

# BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" for promoting Human and Constitutional Rights

## The GCC Summit in Oman

### The Bahraini crisis is still there, can they do anything?

As the leaders of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council meet in the Omani capital, Muscat for their annual conference, the memories of their last year's experience in Bahrain will not easily be overlooked. For the whole Gulf was trembling as the the leaders met for their 14th summit in Manama as the sounds of chanting youth and exploding gas cylinders wrecked the buildings around the Meridian Hotel where the summit was being convened.

It will be difficult to escape the fact that a serious approach to the internal problems needs to be undertaken if further political disasters are to be avoided. There has been serious political challenge to the authority of the Saudi monarchy, culminating in last month's bomb attack on a training centre belonging to the American armed forces. The internal situation in the Gulf states needs to be addressed in a more serious way, and the summit has to debate these issues. The ongoing political quagmire in Bahrain is proving more challenging to the leaders of the Gulf than it appears to be.

It is now a full year since the people of Bahrain took to the streets chanting their slogans to demand the restoration of the country's Constitution. Throughout the year the situation has remained tense with frequent outburst of public anger especially as the number of victims mounted. With more than 14 persons dead either by police fire or under torture in Ian Henderson's department, the people's psychology is becoming less accommodating with the ruling Al Khalifa family.

The government has shown no sense of responsibility or humane attitude to its own people as it ordered the use of unlimited force to quell the disturbances in towns and villages throughout the country. The prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, has gone as far as threatening to create "a blood bath" in Bahrain in order to restore "law and order". In fact the people's marches and demonstrations have been among the most peaceful expressions of opinion in the world. It was the provocation of the riot police that caused a lot of havoc in the country and the death many people. There has been no sign of goodwill from the government towards the people of Bahrain.

Besides the killings, the torture, and digestions the government has continued its policies of forcible exile of its own people. It is perhaps the only country in the world that exiles its citizens. It has refused to acknowledge the existence of dialogue with the representatives of the people, and even denied that it had ever talked peace with the five imminent personalities who had been in jail. When these people

spoke out and detailed the agreement reached with the government last August, the information minister repeatedly denied that his government would engage in dialogue with the opposition. He often stressed that it was not the policy of the government to talk to the opposition and that the Amir only could decide what to give and what to take.

The Al Khalifa ruling tribe has been obsessed with the idea that its main goal was to restore the credibility and supremacy of the government. The events of the last twelve months has left it exposed as the weakest regime in the Gulf in terms of its internal popularity. When tens of thousands took to the streets to greet the release of the opposition leaders in September and then to express solidarity with them when they staged a hunger strike in October, it was seen by observers as a referendum against the Al Khalifa whose popularity had sunk to the bottom. The use of force to quell the disturbances was seen as a determining factor against the government and an indication that things were getting out of control.

The government could have absorbed the situation by engaging in dialogue with the proponents of the popular petition which was signed last year by 25,000 people. There is now a total agreement among the people of Bahrain that there can be no way out of the crisis without a substantial reduction of hostile attitude from the government side. The governmental threat to create "a blood bath" is not conducive to the cause of peace and stability of the country. No amount of threats or hostile attacks may force the people to abandon their demands. The only thing they can achieve is to cause more stiffness in the public attitude and more steadfastness.

There are encouraging examples in other Gulf states which indicate wiser attitudes by the rulers of those states towards their people. The Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Saeed, has issued a decree pardoning all political prisoners, a step that was welcomed by the people of Oman as well as those campaigning on behalf of these prisoners. All in all there were 139 political prisoners in a country with a population of more than 2 million people. Among them were the 127 who had been arrested last year and accused of affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood organisation. Some of them had been sentenced to death, but their sentences were later commuted to life imprisonment. In Kuwait the government had dissolved the State Security Court, which had been in action since the Eighties. The dissolution was again welcomed by the Kuwaiti people and international human rights organisations campaigning for

improvement of human rights in the region. The Qatari government has dropped censorship on its local press, a step that is of a great importance in a region that is notorious for its rigid rules of censorship. It also intends to organise the country's first municipal elections, a step which is also indicative of the awareness of the new ruler of Qatar of the importance of modernising the political system. It is also possible that the Shura Council of Qatar become an elected body in a year or so.

