

BAHRAIN

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The GCC summit in Muscat ended in disarray Rejecting Saudi Hegemony

The dramatic failure of the fifteenth GCC summit in Muscat last month is yet another reminder of the fragility of the situation in the troubled region of the Gulf. No amount of propaganda may obscure the fact that internal strife amongst the tribal chiefs in the states of the region is one of the most troubling phenomenon, and that the peace and stability of the region are threatened by the inter-wrangling of the regimes. Over the last two decades, and specifically since the inception of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the inter-governmental disputes have led to tensions, warmongering and even physical wars. One of the most important elements in those disputes is the desire of the Saudis to stretch their political and military muscles and maintain unlimited domination over the affairs of the other states. This has often led to friction, especially with states which aspire to a greater self-reliance, wider regional influence and more freedom in their foreign relations. The withdrawal of the new Amir of Qatar from the final session of the summit in protest over the appointment of the Saudi candidate for the post of the Secretary General of the GCC is the latest in a series of anti-Saudi policies adopted not only by Qatar but also by the Omanis, and to a lesser extent by certain quarters in the United Arab Emirates.

Although the demise of the GCC may not be imminent following the fiasco in Muscat, it will definitely lead to a period of tension and bad tempers to expect the least. It could even lead to clandestine operations by the Saudis against the present ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, whom in June 1995, had deposed his father in a bloodless coup. The father was on a foreign trip when the son assumed power in an unexpected move. In the first few months the new regime established itself with a strong leadership spearheaded by younger statesmen causing a tremor in the region. Sheikh Hamad moved to dispel any suggestions that he was embarked on destabilising the relations with Saudi Arabia. He went to the extent of embarking on a trip to Riyadh to impress King Fahd and dampen any hostile attitudes in the Saudi capital. However, it was not long before tension started to mount. King Fahd had, earlier in the year, promised to sort out all outstanding border disputes before the advent of the Muscat summit, a promise that was welcomed with scepticism. As the annual meeting of the Gulf heads of state approached with no imminent solution to any of the disputes, fears grew that feelings would erupt when the rulers met in Muscat. Qatar had earlier put forward one of her diplomats, Abdulla Al Atiyya, for the post of the Secretary General. The Saudis, to the surprise

of everyone, countered that by putting the name of her Paris ambassador, Jamil Al Hujailan, for the post. The Saudis, once again, wanted to cut the Qatari ambitions down to size, a move that was fiercely resisted by the new ruler. The three day summit was overshadowed by this issue. After all attempts of reconciliation failed, the summit was doomed to failure. The Qatari delegation withdrew in protest against the continued Saudi bullying, leaving the whole alliance in disarray.

Although several mediators are engaged in secret attempts to reconcile the antagonists, it is unlikely that their attempts will bear fruits. It now appears that a psychological war is being waged against Qatar by the Saudis. It is being conducted by proxy. The Al Khalifa of Bahrain, facing an all-out internal rebellion, are presenting themselves as anti-Qatari combatants. They are now engaged in a two-pronged warmongering exercises; on the one hand they are considering the military solution to their internal problems. In this respect the last few weeks witnessed the deployment of military units throughout the country. It was reported that up to 4000 Saudi troops had crossed the causeway linking the two countries into Bahrain. The local press reported that Bahrain's armed forces had been engaged in manoeuvres with troops from a "friendly country", a reference to Saudi Arabia. For almost a week in December the people of Bahrain were bombarded by TV shows of military exercises targeting homes, people and demonstrations. The muscle-stretching exercises were rebuffed as hollow threats that could not undermine the people's demands for the reinstatement of the country's constitution. On the other hand, warmongering by the Crown Prince was aimed at reminding Qatar of the power of his army. In fact, the minister of Defence, confirmed this by saying that his army "was ready to engage in 100 wars to defend the smallest of the Huwar islands, the main matter of dispute between the Al Khalifa and the Qataris. Furthermore, the Amir of Bahrain, prime minister and crown prince did their best to antagonise the ruler of Qatar by receiving the deposed ruler, Sheikh Khalifa at the highest level. Televised scenes of the reception were frequent and provocative.

