

BAHRAIN

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

Mass arrests, threat of martial law and deployment of army

Constitutionalists will defeat absolutists

With the arrest of the popular movement last month and the threat to impose martial law and deploy the army in streets, the government of Bahrain has declared an all-out war against the peaceful movement, the outcome of which could only be more crisis. The Al Khalifa regime has lost the battle of legitimacy, and to rule the country by force is an indication of the extent of its political defeat. The opposition has been calling for dialogue for the last four years, and there is now only a limited time for dialogue to take place before the country is plunged into more chaos and, possibly, bloodshed. The leadership whose leadership were arrested last month has maintained law and order and had successfully brought the situation under control after months of turmoil.

The government had earlier failed to end the strife despite its merciless onslaught on the people. It was the group led by Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri which successfully concluded a deal with the government while in jail last summer. They had agreed to calm down the situation to allow the government to initiate dialogue with the opposition on the people's main demands; the reinstatement of the constitution, the release of political prisoners, the return of the exiles and the repeal of the notorious state security law. Whilst Sheikh Al Jamri and his colleagues honoured their commitment the government renegeged on its promises causing a major outburst of anger. Eventually, the situation went out of control and the people took to the streets. The failure of the Amir to introduce

any conciliatory remarks in his annual address on 16th December was the main spark for the people's outrage.

The popular leaders continued to demand that the government respected the deal and started dialogue with the opposition. Since all avenues for expressing opinion were closed, the mosques became a forum for airing people's demands. The regime reacted by closing down mosques and banning the leaders from taking part in the Friday congregations. Confrontations took place in a weekly cycle as the worshippers were prevented from entering the main mosques. Street demonstrations erupted throughout the country and the people's resolve proved to be un-diminishing. They faced the heavily-armed riot police with bare chests and clinched fists in an expression of anger and frustration. The government reacted by ordering an all-out attack on unarmed demonstrators, and the arrest of thousands of people. Sheikh Al Jamri, whose speeches in the past three four months have always called on people to remain peaceful and calm, was detained and brutally treated. Intellectuals, public figures, clerics, engineers, poets, and artists were rounded up in raids on homes and work-places. The attacks were so vicious that doors were smashed, bedrooms were broken and privacy violated. In order to divert attention from the real demands, the government reiterated its claims that the movement is foreign-inspired and that there was a conspiracy against the Al Khalifa regime. However, these claims are

dismissed outright by diplomats inside and outside the country. It is now clear that the government is facing a crisis of legitimacy. The opposition maintains that the constitution is the only source of legitimacy for the Al Khalifa and that the use of force and repression could not provide a solution.

The Bahraini crisis is deepening with the Al Khalifa becoming more and more isolated. The deployment of the army is definitely the answer. The threat to impose martial law cannot constitute a solution. The arrest of the most prominent figures together with thousands of citizens will, by no means, end the strife in the country. This policy can only lead to the prolongation of the suffering of the people of Bahrain, and will not safeguard the Al Khalifa. There is a unanimous agreement that dialogue between the government and opposition is the only exit from the crisis. The alternative is for the Al Khalifa to go. Tyranny and tribal doctrines could not be tolerated in Bahrain. As the twentieth century draws to an end, democratic practices have to prevail in our country and the forces of backwardness, tyranny, despotism and un-constitutionalism have to give way to a more open regime. The will of the people cannot be defeated by arms, and the backers of this reactionary regime have to act responsibly and offer constructive advice to the most reactionary regime in the Gulf, after, of course, Saudi Arabia. The rule of law must be upheld and the constitution is the only way out of the quagmire.

