

# BAHRAIN

*A monthly newsletter issued by the Bahrain Freedom Movement*

## We Are Ready for Democracy, Are You?

**They Insist People Are not Ready for Political Participation, They Are Wrong**

As the Kuwaitis go to the polls on 5th October to elect members of the first National Assembly in six years, questions are being asked about the future of the political movement in the Gulf region. Years ago, Kuwaiti elections had rarely moved an eyebrow among spectators, but changes in the political realities have made such an event an important issue which forms the basis of serious political debate. The political echelons in other Gulf countries are even more interested in the subject, not because they like democratic practices, but because of their implications and the possible consequences that may follow in the region.

When the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah dissolved the parliament in July 1986, there was a major outcry in the country, and the opposition led a campaign against the Al Sabah family to force a return to democracy. The campaign had little effect, and the government, supported by regional powers, introduced the idea of a National Council, half of whose members were elected and the rest nominated by the government. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces and the subsequent war of liberation made a return to the constitutional practices a foregone conclusion. The Al Sabahs were under immense pressure to abandon the idea of an elected assembly. The Saudis lobbied intensely to prevent a return to the constitutional life but the post-war Kuwaitis have, by now, been transformed into a more liberal society and would not accept anything less than elections on the basis of constitutional articles.

The results of the Kuwaiti elections may not be so important. What is at issue here is the idea of a constitutional assembly, not nominated by the Emir but elected by the people. At the moment, the Saudis are trying hard to market their brand of reforms announced by King Fahd last February. Here, the "Guardian of the Holy Haramain" had promised to form a Consultative Council whose members and their powers would be decided by himself. The government in Riyadh did not wish to be seen isolated in the Gulf vis-a-vis the programme of reforms. Kuwait has thus been under enormous pressure from Riyadh to abandon constitutional elections and follow the Saudi form of consultation. Having failed to achieve this, the Saudis resorted to bullying in order to force Kuwait to abandon elections. It is said that the Saudi armed forces had crossed into Kuwait three months ago and established a station 14 miles inside Kuwaiti territory. This is in addition to their occupation of the small island of "Garoah" following its liberation from the Iraqis. A state

of strained relations has thus clouded the relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at a time of serious rift in the Gulf alliance known as the Gulf Cooperation Council.

In addition to this the inter-Gulf relations have deteriorated sharply in the past year, a development which has worried outside powers especially the United States of America and Britain. (See Voice of Bahrain No. 9). This collapse in the inter-Gulf relations has forced outside powers to intervene in an attempt to

salvage what could be salvaged before it is too late. It is now clear that the GCC countries are being instigated to take part in the controversy over the three islands in the Gulf. A small boundary issue is being treated with utmost prominence instead of being treated in a quiet diplomatic way. Many reasons are mentioned to explain this sudden eruption of hostilities in order to assess the situation but what is known is that the issue is an artificial one and is unlikely

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## Unconstitutional "Reforms" Are Underway

In what seems to be a calculated leak to the Arabic London-based financial daily (Al Aalam Al Youm) of 28 August, some government sources spoke of a royal decree being finalised to pave the way for an appointed national assembly. This was followed by press reports that on 17 September Saudi Arabia appointed an ex-minister (Mohammed bin Ibrahim bin Jbair) to head a power-less Shura Council for advising the King.

Reports have circulated coming of contacts made by the prime minister with some personalities like Mr. Jasim Murad (who had been an MP in the previous parliament). These were aimed at convincing some quarters of the necessity of joining an appointed assembly. It has also been indicated that the prime minister was keen to gain the support of some figures whom the people have respect by the people.

In any case, the government will be cornered. If no announcement is made, then Al Khalifa will have a far worse record than the present one, when even the backward Saudis have announced their appointed council. If something less than an elected parliament is proposed then there is the task of convincing the public that this is a genuine body.

Bahrain is facing a bleak future both economically and politically. Oil is expected to dry out around the year 2003. Until then the government must find an alternative to this source which amounts to more than 60% of the total budget. If the Al Khalifa dare to explore the oil-rich islands of Hawar, the Qataris will react with the use of force. The latter know the weakness of Al Khalifa and how unpopular they are with people of Bahrain. This is why the Al Khalifa have been refraining from mobilising the public in the armed forces for fear of an

armed uprising. Instead they have been granting Bahraini citizenships (in mass scale) to foreign soldiers. However, money cannot guarantee loyalty when it comes to matters of life and death.