It may be that the Al Khalifa are attempting to shift the attention away from their internal troubles by creating a new enemy outside. However, the internal situation has deteriorated last month after the Amir failed to deliver any concrete offers to the people in his speech on the National Day (16th December). Instead of softening his tone, the Amir, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, chose to use the harshest

language to threaten the constitutional movement with more violence and killings. The speech was a failure by all standards. Unlike other GCC leaders who often used their national days to soften their relations with the people by releasing political prisoners and promising a better quality of life, the Amir of Bahrain used the stick to frighten the people. His speech was a disappointment even to his closest aides. According to informed sources, he went as far as sanctioning the use of live ammunition against the peaceful campaigners, and blessed the use of torture against detainees, that has resulted in deaths.

At a time when the world is witnessing a more liberal attitude to political participation, pluralism and democratic practices, the situation in the Gulf, and especially in Bahrain, has remained stagnant. The Al Khalifa regime, the worst and the most corrupt and bankrupt of all, will be the first to be challenged by its own people. The militarisation of the country is not a solution. Silencing patriotic voices and detaining thousands of citizens, deporting some of them and torturing the rest is no guarantee against popular discontent. As the people of Bahrain welcome the new year, their hearts and souls are full of life, hope and aspirations to a better state of affairs.

Sir David Steel speaks-out for human rights in Bahrain

At the end of November, the Bahraini Embassy in London held its annual dinner at the Cafe Royale (Piccadilly) and invited many senior politicians and diplomats. The guest speaker was supposed to be Nicholas Soames, Defence Minister. But to the disappointment of the embassy and their consultants (Shandwick) Soames could not attend and Sir David Steel spoke instead. The meeting was turned upside down when Sir David expressed the "concerns about respect of human rights in Bahrain following disturbances there last year". Neither the embassy nor their consultants could do anything to stop the guest speaker who continued: "I would however recall the 1992 petition presented to HH the Amir and signed by 281 leading personalities, lawyers, university professors, religious scholars, artists and notables, expressing popular concern for the restoration of parliamentary life. I hope that Bahrain may progress beyond the consultative assembly and join Jordan and Kuwait in following cautiously in that path, the best bulwark against extremism and fundamentalism". Sir David spoke-out and his words reverberated but non of the officials present dared to comment.

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Hundreds of students snatched and beaten

Death sentence challenged

In a move bound to enflame the political situation in Bahrain, the Supreme Court of Appeal approved (on 27 November) the death sentence passed on Isa Ahmad Hassan Qambar, 27 years old. For unknown reasons this political case was transferred from the State Security Court which has no provisions of appeal to the Criminal Court. The appeal court heard from lawyers standing for the defendants that the verdicts passed on the group accused of causing the death of Sergeant Saidi were out of proportion, bearing in mind that in that period about a dozen citizens were killed by security forces. The circumstances of the event does not indicate that it was premeditated and that when clashes occurred with security forces firing live ammunition against crowds of people, then something like what happened was bound to happen.

The court also confirmed the life sentence against the second defendant, Mohammad Ali Hassan Khatam, 20 years old. The rest of the group were sentenced as follows:

Mansoor Salah Makki, 25 years old, five years sentence (reduced from life sentence), Younis Salah Mosa Al-Sanini, 22 years old, five years sentence (reduced from 10 years), Eshaq Hassan Yousif Marhoon, 20 years old, Acquitted (was 10 years sentence), Hussain Salah Mosa Al-Sanini, 20 years old, Acquitted (was 5 years sentence), Ahmad Mosa Al-Sanini, 27 years old, 5 years sentence (was the same), Hamza Majid Habib Al-Sheikh, 24 years old, five years (was the same), Hussain Mohammed Abdul Wahab Hassan, 22 years old, acquitted (was five years).

The security forces attacked groups of students of the University of Bahrain (Isa Town), who had gathered after hearing the news. Also, it was noticed that an alert declared some time ago was intensified. On the night before the court session many people attended major mosques to declare their solidarity with the

group appearing in court. Skirmishes took place all around and the situation was bound deteriorate further. On the day following the court session (28 November) several schools were attacked and 600 students were taken prisoners to Nabih Saleh Police Station for haphazard beating. Forty of them remain in jail. Al-Jabreyya and Sheikh Abdulla secondschools suffered the worst of attacks when hundreds of students were packed in lorries after being rounded up inside their classes.