Before his arrest: Al-Jamri challenged the government to behave rationally

On 12 January, Sheikh Al-Jamri delivered his last public sermon before his arrest on 21 January. He explained his views before a mass gathering in al-Sadek mosque in Duraz and pointed out that "the nation as a whole is not only responsible for participation in the political process but also in observing the process and correcting mistakes. It is the right of the nation to freely express views and opinions for that purpose. I have followed what the Minister of Information stated to the BBC when asked about closure of mosques. He said "we as an Islamic Government and mosques are open and we do not close them. But mosques are for prayers and we reject their use for agitation". Would the minister excuse me to notify him that two weeks ago on Thursday night, we were in Zain al-Abidin mosque when the riot police used tear gas and rubber bullets. Wouldn't this be considered a violation of a sacred place? Then, on that night and from 7.30 pm to the next day 2.00 pm both Bani Jamra and Duraz (vil-

lages) were besieged as well as my house. Aren't these considered to be disturbing peace for citizens and destabilising for the country?

Last Friday the grand mosque in Qafool was besieged; I had been prevented from attending, the people who headed to the mosque were fired at using rubber bullets and tear gas. Was this because of an agitation? May the minister excuse me to say: What is meant by agitation? Why is it now that we are termed "agitators"? Now after we established calm in the country! This is a fact acknowledged by the security department and by those observing events. How come that now we are accused to be agitators? Do you mean that calling for reactivation of constitution and restoration of parliament by peaceful means, do you call this agitation? We have asked for dialogue and we still call for it. I believe that attacking villages and mosques is the real agitation for violence.

What is happening to our local press? Why are they silent? The country underwent a crisis

that cause the shedding of blood, the imprisonment of hundreds, the deportation of others and all people lived under fear. Where was our press? We never saw the press reporting the submission of a historic petition in 1992 calling for restoration of the parliament! Wasn't there another petition in 1994 signed by 25,000 people? Why aren't attacks on mosques reported?

Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rayyash was arrested last Friday in front of the people in the mosque. Why is such a distinguished person arrested? What is the crime that he committed? Is calling for constitutional reforms a crime? We demand the release of Sheikh Al-Rayyash and all other political prisoners."

Responding to the main political demand the information minister was quoted by Reuters (17 January) saying "Once we feel that we need it, when it is suitable for our society and development". Such a statement reflects the backwardness of the government that admits it is incapable of adapting to modern politics.

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January 1996: Security forces attack mosques,

1 January: Following last Friday (29 December) siege on Sheikh Al-Jamri's house and closure of two mosques demonstrations and street clashes broke out at mid-day in Bani Jamra and Duraz. Later in the evening a demonstration marched through the streets of Daih and Jedhafs. The demonstrators clashed with security forces on the main highway near Al-Razi Pharmacy.

The siege on Al-Jamri ended after few hour of clashes. Then, Sheikh Al-Jamri led prayers in the grand mosque of Al-Qafool (a district of Manama, the capital) where he said that "the government wants me to give-up calling for political reforms. But this is not a personal issue and I have no right of doing so. The demands for political reforms concern the nation and it is them who decide whether or not these demands should be stopped".

At noon, on the same day, Mr. Hassan Mushaima addressed a gathering in Momin mosque in Manama where he stressed that "the struggle for restoring the rule of constitutional law will continue regardless of all obstacles". Members of the intelligence department encircled the mosque and started intimidating attendants. This led to skirmishes between members of the intelligence department (who were Pakistanis) and a group of youth.

2 January: Sheikh Ali Al-Nachas, a 48-year old blind person was released on bail after his family paid 200 dinars. He spent few days in detention and has been known for his outspoken criticism of the government.

3 January: The chief Manama Police Headquarters summoned Mr. Abdulla Al-Ebrik, the person in-charge of Al-Qafool grand mosque, and warned him that if Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri continues to lead prayers in the mosque every Friday night the mosque will be closed down. Mr. Al-Ebrik then went to the religious affairs (Awqaf) department and informed its head, Mr. Sadek Al-Bahamah about the matter. Al-Bahamah stated to Al-Ebrik that "you are an employee responsible for opening and closing the gates at certain times but not responsible for who leads prayers in the mosque". The latter statement was then conveyed to Al-Khamis Police Headquarters by Mr. Al-Ebrik. However, the chief of Al-Khamis HQ, Mr. Abdulla Al-Mussallam insisted that Al-Jamri must be prevented from praying in the mosque. On 3 January, the chief of Manama Police HQ contacted the house of Sheikh Al-Jamri to convey the message and threatened Al-Jamri.

