

Bahraini parliament rejects lifting trade embargo on Israel

By Ahmed Hamida | Morocco TIMES
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The Bahraini parliament has rejected the government decision to repeal the economic boycott of Israel and urged it to re-enact a decades-old law of economic embargo on the Jewish state.

The decision of the 40-member lower house of parliament was a blow to the Bahraini government which was trying to persuade its people that the drive was in compliance with the Gulf state's free trade agreement with the United States.

The government, led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, tried to explain the reasons for lifting the ban and to contain the growing standoff with deputies who had been calling for the re-imposition of the embargo.

Instead, the parliament urged the government to reopen an office responsible for blocking Israeli imports into the local market.



Last month, Bahrain said that it lifted the ban in line with the provisions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signed with the US in September 2004, which calls for open trade with all members.

The FTA was endorsed in July by the deputies who are now saying that they were not made aware of the implication that they were legitimising trade with Israel. The US Congress has not yet ratified the deal.

In a bid to override the discord, the Bahrain government said that Manama would not have any form of normalisation with Israel and would not impose Israeli goods on its citizens, but Islamist MPs blamed the US for seeking to impose the Israeli entity on the Arab states through agreements and pacts.

The move makes Bahrain the first of the six Arab states of the Gulf to abolish its trade boycott of Israel, although others, such as Qatar and Oman, have taken limited steps in that direction.

Bahrain, which hosts the base of the US Navy's 5th Fleet, signed the free trade deal with the United States last year, becoming the first Gulf state to do so.

The Arab embargo against Israel goes back to the 1960s when the Arab League declared a boycott of all Israeli companies and products. A blacklist was drawn up that featured Western companies doing business with Israel. However, the boycott was heavily eroded after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994 signed peace treaties with Israel.