

The foundation of modern Bahrain

Written by H.E. Ahmed Mohammed Al Mannai on 14 February 2019 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

Bahrain's National Action Charter laid the foundations of the nation as a representative democracy and constitutional monarchy



Photo credit: Bahrain Ministry of Information Affairs

Today, February 14 Bahrain marks the anniversary of its National Action Charter, the document that laid the foundations of the nation as a representative democracy and constitutional monarchy.

The Charter was acclaimed by Bahrainis – a national vote on its adoption in 2001 saw 98.41 per cent in favour, with a turnout of 90.2 per cent.

This year, on the 18th anniversary of the historic vote, Bahrain honours the document as the Charter of Gold.

The Charter lays down the principles of Bahrain's government – the division between the executive, legislative and judicial branches, the establishment of an elected Council of Representatives, the codification of governmental responsibilities, including the independence and immunity of the judiciary, and acknowledging the people as the source of all power.

But it goes further. It sets down the rights people should enjoy in Bahrain, guaranteeing personal freedoms such as freedom of religion, and marking rights such as the inviolability of personal property and equality in the eyes of the law.

Bahrain has long been a diverse nation, a trading hub that has attracted business people from the region, and further afield, for centuries.

The Charter commits Bahrain to sustainable economic development and diversification of national income. This drive is further developed in the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 and successive government action plans.

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It further commits Bahrain to a free economy, including free movement of capital. This has helped increase the attractiveness of Bahrain as a business hub – the Kingdom ranks third in the Middle East and North Africa on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index.

The Flexible Worker Permit, a first in the Gulf Cooperation Council, creates further opportunities for both employers and employees in the private sector. The US State Department cited the Flexi-Permit as a key reason for moving Bahrain into Tier 1 status in its 2018 Trafficking in Persons report.

Agencies such as the Bahrain Economic Development Board and Tamkeen, which supports small- and medium-sized enterprises, help drive private sector growth and attract investment. Bahrain's regulatory environment allows 100 percent foreign ownership for most sectors. Operating costs are an average of 30 percent lower than regional neighbours.

The public sector plays an increasingly important role in Bahrain's economy, and the Kingdom's strategy to transform the private sector into the main driver of growth and employment is delivering clear results.

The financial and banking sectors are leading non-oil growth and account for 15.8 percent of GDP in mid-2018. Foreign direct investment reached \$830 million in 2018, while real GDP grew by an estimated 2.0 per cent, with non-oil growth at 2.7 per cent.

All of this development is conducted in line with the sustainable vision laid down in the National Action Charter – a vision later expressed globally in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which Bahrain readily adopted.

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The Charter also sets out Bahrain's international role, both within the Gulf Cooperation Council and

further afield. Bahrain's diplomatic service, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, has successfully built a network of international alliances and partnerships based on respect for the sovereignty of countries and good neighbourliness and building bridges through understanding.

The Charter commits Bahrain to core principles of peaceful settlement of disputes and a conviction that world and regional peace is a core, strategic goal that justifies the greatest effort. Bahrain's foreign policy is committed to promoting global solidarity and improving human security. Bahrain is committed to the UN Charter and international laws and rules.

To mark its diplomatic achievements, by Royal decree Bahrain's Institute of Diplomacy will be transformed into a special academy for diplomatic studies, named for His Highness Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, the pioneer of Bahraini diplomacy.

All these achievements have been earned as a result of the vision laid out in the National Action Charter. And the Charter continues to guide Bahrain's policies, and the implementation of those policies, to this day.

There is more progress to be made, of course, but on this day Bahrainis acknowledge the progress achieved so far.

About the author

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