4 January: Security forces deployed twenty lorries packed with riot police and many civilian cars packed with members of the intelligence department around the house of Sheikh Al-Jamri. They tear-gassed people who were praying in Zain al-Abidin mosque in front of Sheikh Al-Jamri house in Bani Jamra. People started gathering from every where responding to the provocation. After few hours, the security forces pulled-out. Sheikh Al-Jamri addressed the gathering crowd and said "this childish and immature move was unnecessary. They (security forces) have been shocked by the strength of unity amongst the people and are waging these provocative actions to intimidate the opposition". A mass demonstration followed this event in Dair area (Muharraq island) and sev-

eral clashes and skirmishes were reported.

5 January: Sheikh Al-Jamri addressed a gathering in Al-Sadek mosque in Duraz. Last week, the siege prevented the prayer. The number of gathering people surged and the speech was delivered while riot police were visibly encircling the area at a distance.

Later at Al-Qafool (a district of Manama, the capital) security forces besieged the grand mosque there to prevent Sheikh Al-Jamri from leading the prayers later in the evening at the mosque. People started going to the Al-Qafool mosque after 5.00 pm and clashes broke out when security forces attacked with tear gas, and rubber bullets. The youth responded with stone-throwing and clashes affected the window-glasses of the prestigious nearby Dairy-Queen restaurant.

At night In Nuaim, another district of Manama, riot police attacked a mass gathering at around 9.20 pm, without prior warning. Mr. Hassan Mushaima was delivering his speech when the attacking forces fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Clashes erupted and about a hundred people, including Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, took refuge in a nearby small house. Ninety minutes later, security forces stormed the small house and clashed with people inside. Sheikh Al-Jamri was heart when police started beating people in random and began hand-cuffing them.

Sayed Ibrahim Al-Alawi (a prominent clergy) was beaten to exhaustion. Al-Jamri attempted to discuss matters with the riot police but these could not speak Arabic. Their chief (A Bahraini by the name Isa Al-Qattan) later appeared on the scene and Sheikh Al-Jamri warned him of the grave consequences and asked for the release of the hundred people who were hand-cuffed. After a heated discussion, this group was released while many others were taken prisoners. Sheikh Al-Jamri then saw a person outside the house lying face-down in a critical condition. The person was given water and recovered slightly. Asked what happened, the young man (in his night wear) explained that he had nothing to do with the gathering when his house was stormed and he had been pulled out from his bed. He suffers from heart conditions and requested to be taken back to his wife who was worried about what happened.

9 January: Three boys aged 7 and 8 were arrested in Barbar. The three children are Yasir Ammar (7 years old), Ali Mahdi Hammood (8 years) and Seyed Majid Hasan (8 years old). After receiving torturing treatment they were released on bail to appear before a political court on 13 January. On the same day (9 January), riot police stopped a bus in Duraz taking pupils (all are children and teenagers) to school. Then, police entered the bus and randomly started beating the children with batons. They claimed that one pupil whistled at them. When the bus arrived at Duraz schools, teachers declared their solidarity and implemented a one day strike.

10 January: AP reported from Manama that "security forces fired tear gas at participants in an anti-government protest near the capital, the fourth to be broken up in the last two weeks, opposition groups said today. A

government source confirmed that a "gathering of a few hundred" people was dispersed Tuesday night (9 January) in al-Daih, five miles west of the capital Manama". Demonstrators from three Manama suburbs converged on a main road just outside the capital for the protest march. There were many injuries in the clashes. The demonstrators were angered by the recent arrest of a leading clergyman, Sheikh Mohammed al-Rayash. Residents told AP that some 700 protesters took part in a march.