The government has failed to create a viable and dynamic economic base in the light of vicious competition from other Gulf states, especially the Dubai free zone. Taxing the income of people will not be feasible. The people have long been left on the margin and feel alienated from a tribe which monopolised power and wealth and resorted to all means of suppression to quell opposition.

Above all the problem lies with concept of "state" advocated by the tribal government. State is effectively defined in a tribal way. The head of the tribe is the boss. If you want something from his majesty all you have to do is to plead and ask for his generosity, mercy and kindness. His open majlis (i.e. court) is perceived to solve every major and minor problem. The Amir is allocated half a million dinar (\$1.3 million) every month from the budget to finance his gifts, gratitudes etc.. All you have to do is to show your allegiance and a tiny portion of this may end up in your pocket. If you don't like this way of governing and if you are seeking a more civilised way of running a state, then the royal family has prepared for you prisons. Interrogation and torture is of high standard with British advisers and managers.

As the 21st century approaches, Bahrain is going backward. The opposition is more enlightened and determined to stand against dictatorship. The Al Khalifa, we believe, will find themselves losing their fight against global, regional and local waves of change towards democracy and free society.

## Beheaded for Being A Shia

Mr. Sadeq Abdul Karim Malallah, 25, was an aspiring young man living in the town of Qatif in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Last month he was no longer there. His headless corpse was left for several hours in the town for the public to see it to draw the proper lesson. The head was two metres away and was staring at the sky.

The martyr was accused by a Wahhabi court of swearing at God and his Messenger, a capital offence in the Islamic Law. He was thus condemned to death by sword. The circumstances of the incident are nevertheless different. It is known that the victim had been opposing the Saudi regime for many years and had been jailed in 1986. One year later he was released but continued to be harassed. The fact is that Mr. Malallah was a Shia Muslim opposing the tribal Saudi regime. He was condemned to death on both accounts. In a society which is in the grip of a totalitarian regime such as the Saudi one, fact is always the victim, and Malallah, is yet another victim in the Wahhabi-run Arabian peninsula.

## Un-Royal Marriage

### The Tribal Rule is: Outsiders Are Not Welcome in Al Khalifa Circles

An interesting story has recently leaked to the public in Bahrain. It is a love story in a sense and would have attracted the interest of the tabloid press in the West. It may be as interesting as the stories of the affairs of some members of the British royal family or those of Bill Clinton, the presidential candidate of the United States.

One of the daughters of the Emir of Bahrain fell in love with one of the stewards of the palace. And in order not to extend the relationship further, and to avoid illegitimate pregnancy, the steward went to the Emir asking for the hand of his daughter.

The reaction of the Emir was hysterical. He immediately convened a meeting for the Al Khalifa Council (which includes senior members of the ruling family) to discuss the issue. The verdict was that any Al Khalifa member cannot marry a non-Al Khalifa.

One attendant told the Emir that an artist called Wahid Khan, had married a female from the ruling family. The Emir became angry, demanded Mr. Khan and his spouse and asked them to divorce. The couple refused to obey the order, and the Emir asked them to leave the country and not to come back until they have divorced each other. The couple is now in exile. They must be wondering why on earth should this unholy tradition be kept in place in the twentieth century.

## Cleared After 80 Months in Jail

### The Story of Hussain Nejadi, the Banker

For the first time in seven and a half years, a man in his early fifties, set foot outside the doors of the notorious Jao Prison in Bahrain. Mr. Hussain Nejadi finally won the day and joined his family after a change of heart in the Palace of Rafa'a. For almost eighty months the man had to endure the solitude of his cell not knowing his crime.

What Mr. Nejadi knows is that he had been the chairman of the Arab-Asian Bank when the Ministry of the Interior, Sheikh Mohammad Al Khalifa ordered his detention on 23rd April 1985. Despite his pleas of innocence, he remained a hostage and would not be released. His family won a reprieve twice during the first few months, but the decision to jail the man was not a legal one; it was political.



