIA World Factbook, 28 February 2008 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html
	[39]	United Nations (UN) Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section, January 2004 http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/bahrain.pdf
HISTORY	[1]	Europa World Online, accessed 5 March 2008 http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bh (subscription)
	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[2b]	USSD Background Note, October 2007 http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c3219.htm
	[3a]	BBC Country Profile, 15 February 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/790690.stm
	[4]	FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 May 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744936800

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POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[2b]	USSD Background Note, October 2007 http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c3219.htm
	[3a]	BBC Country Profile, 15 February 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/790690.stm
	[3b]	BBC 'Bahrain king cements army control', 7 January 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7175785.stm
	[3c]	BBC 'Bahrain rocked by days of clashes', 23 December 2007 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7158429.stm
	[3d]	BBC Timeline, 15 February 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/790690.stm
	[4]	FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 May 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744936800
	[5a]	Human Rights Watch (HRW) World Report 2007 http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bahrai17594.htm
	[10]	Amnesty International (AI) Annual Report 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/middle-east-and-north-africa/east-gulf/bahrain
	[11]	Gulf Daily News 'New Trafficking law passed', 7 January 2007 via http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=16100
	[12a]	Freedom House (FH) Country Report 2007 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007&country=7131
	[29a]	Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) 'Bahrain: Key developments', 8 February 2008 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)
	[29b]	EIU 'Bahrain: Political forces', 6 February 2008 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)
	[29c]	EIU 'Bahrain: International Relations and Defence', 6 February 2008 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)
	[30]	<i>Financial Times (UK)</i> 'Democracy disappoints Bahrain', 14 January 2008 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)

POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENT CONT'D	[31]	World Markets Research Centre 'Fresh anti Government Protests hit Bahrain' 24 December 2008 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)
	[32]	Gulf News 'Bahrain MPs must pass Press Law', 19 October 2007 via Lexis Nexis (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)
	[33]	Mideast Youth 'Bahrain/Gulf: Sex Trafficking through the Internet', 19 August 2007 (subscription accessed 14 March 2008)

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	[4]	FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 May 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744936800
	[5a]	HRW World Report 2007 http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bahrai17594.htm
	[10]	AI Annual Report 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/middle-east-and-north-africa/east-gulf/bahrain
	[12a]	FH Country Report 2007 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007&country=7131
	[13]	International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Annual Report 2006: Regional Delegation in Kuwait http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/bahrain?opendocument
	[14]	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Profile, undated http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/country.asp?cid=2
[36]	Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/	
HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES:		
(IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)		
ARREST AND DETENTION	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[5a]	HRW World Report 2007 http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bahrai17594.htm
	[10]	AI Annual Report 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/middle-east-and-north-africa/east-gulf/bahrain
	[12a]	FH Country Report 2007 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007&country=7131
CHILDREN	[1]	Europa World Online, accessed 5 March 2008 http://www.europaworld.com/entry/bh (subscription)

CHILDREN CONT'D	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[2d]	USSD Trafficking in Persons Report 2007, Country Narratives -- Countries A through G, 12 June 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/82805.htm
	[5a]	HRW World Report 2007 http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bahrai17594.htm
	[10]	AI Annual Report 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/middle-east-and-north-africa/east-gulf/bahrain
	[11]	Gulf Daily News, 'New Trafficking law passed', 7 January 2007 via http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=16100
	[12a]	FH Country Report 2007 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007&country=7131
	[19]	Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers (CSC) Annual Report 2004 http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/country.html?id=17
	[24]	United Nations (UN) News, 'UN Human Trafficking expert gives mixed report after fact-finding mission', 1 November 2006 http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20453&Cr=bahrain&Cr1
	[25a]	The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Background, undated http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bahrain.html
CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY	[37]	United States Office of Personnel Management (US OPM) 'Citizenship Laws of the World', March 2001 http://www.opm.gov/extra/investigate/IS-01.pdf
CORRUPTION	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[6]	Transparency International (TI), Corruption Perceptions Index 2007 http://www.transparency.org/content/download/23978/358254
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	[10]	AI Report 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/middle-east-and-north-africa/east-gulf/bahrain
DISABILITY	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm

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ETHNIC GROUPS	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
	[2b]	USSD Background Note, October 2007 http://www.state.gov/p/nea/ci/c3219.htm
	[3a]	BBC Country Profile, 15 February 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/790690.stm
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	[8]	CIA World Factbook, last updated 28 February 2008 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html
	[12a]	FH Country Report 2007 http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2007&country=7131
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	[2a]	USSD Country Reports on Human Rights 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100593.htm
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	[2e]	USSD International Religious Freedom Report 2007 http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90208.htm
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	[4]	FCO Country Profile, last reviewed 23 May 2007 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019744936800
	[5a]	HRW World Report 2007 http://hrw.org/englishwr2k8/docs/2008/01/31/bahrai17594.htm
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