Even the Saudi monarch, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz did take steps to reduce the tension in his country. In 1986 and 1993 he issued an amnesty to all political prisoners, a step that led to a great relief at the time. It is only the Al Khalifa whose obsessive hold on power in Bahrain who have no tradition of releasing any political prisoner before he has served the full sentence. There are now political prisoners in Bahraini jails who have spent more than 14 years in jail. One person, Majeed Marhoon serve 23 years in jail before his/her release in 1991. It is therefore logical to expect the steadfastness of the Bahraini opposition in the face of the Al Khalifa rule.

There can be no going back on the issue of the restoration of the Constitution especially after twenty years of immense suffering. The rulers of the Gulf have a duty to understand the cause of irritation of the people of Bahrain, and do their best to stop the excesses of the Al Khalifas in Bahrain. It is understandable that they want to express a show of solidarity amongst themselves, but that does not prevent them from exercising their power to put an end to the crisis in Bahrain through persuasion and even threats that the continuation of the crisis in Bahrain may become a regional problem that could have a disastrous outcome not only for the Al Khalifas but for the whole region. It is this frankness and firm stands and policies that may transform the GCC from a mere gathering of heads of states to an effective alliance capable of solving local and regional problems. The problem in Bahrain is not merely an economic one. The core issue is the absence of any form of political representation and absence of any respect for human rights. The security of the state and of the region is coupled to the security of the individual to live honourably in his/her country.

The people of Bahrain will continue their peaceful struggle and will face the terror of the Al Khalifa with brave resolve and determination to achieve their goals: the reinstatement of the Country's Constitution, the repeal of the State Security Law, the release of all political prisoners and the return of all exiles.

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## While the government threatens a blood bath The opposition consolidates its action and calls for dialogue

\* 1 November: At 9.00 pm, some 85,000 people gathered in Bani Jamra, north-west of Bahrain to listen to the statement made by Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri declaring the end of hunger strike that lasted ten days. Sheikh Al-Jamri gave details of the agreement reached with the Bahrain government in August. He explained how the deal was struck and announced the names of the people who witnessed the meeting between himself and both the interior and labour ministers back in August.

The government did not comply with its promise to release all political detainees by the end of September, and instead, many teenagers were put on trials accused of political activities. This, Al-Jamri stated, created a charged atmosphere that was about to erupt. The hunger strike came to regain the initiative and notify the government of the grave consequence of the continuation of political deadlock.

The statement made it clear that the decision to end the hunger strike was made to give the government an opportunity to rectify the situation by healing the wounds and establishing serious dialogue.

\* 5 November: In a meeting held on Sunday 5th of November, six security officers delivered what amount to an ultimatum to the seven opposition leaders who staged a hunger strike for ten days between 23 October and 1 November. The meeting was held at the Isa Town Police Headquarters and was attended by senior security personnel including: Sheikh Abdul Aziz Atteyatalla Al-Khalifa (Head of the Investigation Committee that detained 5,000 people and killed two under torture since last December), Ahmad Abdul Rahman Bu-Ali deputy of Ian Henderson for administrative affairs, Abdulla Musallam, as well as three other officers.

The seven opposition leaders went to the headquarters accompanied by their lawyers, but the latter had to wait outside at the request of the security officers. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Atteyatalla Al-Khalifa stated that "the aim of the meeting is to pass a warning to you that you must not lead prayers in mosques outside your residential areas, that you must not contact any opposition group or news organization outside or inside the country, that you must not issue any statement, that you must not gather anywhere without prior permission, that the security forces will use all its authorities to crack-down any mass gathering".

Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri replied that "this is an unacceptable attitude and a very negative response to our contributions in calming down the situation. We had an agreement with the Interior Ministry, and this was violated by the government. We also requested the lawyers to stay out of this meeting because you requested so. We demand that you write all these warnings on papers. We do not consider these threats to be the official position of the political leadership".

The meeting ended with both sides preparing themselves for the worst to come. On the same day (5 November) both the prime minister and crown prince were quoted with hawkish statements by local media. The prime minister stated that "security and stability on top of our priorities", while the crown prince implicitly

declared the preparedness of his special unit for the crackdown by praising "skills of the special unit".

Following the stormy meeting the local press published an announcement on 6 November by the Interior Ministry amounting to a declaration of a state of emergency. The latter declared that any gathering of more than five people would be dispersed and, if necessary, fire arms would be used. Lorries packed with riot police were deployed in all areas where previous gatherings took place.

The opposition leaders who received the ultimatum defied these measures and declared them illegal. The many tens of thousands of people who participated in the gatherings in the past few days have complied with the request of their leaders to stay calm and avoid street clashes. At the same time, it was made clear that neither the opposition leaders nor their followers considered the government's action as legal or moral and hence "these measures will be resisted by all means".