On 1 December Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri delivered a strong but prudent talk at his weekly Friday sermon at Al-Sadek mosque in Duraz, north-west of Bahrain. He stated: "I refer to the incidents that took place in Al-Jaberyah and Sheikh Abdulla Schools. What happened to justify the expelling of great number of students? What happened to justify the intervention of riot police for beating and jailing the students? Where does this lead us to?" .. "Last Monday we all went through a critical stage. The trial acquitted four persons who were previously sentenced to five years. The third defendant had his sentence reduced from life to five years while those who had ten years sentence had theirs reduced to five. This gives us a hope that the casation court (Makhamat al-Tamyeez which is the top court, above the appeal court, with authority for quashing sentences) which will look into the case would quash the sentences.

Without doubt that the reduction in sentences and acquittal of others is a good thing, but the circumstance we pass through are not compatible with the other sentences. The hundreds of prisoners who remain in jail, the exiled and the problems that accumulate every day means that if -God forbids- the upper court confirms the death sentence, then the situation will be complicated and the issue of the martyrs will surface", so that those responsible for killing them are brought to justice.

Deployment of the army in a muscle show

The people of Bahrain woke-up on Sunday 10 December, to witness the tents, cabins, sand bags, armoured vehicles, automatic machine guns and military personnel that were deployed after midnight. This follows the departure of the prime minister yesterday, 9 December, on his annual absence from Bahrain. Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, brother of the Amir of Bahrain, usually leaves Bahrain during the celebration of the National Day, due on 16 December. In his absence, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, son of the Amir, assumes the position of prime minister in addition to his role as Heir Apparent and chief of Bahrain Defense Force. Sheikh Hamad is known for his preference to using his military forces for combating pro-democracy movement.

Military forces were positioned all over the country at entrances and exits of all strategic areas including the causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. Many of these military personnel do not speak Arabic and have orders to use force for frightening the people of Bahrain.

The deployment lasted until 2.00 pm, when a rushed decision seems to have been taken for withdrawing the units.

One tank rolled-over from a trailer on the road to the causeway (coming from Isa Town), creating a huge traffic jam. Bahrainis were cracking jokes about the bewildered army deployed in such a haphazard way.

Later on in the night and for the next three days, live ammunition, explosions were heard together with sirens and fighters breaking the sound barriers. When many citizens phoned the Civil Defence Directorate to enquire about the explosions, they were told that the Directorate heard no explosions or siren and things are normal. However, Al-Ayyam and Akhbar Al-Khaleej official newspapers reported that manoeuvres with friendly forces were conducted using live ammunition to smash targets and to destroy enemy positions.

On 25 December, the Amir received Qatar's deposed Amir Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani for "cordial talks" with Sheikh Khalifa. The Bahrain Defense Minister was also quoted that he is prepared to fight 100 wars for each small disputed island. The raising of these critical issues was coupled with extensive use of military forces to clamp down on opposition gatherings around the country.

Attacking freedom of expression

Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, one of Bahrain's distinguished lawyers and writers was summoned to the intelligence department in Manama yesterday 19 December. With him was Mr. Hafedh Al-Sheikh, the well-known Bahraini journalist. Both had participated alongside many other professionals and thinkers from the Gulf countries in a live programme broadcast by Radio Qatar on 7 December. The phone-in programme debated the problems faced by GCC countries and answered several questions about Bahrain's pro-democracy movement.

Mr. Al-Shamlan was subjected to intimidating treatment yesterday, 19 December, starting at 8.00 am and lasting till 10.30 pm. The harassment continued today, 20 December, in front of the investigating judge. Many lawyers volunteered to defend Al-Shamlan and Al-Sheikh. These lawyers included Abdulla Hashim, Hassan Bedaiwi, Ahmad Al-Thekair, Hassan Radhi, and Ali Al-Ayyubi. The investigating judge charged Ahmad Al-Shamlan and Hafedh Al-Sheikh with "inciting hatred to the political system in Bahrain". Failing to prove such point both Al-Shamlan and Al-Sheikh were released on bail of 500 dinar (approx. \$1500) each and both had been banned from traveling outside the country.