Hussain Nejadi: Victimised for his stands

According to the news of his release leaked to the press which published it on 22nd September 1992, Mr. Nejadi "was cleared by the Supreme Court of the last charge levelled against him". However, the charge was not specified but is assumed to be related to the one mentioned in his 10-minute appearance in front of the Bahraini Court on 14th October 1985. That court followed the earlier two trials which had cleared Mr. Nejadi of any financial misconduct. Having failed to justify his continued detention, the Ministry of the Interior set up a new charge against Mr. Nejadi claiming he had embezzled the bank of US\$ 2 million, something he had denied throughout his ordeal. In the brief court appearance the prosecution, whose members were from the Security Service, claimed the defendant had defrauded the Bank of the said amount but produced no evidence. That claim had never been mentioned in the original lawsuit in the earlier trials. It took the Interior Ministry almost six months to prepare its claim, and then it took the Bahraini courts seven more years to prove the innocence of the man.

But what did really happen that could have landed Mr. Nejadi in such a serious trouble?

The story goes back few years back when the Minister of the Interior borrowed money from the Arab-Asian Bank (AAB) of which Mr.

Nejadi was the chairman. The loan was to fund a building project which included the construction of the building which was to house the Bank later, and which is known as the "Diplomatic Tower". The AAB was established in 1975 with the help of Mr. Nejadi. When the time came for the Minister to start paying back, he asked for a rescheduling of the loans. The management proposed several ways to settle the problem, among which a shared ownership of the tower, but he refused. Instead, he suggested paying only part of the original sum and without any interest.

On 3rd April 1985 the Board of Directors of the Bank convened a lengthy meeting which went on until 2.00 am, but were unable to reach



Mohammed Bin Khalifa: Robbed the Bank

a conclusion. Mr. Nejadi had booked on a flight overseas on a business trip. His passport was confiscated immediately after the meeting and he could not make the trip.

Here the "the Middle East Financial Group" of Luxemburg which is owned by the Bin Mahfood Family was asked to "salvage" the AAB. After deliberating the matter, the Group turned down the deal, but after pressures from the government, the Group agreed to buy the business for US\$ 70 million. Following this arrangement, Mr. Nejadi resigned from his post. He was replaced by the Manager of the "Bahraini Company" which is a subsidiary of the National Commercial Bank which is owned by the Bin Mahfood family. On 23rd April 1985 Mr. Nejadi was arrested. The Bahrain Monetary Agency managed to get hold of the private papers of Mr. Nejadi which included papers relating to Swiss companies in his ownership from his solicitor in Switzerland. The Agency also sent some of its lawyers to the offices of London-based company, among which was one known as "High Tec" which are linked to Mr. Nejadi.

Seven and a half years later, Mr. Nejadi is a free man having been cleared of all charges set up against him simply because he had refused the request of the Interior Minister to write off his debts to the Arab-Asian Bank.

*Home Thought*

# The Art of Marching Backward

Rumours have it that Al Khalifa family is apparently thinking of introducing some public participation in the country. Don't hold your breath very long. They have not been transformed into democrats. Far from it, there are no Rafsanjanis, or Gorbachevs in Bahrain. If the rumours, published in an obscure newspaper called "Al Aalam Al Youm" or The World Today, are confirmed, then the ruling family are practicing one of their favourite hobbies: marching backward.

You would expect, in a country which had an elected National Assembly some two decades ago, the next step forward would be giving such an assembly a new life line and expanding its role. Instead, what is proffered is an appointed council, or a few dozens of unelected government employees trying to create a false atmosphere of openness.

The Gulf is full of similar misscouraged institutions. Qatar has a very ineffective assembly, its members are chosen by the ruler every four years. Thus, members tow the government line. Otherwise, there is no come back. They draw high salaries and other privileges, use their official contacts to advance their own commercial interests, and provide the government with a fig leaf of legitimacy (mind you, the Qatari rulers require a fig tree to provide some concealment). When some Qatari nationals demanded more openness and democratic practices they were rounded up and harassed. Some were even threatened with arrest.

Down, in the United Arab Emirates, they also "enjoy" a life with this great farm of democracy?