12 January: Al-Qafool grand mosque was again turned into a battle ground. At around 3.00 pm about 300 riot police encircled the area and blocked access from all direction. Police units started attacking those people who headed to the mosque to perform evening prayers. Traffic jam resulted on the busy Sheikh Salman Highway with many foreigners and tourists witnessing the event. Columns of cars stretched to several kilometres. When youth pulled back, the security forces chased them into the surrounding residential areas of Zenj and Bilad al-Qadeen deploying tear gas and rubber bullets. Live ammunition was fired in the air creating red-coloured clouds. Cars were sounding their horns and some have abandoned their cars after being hit by rubber bullets. Later, in Bilad al-Qadim, Sheikh Jasim Al-Kharyyat (a cleric) and three of his brothers were arrested. An oppressive oppression campaign extended to Southern Sehlah where Seyed Faisal Al-Talibi (a cleric) had earlier in the day been arrested.

Security forces also raided Al-Zahra mosque in northern Qafool and confiscated equipment and the platform used for delivering sermons. This is the mosque which last Friday (5 January) was also attacked while Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rayash was delivering a sermon. Al-Rayash was arrested on the spot and remains in detention.

13 January: Fifteen security officers headed by the undersecretary of the interior ministry summoned eight leading opposition figures. Each person, including Sheikh Al-Jamri, was entered to a room and received a barrage of threats and badly behaved language. All personalities refused to stop calling for restoration of parliament in public gatherings.

14 January: Mr. Abdul Wahhab Hussain was arrested from his home in Nuweidrat. He had delivered a speech in Arad (Muharraq) in which explained the encounter with the 15 officers and stressed that the call for restoration of parliament would continue.

15 January: The editor-in-chief of the Jordanian newspaper "Al-Majid", Mr. Fahad Al-Remawi was arrested following the publication of an article last February criticising abuse of human rights in Bahrain and calling for the removal of Ian Henderson. When relations between Jordan and the Gulf states improved last November, the Bahraini government demanded that Mr. Al-Remawi must be punished. He was arrested last month, harassed and due to appear before a court today (15 January).

16 January: At around 16.30 local time Sheikh Al-Jamri was arrested from his house in Bani Jamra, north-west of Bahrain. Mass demonstrations broke out in Bani Jamra, Sanabis, Daih and Jedhafs. Shortly afterwards, security forces arrived and blocked the main Budaya

.. arrest activists, commit arson and beg for support

Highway. However, the situation was heading for explosion and the security forces released Sheikh al-Jamri few hours later.

The secretary of Sheikh Al-Jamri (Seyed Taleb Abdul Nabi) had earlier been arrested in a dawn raid on his home in Qurraa village last Monday. The village of Nuweidrat has been under virtually continuous siege to prevent an outburst after the arrest last Sunday (14 January) of the leading opposition figure, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain. Clashes continue to spread around Nuweidrat and Sitra region. In Karzakkán, Dair and Bilad al-Qadeem, flames of fire and sounds of explosions were heard during the night. Dawn raids by security forces has been intensified.

17 January: The Associated Press reported from Bahrain that ((Hundreds of guests were evacuated from the Royal Meridien Hotel on Wednesday after a small bomb exploded in a toilet on the ground floor. A man who did not identify himself telephoned The Associated Press and said: "We put two bombs in the Meridien Hotel. Tell the government we can reach wherever we want to reach." The second bomb was discovered near the first one and defused, a security source said. No one was injured in the blast at the hotel, where an international oil conference had opened earlier in the day. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the bomb blew a hole in the ceiling and a door)).

18 January: At around 20.00 (17.00 GMT) clashes erupted simultaneously in all traditional uprising-areas of Bahrain. From Bani-Jamra and Duraz in the north-west of Bahrain to Sanbis (west of the capital Manama); from Qurraaya to the south-west village of Shahrakkan, from Dair to Samahij and Arad (in Muharraq), from Nuweidrat to Sitra, and in Hamad Town, people marched on the streets protesting against the attacks of security forces on mosques and detention of leading opposition figures. Clashes surfaced in Hamad Town for the first time in the history of the uprising.