This attack on freedom of expression was extended further on 20 December by the arrest of Sheikh Hassan Sultan, one of the five leaders who negotiated with the interior ministry the release of political prisoners in return for calming down the situation and starting dialogue on restoration of parliament. Sheikh Sultan was arrested from his home village of Dar Kulaib (west of Bahrain) around 1.00 pm (10.00 GMT). He was made to pay 500 dinars for a sermon he delivered in a gathering.

On 18 December, the intelligence department summoned a religious scholar, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rayyash and threatened him with a revenge in the form of a car accident or a mad man random attack. Al-Rayyash returned to his mosque and delivered a sermon detailing the threats he received from the intelligence department and declared that anything happens to him is the responsibility of the government.

Also, on 20 December Mr. Mahdi Rabea, a journalist, was detained in a dawn raid on his home in Duraz. His fate is not yet known. Also on the same.

On 21 December, several dawn raids ended up in the detention of many people. Some of those known are Jasim Rahmah (Bilad Al-Qadeem), Mohammed Redha Shehab and Nadir Al-Asfoor (both from Duraz), Abdul Jalil Abdul Nabi and Ali Al-Jabal (both from Sanabis).

Many phone calls have also been made to opposition activists inside and outside the country. The phone calls are made by the Bahraini intelligence department and are full of insults, abuse and threats. While these phone calls are indicative of the low level of such people who have been torturing members of the opposition inside jails and detention centres, they are being recorded and monitored to provide a damning evidence. Experts listening to the tapes remarked that such wrong-doing is coming from a desperate and bankrupt government, and will certainly back-fire.

Bahraini opposition in a press conference at the British parliament Bid to gag peer fails

Bahraini Embassy officials in London refused an opportunity to defend their government and then tried to persuade an English peer to remain silent. Human rights parliamentary spokesman Lord Rea of Eskdale presided at a press conference in the Houses of Parliament on 14 December to mark the first anniversary of the pro-democracy uprising. He said the embassy had declined his invitation to attend and had urged him not to take part in the meeting. Lord Rea described the Khalifa regime's record on constitutional and human rights issues as "an outrage." Increasing pressure must be put on the ruling family to restore the constitution and national assembly for the sake of Bahrain's economic future and

Representatives of the Bahrain Freedom Movement reviewed events of 1995, both tragic and encouraging. After pointing out that Bahrain's Opposition was united across a range of political and religious opinions and was "evolutionary not revolutionary," speakers warned the government that there could be no turning back. "The pro-democracy movement might change its tactics but the goal of securing freedom and justice for the people remained".

Mr. Ala'a Al-Yousuf, member of the Bahraini Freedom Movement (BFM) and an Economist who worked for the International Monetary Fund in Washington DC stated that "there

are two sides for the problem. The first is the developing internal situation in the past twelve months, and the second is what will happen in the near future. The Amir delivers his annual speech at the National Day (16 December) and we do not expect the Amir to declare his intentions for restoring the constitution and parliament. We also do not expect the Amir to announce a general amnesty to reconcile the situation".

Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri, speaking for the BFM, stated that "what happened in Bahrain is a unique phenomenon that brought together all tendencies and sections of Bahrain society on a unified approach and agenda. The recent move by seven senior judges who demanded the establishment of a supreme judicial council in accordance with constitution as well as the recent moves by the Bahrain labour movement demanding their constitutional rights to unionize are but examples of how broadly based the pro-democracy movement is. On the other hand, the recent open letter to the Amir from about a hundred distinguished Kuwaiti personalities calling on him to fulfill the aspirations of the Bahraini people by restoring the constitution and parliament is another dimension adding to the strength of the popular drive for democracy". Dr. Majid Alawi, a Strategic Analyst by profession and member of the BFM, stated that

"the opposition well understands the strategic importance of the Gulf region as a major supplier of oil, but today the market power is in the hands of the purchasers and the pro-democracy movement does not affect market forces adversely. The rulers of Bahrain thought that they could play with time and matters would settle-back to the old days. We will continue to press for political reforms and the opposition will achieve its goals by all legitimate and peaceful means".