The government of Bahrain is losing yet another golden opportunity to settle the crisis. Instead of adopting a rational approach, the ruling Al-Khalifa family wrongly decided to warn that they will re-use violence against the peaceful opposition movement. The military man installed as president of Bahrain University issued an instruction on 6 November notifying the university guards that from now onwards the Interior Ministry will be fully in-charge of the university security. This provocative act is not only undermining the standard of the university but is also exacerbating the situation by providing yet another proof of the ill-intentions of the ruling family.

Military forces have been deployed around strategic locations in the country as part of the un-wise moves by the government.

A campaign of rumours and distortion of facts has accompanied these oppressive measures. Hassan Al-Laqaees of the London-based Saudi-financed Al-Hayat newspaper wrote two false news items on 8th and 9th of November. On 8th November, he assigned statements to Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri that never took place. Quotations were made to a speech which can be viewed by video and which proves that non of what Al-Laqaees reported was true.

Similarly, on November 9th, Al-Laqaees claimed that six opposition leaders (including Sheikh Al-Jamri) pledged for a pardon from the Amir before their release last August and September. All the opposition leaders have declared their positions clearly by falsifying these inaccuracies. The reporter published extracts from a letter he alleged to have been sent by opposition leaders to the government. Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain stated "we can never apologize because we did not commit any mistake in calling for the rights of the people". All other leaders have reiterated the demands of the people, most important of which is the reinstatement of the constitution and parliament. They said they would pursue these goals in every peaceful way.

The few days that followed witnessed a range of governmental provocative measures as part of attempts to intimidate the opposition.

While the Bahraini people continued their normal lives, the security forces were charged with intimidating the public. For example on 12 November, a bus taking students to schools was stopped by the riot police near Qadam area. The students were savagely attacked and beaten with electronic batons by the security forces for no obvious reason. Similarly, these police units, have been going around the houses after midnight and disturbing the public. At several occasions, they were seen banging and damaging the front doors of opposition activists. Eight students from Karzakan village were arrested on 13 November and remain in detention.

In a move believed to be the signal for the new wave of crackdown on the peaceful opposition in Bahrain, the interior ministry announced, today 23 November, that a small shop in Bilad-al-Qadeem (for ironing cloths) was set-ablaze yesterday (22 November) and that a security operation is underway to find the criminals. Leaders of the opposition have confirmed that non of what happened (if it ever took place) has anything to do with the opposition.

The declaration of the oppressive campaign was preceded by a verbal warning delivered last Sunday by Dr. Faisal Al-Zeera, member of the powerless Consultative Council. Al-Zeera stated to the leading opposition figure, Sheikh Al-Jamri, that the security forces are planning for a blood bath. The opposition has been preparing itself for the crackdown. All leading figures have already contacted their lawyers in preparation for defending their peaceful and constitutional demands.

### **Bahraini workers demand their right to unionize**

The General Committee for Bahrain workers was formed in 1983 short of achieving the aspirations and demands of the Bahraini workforce. The government did not want to recognise the right to unionise as specified by the constitution, and established an organisation based on joint committees (between management and employees) in major companies. The constitutional movement sweeping the country since 1992 has influenced the executive committee and gave encouragement to demanding the development of the committee to the standard of a union. In a memo published by the executive committee published recently, the demand was officially submitted to the government, sighting shortcomings of the current structure which prevented its international recognition. Some of the points mentioned were:

- (1) Labour Law 142 merges labour and managers in joint committees, removing the independence of labour action. The permitted scope for labour is limited, weak and incapable of shouldering responsibilities.
- (2) The workers have no right to write procedures for systemising the activities.
- (3) The Committee can now be dissolved by a ministerial order, which means it has no legal structure of its own.
- (4) The Committee is not involved in any law-making process to represent labour. This itself violates Law No. 145.
- (5) The formation of workers committee is restricted.
- (6) The Committee is not allowed to have full time staff.
- (7) Absence of legal protection.

## No compromise on restoration of parliament and reactivation of the constitution

# National consensus drives the change process

The Bahraini opposition intensified its peaceful activities inside the country responding to events and taking the initiative for furthering the demands of political reforms.