The point about these "Shoura Councils" or whatever they are named from time to time, is that they ridicule the rulers and insult the intelligence of the people by appointing their members, the Gulf ruling families are bluntly saying to the people that they are not capable of electing their representatives in these councils and that foreign advisers are more aware of people's needs than the people's themselves, and that they have more right to shape this generous progers than the whole of the nation.

Back to the "democratic" coup in Bahrain. Why now? You win no prizes for guessing. Since August 1975, when the Emir dissolved the elected National Assembly, the country has been ruled by his decrees. The wealth of the Island has been squandered. The budget deficit is mounting every year, while the ruling family goes on in a craze of extravagant spending. Not on social services or on investment but mainly on personal and security matters, and on polishing their image. Meanwhile their standing is getting weaker every day, both inside and outside the country. This intum tarnishes their image, which needs money to repolish, and so on, a vicious circle.

This is paralleled with an iron fist policy commanded by Colonel Ian Henderson and the P.M. Khalifa bin Salman. It continues to be

repressive as ever, arresting and torturing opponents of the regime. This has ensured Bahrain a permanent and ever expanding space in the annual reports of Amnesty International, and often human right organisations. Moreover, the United Nations Committee for Human Rights (UNCHR) is keeping Bahrain under observation for 1992, to monitor government's practices. An easy task, no doubt, since it is almost very familiar.

On the other hand, the government relations with its neighbours and partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council have been deteriorating, especially in the last two years. Before the second Gulf War, many schools and hospitals, for example, were being built by Abu Dhabi and Kuwait, allowing the Bahrain government to spend more on security. Now the two Emirates have closed the tap. Moreover, Kuwait has been channelling most of its reconstruction projects, through Dubai, rather than through Bahrain as they had promised to do so. This prompted the infamous pro-Saddam noises made by Khalifa bin Salman. In the mean time, U.A.E with Dubai spearheading total economic and legal liberalisation, is starving Bahrain of foreign investment. As with Qatar, relations remain as nasty as it has always been. AL Thani of Qatar lays a claim on some islands and sea reefs and are conducting an arms race, which Bahrain can't possibly afford.

With this background in mind, disastrous failures of internal and external policies, the new rumour is not surprising. But it is pathetic. Surely the government knows that not many Bahrainis would take an appointed council seriously. Bahrainis are not envious of Qatari or Omani, let alone Saudi Arabian style of government. Indeed, very few people elsewhere are. But they witness with some envy the situation in Kuwait. Therefore, the minimum demands are clear. Return an elected National Assembly, allow a public dialogue and lift the state of emergency. The latter means freeing all political prisoners, implementing the 1973 Constitution and abolishing the notorious State Security Law.

Still, this would take us back to where we used to be in 1975. To go forward implies things more. The new elected forum can subject government policy to public scrutiny, especially its economic strategy. It may also mean forming a committee of lawyers to investigate human rights violations, including the death-by-torture of 8 young people in as many years.

Otherwise, the government is marching backward. Usually when you do that, you are likely to fall. Sadly, however, our government is so skillful in this form of exercise, often with its eyes shut. So, don't be surprised if you hear about the Emir's generosity for allowing 30 or 40 businessmen to provide a talking shop from which the people's voice is totally absent. This may provide an illusive comfort for his autocratic regime. But sooner or later, the magician will become the victim of his tricks.

# Saddam-Style Policies Haunt the People of Bahrain

Two British and three Swedish crossed Iraqi territories by mistake. Iraqi courts sentenced them to imprisonment of seven and ten years. These are outrageous sentences and are incomprehensible, because the judiciary in Iraq is nothing more than a political tool used by a dictator to punish his enemies, potential enemies and those related to his enemies. Saddam must be condemned for all the atrocities carried out against Iraqi, Iranian, Kuwaiti, British, Swedish and other people.

Equivalently, all those who practice Saddam-style policies, not least, the Bahraini Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. In Bahrain and during the last two decades up until now, many hundreds of young men were sentenced for long terms of imprisonment. All were sentenced by memos from the Prime Minister and Interior Minister to the State Security Court which is presided by members of the ruling family. When an Egyptian judge called Ibrahim Nassar protested in the late seventies to accept a memo from the prime minister specifying the sentences to be passed in one of the political cases, he was sacked immediately. As an honourable judge, he did his best to expose other hired judges upon his return to Egypt.