The security forces encircled the house of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and detained him at 4.00 pm local time. He was set free two hours later. This is the third time Sheikh Al-Jamri is summoned or detained since last Saturday.

19 January: The Bahraini security forces stepped up their attacks on mosques. Several people leading prayers, amongst them Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, Mr. Hassan Mushaimaa and Sheikh Ali bin Ahmad Al-Jedhafsi were either summoned or contacted yesterday by the security committee (created last year after eruption of events). The head of the committee, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Atceyat-Allah Al-Khalifa, threatened members of the opposition and banned prayers in several mosques, amongst them al-Sadek mosque in Duraz and the grand mosque in Qafool (a district of the capital Manama).

Moreover, ten lorries packed with riot police besieged the house of Sheikh Al-Jamri this morning and fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators and prevent them from reaching the besieged area. Entries and exits of Duraz and Bani Jamra have been blocked by check-points.

The banning of mosques and attacking peo-

ple heading to pray behind leading opposition figure have now been tightened amid fears that Bahrain is entering another cycle of events with grave consequences. A spokesman for the Bahrain Freedom Movement stated "the government could not withstand the peaceful approach of the opposition and had to incite violence in order to justify oppressive measures. Playing with fire has no guaranteed outcome and the BFM calls on the government to stop this vicious cycle".

20 January: Bahraini security forces mounted a major aggression against residential areas yesterday. In Duraz, they attacked houses and mosques, detaining people in random and destroying contents of mosques. At least 75 people were arrested amongst them Hajji Hasan Jar-Allah the 60-year old person in-charge of the grand Al-Sadek mosque.

In Bani Jamra, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri was put under house arrest starting from 3.00 am (Saturday 20 January). Some 20 members of his family and relatives were prevented from going out. Only children were allowed to go school. A garrison surrounded the house comprising 3 lorries packed with riot police, 4 jeeps and one civilian car. An old man who attempted to enter the house was beaten and kicked savagely by these forces. Food can only be brought-in by a relative who must hand everything from a distance before being told-off. Arrests in Bani Jamra include, Sheikh Abdul Mohsin Mulla Atteya, Omran Hussain Omran, Ali Abdul Wahhab (whose two brothers Jamil and Abdul Amir were arrested few days ago).

Sanabis suffered another ferocious attack. Houses were raided, youth were taken away from beds and contents of mosques were destroyed. A person by the name Abdul Amir Darweesh was hit by a bullet in the chest and arm. He lies in critical condition at the International Hospital. Nasser Wahhab Nasser, 40 years old from Malkeyya was hit in the stomach by a rubber bullet and Ali Khalil Al-Helaiw, 26 years old from Malkeyya was hit by rubber bullet in the head. Makkí Ali Abbas, 30 years old from Sitra was tortured during a detention lasting few days. His eyes, legs and rests are swollen as a result of the torture he received.

In Zenj, a district at the outskirts of Manama, people resisted another aggression against their homes by other units of the security forces and clashes continued until after mid-night. Similar clashes took place in Bilad al-Qadim, Shahrakkan, Karzakkán, Malkiya, Dair, Samahij, Sitra and Nuweidrat.

In an unprecedented move the Bahraini Defence Force (BDF) issued a statement today threatening the use of military might against unarmed civilians to suppress demands for restoration of constitutional law in Bahrain. BDF statement referred to the "preparedness to perform security role in accordance with martial law".

21 January: Sheikh Al-Jamri was arrested on 12.00 pm (mid-night) on Sunday 21 January 1996 after a house arrest that started on Saturday, 20 January 3.00 am. Check-points have been established in villages and towns hindering the movement of people. Telephone lines of many people have been tempered with to

prevent communication of news.