On 17 November, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, delivered a statement in Al-Sadek mosque in Duraz, north-west of Bahrain, re-affirming the demands of the opposition. He called upon the government to initiate the process for political reforms. In his statement he said:

"Alongside the changes taking place in the region, we find ourselves committed to clarifying several issues to remove any misunderstanding. Some ill-intentioned newspapers attempted to mix issues in a desperate trick to damage the reputation of the people's movement that is seeking political reforms and calling for legitimate demands. These newspapers can never win because:

Firstly, the trend of the people is indignant and has nothing to do with external involvement. The trend is a result of the political situation and the accumulative problems resulting from it. The trend seeks public interests and aspires for effective involvement in a sound decision making process.

Secondly, The trend is a grass-root one and is open to all. It is not a partisan agenda. All sincere activists working for the good of the nation, whether Sunnis or Shia, Islamists or patriots, are involved without any significance to tribalism or sectarianism. The concerns and wishes of all tendencies are the same and all are united in their aims and means as have been stated in the Petitions of 1992 and 1994.

Thirdly, the trend adopts peaceful means and rejects resorting to violence, extremism or terrorism. All activities are aimed at achieving the just demands by serious and fruitful dialogue. The people responded positively and established calm since the first day of our initiative (mid-August). They will continue to preserve stability because their trend is peaceful and seeks reform. The government can assist the people by reviewing and achieving these demands.

Fourth, the aims of this trend are moderate and objective. The trend does not aim to topple the regime or de-stabilize it. Indeed, it aims for security and stability and aims at the re-activation of the constitution, restoration of the parliament, the release of all political prisoners and return of exiles. The trend of the people is not a naive one. The people understand and are aware that some of the aims can be achieved instantly and some require time for preparing necessary provisions.

The question raised is: Do these aims represent extremism or terrorism? The answer must be No. This is the real picture of the nation's trend. Why don't we see and positive response from the respected government? Is this because of the false coverage of some ill-intentioned newspapers? Why is the government creating more barriers with the people? We have stated once and again that we are prepared for dialogue and we demanded it. Up until when will the doors remain shut? Up until when will the deployment of riot police continue? Why do these police units stop a bus of students and beat them?

We witness sound political moves in the countries of the region aimed at development and stability. In one country we witnessed the removal of state-control on media and a promise for local council elections; in another we witnessed the abolition of state security law, and in a third country an amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles was declared. These types of actions are bound to enrich the trust between peoples and governments, and these actions consolidate the sincere efforts aimed at developing the countries. We have a hope that the Amir would issue an amnesty for all prisoners without distinction, allow exiles to return home, officially open the door of dialogue and hence reach the stage for achieving political demands, the most important of which is the parliament".

Another statement was made on 24 November, where Sheikh Al-Jamri offered his advice for the government for ending the crisis. He stated the following:

"Any nation may experience the types of shocking events we are having and hence sound vision is needed to find correct solutions. Any ruler facing complex and worsening economic and political situations needs advice. Such an advice must be sincere and free from cheating and political games, so that reality, even if it were bitter, is fully divulged. Such an advice must also be in the interest of the public even if personal interests are lost.

The offering of advice is the responsibility of clergy, thinkers, journalists and other people possessing influence, views or opinions. These people should live amongst the people to feel the pain and problems and be able to criticise without fear. On this basis I refer to following issues:

A. We hear these days that some proposals are being talked about by some people whom we believe are acting with true feeling of their responsibilities. But sincerity on its own is not adequate. We believe any initiative must be based on the following principles, if it were meant to succeed.

1. Broadness: Any solution must be comprehensive enough to include all tendencies and sections of the society. Any initiative lacking this factor is a partial and incomplete, and is therefore rejected. We heard that there exists some moves to improve the living conditions of the Shia community. Such moves are being led by some businessmen. This is a short-sighted initiative because it transforms the demands for political reforms to merely living conditions. Such moves are also bound to create divisions amongst the nation that has been campaigning for unified clear objectives.

2. The other element that must be considered in any initiative is the constitutional factor. Any solution lacking constitutional cover is incomplete. We hear that the respected government intends to widen the scope of the Consultative Council. Such intention is appreciated but for it to receive popular support the members of the such body must be elected by secret ballot and that such a body must possess the authorities of an independent legislature.

The people have always demanded reforms and they have declared that they seek effective

participation in the progress of the country.

B. Open letter to GCC defence and interior ministers: In the past few days, Bahrain hosted two meetings. One for the GCC interior ministers and the other for the defence ministers. These meetings reflect the concern of officials for preserving the security and stability of the region which are the aims and desires of the rulers and the ruled. I would like to say to the respected ministers:

1. We are peaceful people. We are not anarchic or violent as can be proven by all our steps that were summarised by the Petitions of 1992 and 1994 as well as our initiative for calming the situation and stopping all forms of violent protests. We achieved all this with sincerity and calmness was established.