In other cases, when several distinguished personalities approached the Prime Minister enquiring about harsh sentences passed on a group of young men, he blatanly answered: we are teaching them a lesson!

One wife of a political detainee who kept on asking about the fate of her husband at the Security and Intelligence Services (SIS) headquarter at Al Qalaa was told by Ian Hunderson (head of SIS) that her husband will serve three years in jail. After a short period the husband appeared in court and was sentenced for three years exactly.

It would be unacceptable to Britain, for example, to condemn Saddam for his unjust sentencing of innocent people when the victims are British, while be silent and probably support others like Khalifa and Henderson who are really not better than Saddam. These double-standard policies cannot contribute positively towards the establishment of peace and tranquility of the world. Turning a blind eye to the practices of the Security Service of Bahrain results only in further tension and, possibly, bloodshed. What is at stake here are the human values, the people of societies governed by dictators and despots like Saddam of Iraq and Al Khalifa of Bahrain. Flooding the region with military hardware and the most sophisticated intelligence expertise will not lead to a better life as long as the situation at the internal front remains tense due to repressive policies.

The region requires peace. This can only be achieved if there is justice and security for individuals as well as states. Saddam, Khalifa, Henderson and the like are obstacles to the creation of civilised societies.

# We Are Ready for Democracy, Are You?

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to fade away abruptly. But it is also unlikely to result in armed confrontation although the atmosphere is charged and the feelings are running high. The Iranians are insisting they had done nothing to jeopardise the status quo with regards to rules and regulations governing the island of Abu Musa since its seizure by the Shah in 1971. The understanding between the Shah of Iran, the Saudi and the British governments was that the Shah would relinquish his claim to sovereignty over Bahrain and in return he would be allowed to seize the three islands of Abu Musa, the lesser and the bigger Tumb, all of which were under the control of the Emirate of Sharjah.

For twenty years the status quo was maintained, and no attempt was made to violate it. It now seems that the issue of these islands had become a convenient way of bringing about a consensus among the Gulf regimes whose relations were becoming tense since the end of the

war of liberation of Kuwait. Moreover, a tense political atmosphere helps restrain pro-democracy forces in the Gulf and saves the regimes the embarrassment of failing to initiate a serious programme of reforms. Also, the Iraqi issue is becoming more volatile and a political change in Baghdad seems imminent. In this case, the Allied powers believe, Iran must not be given the chance to have a major role in Iraqi affairs. A buffer zone of 10 Km has been established along the Iraq-Iran border to prevent incursions by Iraqi Mujahideen from the Iranian side. This is similar to the security belt established by the Israelis in South Lebanon.

The changes in the geo-political map of the Gulf region is thus being redrawn in a way which ensures the stability of the tribal regimes in order to secure the flow of oil at the current prices. Experts say these prices in real terms are less than they had been 20 years ago, i.e., before the oil boom that followed the 1973 war. In this process, it seems, the western powers are ready to sacrifice the principles of democracy and human rights if there is slightest chance that upholding them may result in a change in the political balance in the region. The result is total abandonment of the idea of political reforms in most Gulf countries, apart from Kuwait whose circumstances are different.

Bahrain, for example, is waiting for a positive step from the government in the direction of reforms. So far this has not been forthcoming. The country has an outstanding record on the issue of violation of human rights on a wide scale. Despite the changes in the political atmosphere in the world, arrests, torture and other forms of human rights violations have not abated. The country is still being governed by Emergency Laws, and the notorious State Security Law of 1974 is still in place. This Law empowers the Minister of the Interior to order the detention of any political suspect for up to three years without charge. The period of detention is renewable. Furthermore, not a single political prisoner has been set free before he has served

the full duration of his sentence. Almost all political prisoners (of whom more than 100 are still in jails) were accused of opposing the Government's policies vis-a-vis the Iraq-Iran war. Saddam Hussain had always been considered an evil by Bahraini people and opposition to his war efforts against Iran was natural and spontaneous. Officially, the Al Khalifa are now in agreement with the prisoners in their anti-Saddam stands, but this has no value when it comes to relations between the government and the people.