On the other hand, the opposition organized a picket later on in the evening in front of the Dorchester Hotel, central London, where the Bahrain Embassy was holding its annual dinner for celebrating the National Day. Many guests were horrified to know the extent of abuses made by the Bahraini security forces.

On 16 December, a seminar in Arabic was held at Kufa Gallery in Bayswater, London. Participants included Mr. Karim Al-Mahroos of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, Mr. Abdul Nabi Al-Ekri of the Coordinating Committee for both the Popular Front and National Front, Sheikh Ali Salman and Seyyid Haider Al-Setri. At the end of the programme a 16-minute film produced by the Bahrain Freedom Movement was played illustrating the background to the uprising and documenting the events of the past 12 months.

Street clashes ignited after a halt of 4 months

The Bahraini security forces have besieged the house of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri on the dawn of 29 December. Bani Jamra, the home village of Sheikh Al-Jamri, together with the nearby village of Duraz were encircled by units of riot police and all entries and exits to both villages were blocked. The house of Sheikh Al-Jamri and the grand Zain al-Abidin mosque (situated in front of Al-Jamri's house were both put under siege).

On Thursday night, 28 December, Sheikh Al-Jamri addressed a mass gathering in the Zain al-Abidin mosques and some 40,000 people attended for a religious celebration. The authorities had cancelled two earlier celebrations, one in Momin mosque of Manama on 25 December and the other in Al-Sadek mosque in Duraz on 26 December.

Sheikh Al-Jamri has for the last few weeks (since his release on 25 September) led the Friday prayers in Al-Sadek mosque of Duraz. Every Friday, he delivered a sermon that covered main political issues related to the peaceful campaign for the restoration of the constitution. He called on the government to respect human rights in Bahrain and treat citizens fairly. Last night the person in-charge of Al-Sadek mosque, Haji Hasan Jarallah, was summoned by the Al-Khamis police headquarters. After an intimidating experience the elderly man was forcibly taken to the mosque to be locked by police and all keys were confiscated.

The government released Sheikh Al-Jamri in September after spending six months in jail. The release was part of a deal struck with security officials whereby the government would release a thousand detainees by the end of

September and pave the way for political dialogue. Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues established calm in the country and street protest ended. However, due to differences amongst the ruling establishment non of what has been agreed on materialised and for the last six weeks the security forces have stepped up their operations detaining people and intimidating opponents.

As a result of this aggressive attitude of the Bahraini security forces, street clashes resumed on 29 December after a halt of four months. Thousands of youth starting pouring in the area defying the siege and at around 11.30 am, the security forces started attacking the gathering youth using batons and tear gas. Demonstrations erupted in Duraz around 1.00 pm and the security forces deployed rubber bullets together with tear gas. The traffic on Budayya Highway is tense and dangerous. Later in the night, Sheikh Al-Jamri accompanied by some fifty cars marched their way to the grand mosque in Al-Qufool (Manama) where he addressed a mass gathering. He also read a statement issued with his colleagues and said:

"Our beloved Bahrain enters the second year of the political crisis while the government continues its NO response to all legitimate and just demands. No solutions are looming in the horizon as the government continues to dislike dialogue with the people. The situation is increasingly becoming critical and stagnant as a result of the detentions and violations by the riot police and as a result of interrogating symbolic figures of the opposition to clamp down on freedom of opposition. What happened to Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, Mr. Hafedh Al-Sheikh

and Sheikh Hassan Sultan as a result of expressing their views are examples of the attack on freedom of expression. The stubbornness of the authorities and their determination to confiscate differing views resulted in the closure of places of worship as in the case of Noor mosque in Duraz and Momin mosque in Manama.