2. Our demands are peaceful and are aimed at the interests of the country, the ruler and the ruled. We demand the release of political prisoners, return of exiles and the initiation of dialogue for solving political demands, the most important of which is the parliament. We assure the respected ministers who are the welcomed guests of their second country, Bahrain, that we are proceeding with our peaceful process and distancing ourselves from violence and anarchy.

C. Solidarity with the families of political prisoners: As a result of our visits to the families of the prisoners and according to the information we receive from inside the jails, I find myself committed to state the following:

1. The prisoners are living in misery inside small and closed rooms without any mercy. Detainees have gone on hunger strike appealing for slight improvements. The response to their plea has been further tightening of conditions and more hardship to them.

2. Some prisoners are loosing their parents (death of dear ones) while suffering the pains of separation and hardships of imprisonment.

3. Some prisoners have spent nearly 14 years away from their families and children.

4. Some prisoners were jailed during the pregnancies of their wives. They now have children and some of these children have grown-up. Other children have reached the stage of marriage without their fathers being around.

5. Many families of prisoners are living in extreme conditions while their sole bread-winners are in jail.

I did not want to state the above to attract eye-tears. I only wanted to indicate how bad the feeling amongst the public is, especially as we approach the court session on 27 November. If the court decides to approve the execution verdict then the dangerous situation will get more complicated. I request HH the Amir to practice his constitutional authorities and close this chapter of crisis by stopping the political trials and issuing orders for releasing all political prisoners.

I call on the people to gather in mosque during the coming days, especially Sunday night (before the court session of Monday) to pray to Allah to save the lives of the political prisoners".

Would the Bahraini government save this country by changing its out-fashioned police and by initiating dialogue with its people?

## Security for investment:

### Foreign investors should promote democracy in Bahrain

International investors should not quit making business in Bahrain but rather press the government to institutionalize democracy. Bahrain provides the best possible environment for foreign direct investment (FDI). The country has a developed infrastructure and sophisticated labour force. Bahrainis at large are cosmopolitan in nature, open to the outside world and welcome all sorts of technological advancements. The party that has been refusing to adapt to a changing world is the government. Foreign businesses indeed have an important role to play, namely that of pressing the authorities to live to their previous commitments including having a constitutional parliament. Most Bahrainis expect the international firms to help in bringing about a peaceful transition to some sort of democracy. The argument rests on the following conviction: that the government badly needs foreign investments, hence it is willing to listen to its demands. In fact, the authorities have brought about a great deal of services to Bahrain if only to please the investors. These, up until recently, included having BBC television services around the clock. The authorities are badly looking for investors, from anywhere. The

Bahrainis, at large, expect from executives of enterprises to demand that the government listens to popular demands. The truth is that having a parliament helps the cause of peace in the society, hence serving the official policy of enticing investors.

In the past weeks, several infrastructure industrial projects with heavy investment from Western and Japanese companies, notably Mitsubishi of Japan which will expand the petrochemical plant and the giant European ABB which won the power plant and facilities expansion contract for Aluminium Bahrain, ALBA. It would be in the interest of these companies to have a stable political environment for the payback and profitability of their investments. The authorities would do themselves a favour by appreciating popular demands, as this ends a cycle of violence and instability in Bahrain. A failure by the government to honour its pledges to run the country through a democratic system, in effect means that the government would be ready to alter commitments made to businesses as well. A democratically run Bahrain helps all sides, the government, citizens and investors alike.

### 25 Cromwell Street, Bahrain.. Could Henderson be stopped?

Fredrick & Rosemary West, a Gloucester-based (25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester) British couple who committed crimes unheard of in the history of Britain. They abused, tortured and killed their daughters and other women for the sake of sexual pleasure. The crimes of this couple lasted between 1968 and 1987 and were only uncovered in 1992.

Mr. West hanged himself before facing the jury. His wife was given ten life sentences. Before his death, he attempted to cover-up the killing of one of his daughters by claiming that she had gone to Bahrain to work for an international drug cartel. He was a terrific liar.