The lack of progress on the internal front in the GCC states means the region is by no means politically stable. As long as the rights of the people are ignored, no let-up in the confrontation, whether active or passive, between the people and the regimes is expected. The notion that the region is not yet ready for democracy must be abandoned, since it implies total disregard to the people's ingenuity, human rights, intellectual abilities, and political skills. Infact, the reverse is true. Whilst the people are asking for political participation, the tribal regimes are not yet ready to stomach idea that the people have a natural right to share the responsibility of running their own affairs. Unless a transformation of attitudes of the regimes towards their people is achieved, the political stalemate is set to continue. This is a dangerous prospect giving the limitations of human patience.

In the new world it is incoceivable to see old-style regimes continue their policies of suppression within their countries. If human right issues are of value in the international arena, they must be debated at the highest political level. If in the sixties and seventies the Americans made a condition for improving relations with the then Soviet Union to improve its human right records, the United Nations must also be aware of the continued oppression being practiced by governments of countries which are members of the United nations. Practices alien to the spirit of the United Nations Charters especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1947 must be scrutinised and regimes which continue such practices must be warned and eventually made to pay for their lack of respect to human rights.

The Gulf countries today are amongst the worst cases of human rights violations. In the absence of democratic values and practices there remain states which can only be described as "Police States". The constitution is the only guarantee that practices of evil nature may be checked. This is the condition that the Al Khalifa refuse to accept as an important ingredient of any settlement with the opposition. We believe the absence of the constitutional rule is behind most of the evils engulfing our country. Since the Emir suspended the nationally-approved constitution of 1973, conditions went from bad to worse, and human rights violations continued unabated. It will be the most courageous move by the Emir if he announces the restoration of the constitution and removes the obstacles that hinder its enactment.

## More Human Rights Violations Pre-Empt "Reforms"

The Bahraini authorities continued its violation of basic human rights by detaining people and threatening others. On 14 September, for example, a religious celebration at the Grand mosque of Mo'min ended with several arrests. Mr Mohsen Abdul Karim Al Shehabi, Abdul Qadir Abdul Karim Al Shehabi, Mohammed Mohsen Abdul Karim and Abdul Ghaffar Al Gherbal, were arrested after the end of the celebration and detained for a one-day interrogation. The next day they were released without charges.

On the same day, a car belonging to the Special Branch picked-up the person in-charge of Mo'min mosque after stepping out of the mosque, Haji Mohammed Hasan (45 years old). This incident took place in front of a large number of people. In response to this provocation, a group of youth intervened and released Haj Mohammed Hasan.

Several other people were arrested at the end of processions in memory of the late Grand Ayatollah Imam Al Khoei, who died in Iraq. Mr. Majeed Milad and Zaki Abdul Majeed were arrested for several days between 22 August and 3 September. Mr Omran Hussain was interrogated on 19 September. The latter had served several years as a political prisoner.

The Arab Organisation for Human Rights published its 1992 annual report. Bahrain maintained its position as a major violator of human rights. The report examined the constitutional and legal framework which doesn't guarantee protection of basic civil rights. Insecurity of individuals continues to be a prime concern for the human rights organisation. Details of several cases were highlighted. The Organisation's newsletter Al Dhameer revealed in its August issue that a delegation visited the Bahraini ambassador in London last May. This was followed by a letter describing Bahraini authorities attitude towards those who hold opposing views. The Arab Organisation stressed that it had not yet received any response to the questions put to the Bahraini authorities.

The US-based human rights organisation "Middle East Watch" is also expressing similar concerns, while Amnesty International revealed in its annual report that the Bahraini authorities have not yet allowed them to visit the country despite earlier promises.

At home, the political prisoners at Jao prison were further subjected to harassment. Abdul Rahman Al Muraikhi, one of the jailers, ordered more restrictions on prisoners' possession of books. The prisoners of conscience are allowed only a limited quota and are barred from reading newspapers, magazines or any other current affairs publication.

From their part, the prisoners of conscience sent a petition to the ruler (Amir), the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister protesting their innocence and demanding their immediate release.