All these negative moves have created despair in the hearts of the people who have now given-up hope that the government may contribute any positive step toward their legitimate demands. The government is not giving a chance for peace or hope and as a result we see violence re-surfacing. The government has abused the calm that was established as a result of the opposition's initiative and proceeded with clamp-downs and settlement of scores with the opposition. Hopes faded after the Amiri speech on National Day that the crisis may be ended by consolidating the relationship between the people and government to initiate a new phase in nation-building under just, equal, secure and stable environment, so that we enter the 21st century with all pre-requisites to face challenges. Despite all this, we sincerely call on the government to listen to the demands of the people for reactivating the constitution, restoring the parliament that was abolished in 1975, forming the supreme judicial council (in accordance with the constitution), allowing freedom of expression, guaranteeing the safety of educational and worship places, offering opportunities for work to those capable and qualified, releasing all teenagers and political prisoners and allowing forcible-exiles to return home. We see that this is the only way to achieve security and stability in the country".

5 December: the first anniversary of the uprising There is no constant but change

Last year, on the 5th of December 1994, the Bahraini security forces conducted one of the worst miscalculated campaigns of oppression. On the dawn of that day, a group of security men raided the flat of Sheikh Ali Salman in Bilad-al-Qadeem and arrested him. Before his arrest, Sheikh Ali Salman and his friends were campaigning for a popular petition sponsored by all tendencies and sections of Bahrain society, calling for the restoration of the parliament and reactivating of the constitution, both by the Amir dissolved in 1975. The security forces thought that attacking pro-democracy activists and creating violent events will enable the government to deviate the legitimate political movement that calls on the ruling Al-Khalifa family to abide by the 1973 constitution. In the week that followed the arrest of Sheikh Salman, people responded by gathering in mosques and public places demanding his immediate release. Few days later, a delegation was formed by religious scholars, amongst them Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri, who visited the interior minister and submitted the demand for releasing Sheikh Ali Salman. The official response from the minister was that "the State will uphold its supremacy by iron fist". So on the 12th of December, the government forces attacked the gatherings in Bilad-al-Qadeem and in Makharqah district of Manama.

The country was swept by a popular rapid response, and this time the security forces did not have their way. Foolishly, the security forces started attacking gatherings and street protests emerged. Both the national day and the GCC Summit were to be held on 16 and 19 December consequently. The people were on the streets and on 17 December the first two martyrs (Hani Abbas Khamis and Hani Al-Wasti) of the uprising fell down in Sanabis and Jedhafs. The Gulf leaders spent their days in the Meridian inhaling the tear gas and unable to conduct their business as live fire and explosions continued throughout the night and day. This heralded the beginning of the greatest popular uprising for political reforms in the history of Bahrain.

The months that followed witnessed a step-by-step exposure of government's failure to understand the real strength of the Bahraini people. The more they continued to insult the people the more the events continued. On 15 January the interior ministry forcibly deported Sheikh Ali Salman (who was still in jail) together with Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Seyed Heider Al-Setri. The three then arrived in London on 17 March, thus provoking the Bahrain Foreign Minister to travel to London on 27 January, to formally request the British government to expel the three leaders. This move fired back when the opposition leaders held a press conference in the British Parliament on 26 January detailing the demands of the reform movement and the atrocities of the security forces.

During the month of Ramadhan (February 1995), the opposition called for calming down the situation to give the government a chance to reconcile itself with the people. Instead, the local and Saudi-financed media launched intimidating attacks on the people of Bahrain. Moreover, the ruling family forced various clubs to write letters of loyalty to the ruling family and

declared that the reform movement is foreign-backed. This created a highly-charged atmosphere and the end of Ramadhan (1st March) was declared a day of sadness. Mass demonstrations took to the streets all around the country. Martyrs continued to fall, and for the next two weeks, Bahrain went through the most critical period with clashes proliferating every where. Ordinary people formed voluntary "resistance groups" and clashed with the security forces who ransacked houses and inhumanely killed and injured many citizens. Thousands of Bahrainis were put in make shift camps as jails were by now crowded.

In mid March two leading opposition figures were arrested, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain and Mr. Hassan Mushaima were arrested sparking off more demonstrations and protests. On 1 April, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and 18 members of his family were put under house arrest after attacking the village of Bani Jamra and killing two of its people and injuring dozens others. Two weeks later he was transferred to jail. By 8 July the number of martyrs rose to 14 people.