The atrocities committed by the Wests reminds one of what goes on in Bahrain jails at the

hands of Ian Henderson and his men where torture to extract confession goes as far as using sexual attacks on young boys of Bahrain. While the Wests were indulged in the killing of young women for sexual pleasure, the men of Henderson were busy managing the torture (including sexual abuse) and killing of young Bahrainis for selfish pleasure. When a young teenage boy, Saeed Al-Eskafy, was snatched from his family last July, he was returned dead with a mutilated body and clear signs of sexual abuse. His father wrote to the interior ministry complaining about what happened to his son. No reply was received since what happened was part of a government's policy. Could they be stopped as the Wests were stopped?

### US Congressional Group condemns Bahraini government

The US Working Group on International Women's Human Rights (a bi-partisan group comprising 11 Senators and 35 Representatives) sent a letter to the Amir of Bahrain protesting about human rights violations in the country. The letter stated "We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the suspension of Dr. Munira Ahmad Fakhro from her teaching position at the University of Bahrain. Dr. Munira Fakhro is a well-regarded academic and author of numerous works on issues related to the cause of women and democratic change in Bahrain. Her suspension from her university position resulted from her refusal to withdraw support for a petition calling for greater degree of democracy and women's participation in the political process in Bahrain.

In April 1995, Dr. Munira Fakhro along with over 300 Bahraini women signed a petition (the Bahraini Women's Petition) submitted to Your Highness calling for the restoration of the constitution and calling on security forces to observe human rights during public demonstrations which Bahrain has experienced since last

December.

The petition also called on the government of Bahrain to permit women to participate in political decision-making. Subsequently, the government pressured signers of the petition to withdraw their support. At least two women, Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam, a radio producer at Radio Bahrain, and Hessa al-Khumeiri, head of adult education at the Ministry of Education, refused to sign statements renouncing their work on human rights and democracy, and subsequently were dismissed from their jobs... The suspension of Dr. Munira Fakhro and the dismissal of her colleagues from their jobs due to their peaceful expression of opinion violated Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which is part of customary international law binding on all nations". The Congressional protest letter was preceded by similar letters of protests from leading American institutions such as the Middle East Studies of North America, Committee for International Academic Freedom and Human Rights Watc

### South African Lessons for Bahrain

Many people see strike similarities between the former Apartheid regime of South Africa and that of Bahrain. An Indian lawyer who visited Bahrain in the early fifties stated in his book that Bahrain is but another South Africa. He also indicated that prison is the nearest place for a Bahraini living in his country.

The republic of South Africa stands between two oceans, the Atlantic and the Indian. Bahrain - the name - stands for Two Seas. That fact indicates the huge difference in size of these two countries, yet it might suggest they have something in common. Bert Mapp, writer and former oil worker in Bahrain, has been in South Africa with a study group from the United Nations Association. Here are his findings.

South Africa's contrasts are extreme, both beautiful and harsh. Against a backdrop of natural grandeur rise the man made edifices of affluence, opulence, fine houses and estates, conspicuous-consumption and fashion conscious shopping malls and luxury hotels.

These represent part of the legacy of Apartheid - the other, tragic part is the gaping wounds of the vile system, the endless tracts of tin shanty townships and squatter camps wherein millions of black Africans desperately struggle to survive.

The historical development will not be unfamiliar in Bahrain. Invasions, conquest, subjugation, British presence and influence, wealth creation from precious mineral resources and cheap labour: the parallels are close.

Many years, perhaps decades, must now pass before all in South Africa will enjoy a decent life. Apart from endemic privilege for some, unemployment and hardship for many, there is routine murder and violence which rivals Algeria's.

Yet the signs of hope are clear. The mood is of confidence. People who have hit rock bottom can only go up and there is much lost time to make up. Foreign investors, sensing a new political stability, are aiding a construction boom geared to manufacturing, commerce and tourism. Confidence is largely founded on trust. The masses trust their leaders, both men and women, headed by Nelson Mandela the statesman and Archbishop Tutu the spiritual guide. In turn, the leaders trust the people.

Desmond Tutu told us we were witnessing a miracle. The deputy speaker of parliament added a qualification: the political transformation was a miracle, he said.

We saw the local government elections on 1st November, the first of their kind after the democratic election of the Government of National Unity 18 months ago. The elections went relatively smoothly. Turnout was 65 per cent or better. An elderly African woman wept when told she wasn't on the register and couldn't vote. Some polling stations stayed open till midnight - two hours late - because of the queues of voters.

The oppressed and dispossessed in South Africa, robbed of their birthright but hardened by experience, are set on a new course of democracy, equal opportunities and human rights. Are there lessons here for Bahrain?