24 January: A woman screamed, yesterday, in the old market area of Manama after witnessing two security men (both were Indians) starting a fire near al-Khawajah mosque in Manama. Several people gathered and extinguished the blaze. An eye witness stated that people who helped extinguish the fire were arrested by police. The security forces have in the last few days smashed private cars and damaged private properties as part of their plan to justify their attacks on the peaceful movement demanding the restoration of the dissolved parliament.

Two jeeps surrounded Momin mosque in the capital Manama. After filming the posters on the wall they confiscated all the contents of the mosque. Similarly, the security forces raided Al-Anwar mosque in Daih, Sheikh Khalaf mosque in Nuweidrat and Al-Sadeq mosque in Duraz. The attackers brought with them some items and photographed them outside and inside the mosques. The items are believed to be some sort of exploding devices and such trick is part of a plan to mount a campaign of deception. In Sitra, two lorries packed with burnt furniture were driven by police. The latter moved the burnt items into a new Post Office. A filming crew entered the post office and filmed the items inside. Police then removed the burnt furniture and drove-away.

The interior ministry said that they had detained 544 people. This number is but a quarter of the detainees.

28 January: Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain and Mr. Hassan Mushaimaa were transferred to the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) hospital, on Friday, for force-feeding after going on hunger strike. Also, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and Hajji Hassan Jarallah were transferred to the BDF hospital after the deterioration of their health conditions.

On the other hand, the security forces confiscated the safe at Sheikh Al-Jamri's house containing donations for many poor families. Last April when the house was raided, the security forces sealed-off the safe, but this time they opted for confiscation.

29 January: Clashes intensified in Karzakkán village, west of Bahrain. The security forces conducted last night a vicious search for any person suspected of participating in the clashes. They fired live ammunition in the air and attacked people with rubber bullets and smothering tear gas, believed to be containing ammonia as some affected people extremely suffer after inhalation and infrequently fall unconscious. Security forces damaged private properties and smashed windows of private cars as a form of collective punishment. They entered houses and asked "where are your sons?" and imprisoned as many as they could. Duraz was also the scene of loud explosions and helicopters were deployed to frighten residents. Curfew was imposed after 10.00 pm in uprising-areas.

The wealthy Al-Haddad family (responsible for looking after the grand mosque in Al-Qafool) were ordered to close down the mosque at 9.30 every night or face punishment. Similar threats were made to others in charge of lead mosques around the country.

An Englishman's reflections on Bahrain in 1995:

Bert Mapp: "DID THEY DIE IN VAIN?"

I wrote those words in big letters on a poster and stood with it outside a London hotel where the Bahraini Ambassador was holding his annual reception for the Bahrain Society and Arab diplomats. The Ambassador found the presence of protesters, Bahraini exiles and me, insulting and embarrassing. A police sergeant said our action was lawful, but the ambassador took steps to have me expelled from membership of the Bahrain Society. It was a painless exercise. One can only speculate what might have happened to us if our peaceful demonstration had occurred in Manama instead of London.

The past year in Bahrain has been momentous and extremely painful. Much blood has been shed, much damage to property caused in a country which, according to a government source, "has experienced nothing other than stability and security in both its ancient and modern history." Any student of Bahrain's history would discover that, in fact, violence and rivalry have punctuated the centuries, and scarcely a decade of this 20th century has been free of public disturbances and demands for democracy.

What distinguishes the uprising of 1995 is the intensity of public feeling over many months and the government's ruthless reaction. The security forces' response is justified because, in the words of a government inspired pamphlet entitled "The Illusion and the Truth!", acts of terrorism and subversion have been committed by "outsiders alien to our society, alien to the will of the people of Bahrain. They sought to spark sedition and spread anarchy to achieve their objective."

Curiously, the civilian dead and wounded and the thousands arrested and jailed were Bahrain citizens. Those who sought to crush the revolt, the security forces, were largely foreign mercenaries, British, Pakistani, Jordanian, Syrian, etc.