Between April and August, six jailed opposition leaders (led by Sheikh Al-Jamri) held talks with security officials and at the end, the government agreed to releasing around 1000 detainees by end of September in return for establishing calm. Calm was established from the first days the six leaders were released, but the government failed to honour the agreement. The tense situation returned to the country. To salvage the situation, Sheikh Al-Jamri and six other opposition leaders staged a ten-day hunger strike ending on 1 November. Some 85,000 people gathered in front of Sheikh Al-Jamri to listen to a statement declaring the continuation of peaceful opposition for restoring the rule of constitutional law to the country.

The government made more mistakes and started showing on TV its special military and security units experimenting with breaking-in dummy houses aiming to frighten the public. On the contrary, the people of Bahrain paid no attention to these threats and continued their peaceful opposition process.

The prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, was quoted by the Associate Press on the first occasion of the uprising (5 December) saying: "I don't see a threat to Al Khalifa" and that the "monarchy can survive and will survive". The stereo-type statement blaming "outside forces" was mixed with another statement saying "We are not frightened by an elected assembly." While the opposition welcomes the latter, the ruling family has yet to prove its credibility by re-activating the constitution. The sentiments of the opposition were publicly aired this evening (5 December) in the main Mo'min mosques in the capital Manama, where tens of thousand of people attended a mass gathering addressed by opposition leaders calling for the restoration of the parliamentary process.

Unfortunately, the ruling family has again resorted to the use of force without taking note of the roots of the problem and without attempting to understand that in today's world dialogue is the best way out of crises.

96 Kuwaiti activists call on the Amir to restore democracy

In an open letter, 96 distinguished Kuwaiti personalities appealed (12 December) to the Amir of Bahrain to restore democracy to Bahrain. Amongst the signatories were eight members of parliament, the head of the Kuwaiti Human Rights Society, politicians, academics, lawyers, businessmen and pro-democracy activists. The letter to the Amir stated the following: "HH Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Amir of Bahrain, Greetings.

It is about one year since the people of Bahrain started their uprising demanding their legitimate and constitutional rights, while the government fails to abide by its promises. There are many Bahrainis in the jails and detentions, there are hundreds of exiles all over the world, and there are many demands, not yet fulfilled, the most important of which are the restoration of constitutional legitimacy and freedom of the people to participate in the political arena through the National Assembly in accordance with the Constitution of the State of Bahrain.

We are keen for the stability of the situation in the Gulf region, particularly in Bahrain, and we appeal to you to fulfill the aspirations of the people of Bahrain by releasing the political prisoners, allowing exiles to return home, and by calling for free legislative election for a new National assembly. In our world of today, violent clashes and encounters are not compatible with respect of human rights and the principles of modern civil societies.

Our appeal emanate from our concern for the stability of the State of Bahrain which would be reflected positively on the future of the country and the region. Signed by A Group of Kuwaiti Citizens"

Seven judges resign

In a move, the first of its kind in Bahrain, seven judges submitted their resignation on 5 December to the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs. The seven Bahraini judges are senior figures in the judiciary. They are Ibrahim Greinees, Saad Al-Shamlan, Salim Al-Kawari, Isa Al-Kaabi, Mubarak Al-Hejji, Abdul Rahman Al-Sayyed and Adnan Al-Shamsi. The reasons for the resignation were a mixture of constitutional and personnel demands. The judges gave the minister until the 15th of January 1996 to positively answer their demands which were as follows: (1) The establishment of the Supreme Judiciary Council in accordance with the Constitution Article 102d. (2) The strengthening of the judicial authority in line with the powers given to the other authorities. (3) The cancellation of housing mortgages/debts so that these do not burden and influence the performance of the judges. (4) Providing financial contributions to the judges to eliminate debts and remove incompatibilities with performing as judges. (5) Allocating a 50% benefit (% of salary) in line with the responsibilities of the judges. (6) Developing the Judicial Affairs Office to satisfy the needs of judges for expediting their affairs with other departments of the government. (7) Providing the health insurance for all judges and members of their families.

The primary demands (first and second) call for independence of the judiciary.