Of the documents published during the year, none is as finely detailed as the 50-page report by Amnesty International. If only one of those pages was true and the other 49 false, it would be enough to condemn the Bahrain authorities for gross abuse of human rights, in contravention of United Nations principles to which Bahrain claims to subscribe. A simple test of the accuracy of this report - allowing Amnesty to visit Bahrain's law courts and prisons, to see male and female prisoners who claim to have been tortured and imprisoned without trial - has been frustrated by the government throughout the past eight years.

The Illusion and Truth pamphlet dismisses the protests of human rights observers thus: "We hear and read that the accused are tried in secret, neither defence counsel nor relatives attending their trial. We ridicule such allegations for they are false...a product of sick minds that know nothing of the nature of this country or of the guarantees of justice for everyone."

If we put justice to one side, it is a fact that many children, some as young as ten, have participated in the disorders and experienced detention and sentencing to long prison terms. The wisdom of their participation, along with their mothers or women teachers, might be

questioned. Yet might it also be seen as a sign of courage as they faced military weapons and possible death?

The official pamphlet is full of interesting points that scarcely add up to an argument. "God will protect this country from all plots and sedition," it boasts. It does not add that most of the religious leaders are either in jail or deported overseas.

The "terrorists," says the pamphlet, "call for democracy, while they destroy public amenities, terrorise people and attack their property. Could there be anyone now who believes what they say or agrees to dialogue with terrorists?"

The pamphleteers do not remind us that the intifada is a heaven-sent relief for the ruling Khalifa regime. For the past three years, pro-democracy leaders have been pleading with the Amir for discussions. He and his kin have turned a deaf ear. Now there is violence and, of course, the Amir could not possibly negotiate with terrorists!

But nobody is asking him to talk with terrorists, instead to talk with sensible, reasonable, progressive people. Not only men, either. There are brave women as well who wish to talk, academic and professional women who have lost their jobs and incomes for daring to sign a pro-democracy petition. The intransigence of the Amir and his close relatives who hold the major posts in government, industry and commerce and control lands and estates, is understandable.

An assembly appointed, with an executive largely appointed from members of the ruling family and a judiciary similarly dominated is not democracy at work.

In some of the less advanced parts of the world, certain families maintain a hereditary grip on power. But their sheer unwieldy numbers must dilute their power. In Bahrain, for instance, the Khalifa family is believed to number 5,000-7,000, while in Saudi Arabia hundreds, or thousands, of 'princes' jockey for position.

The kings and shaikhs in Arab lands who, by dint of the cunning or force of arms of their ancestors, still hold the power of life or death over their subjects must surely realise - if they possess the wisdom they are traditionally credited with - that the time for change has come. They may find a role as ceremonial, constitutional head of state, but the rights of decision making must fall to the people and their elected representatives.

Gulf states are in the unusual position of accommodating, solely for economic reasons, vast and sometimes overwhelming expatriate communities, from East and West. These non-citizens, like the indigenous citizens, lack democratic rights and privileges and, in some cases, basic human rights. It is a matter of wonderment how indifferent these expatriates are to denial of rights for themselves and for the native people.

Acceptance of, or desire to maintain, the status quo is something foreign workers, diplomats and advisers to the host government share with their own governments. Despite sweet words from the British and US govern-

ments about creating a new world order, particularly with reference to the Middle East, nothing appears to change, for fear of disturbing the market in exchanging oil for armaments. When I asked the British foreign secretary what positive steps he proposed to take in Bahrain, the Foreign Office answered that they were keeping an eye on events and regarded the appointment of the Bahrain consultative council as a step in the right direction (which it was not).

Before he was sacked as Bahrain's long serving information minister and mouthpiece, Tariq Al Moayyed told a BBC interviewer that the British in the Gulf always put their own interests first. He added: "I don't blame them because business is business!"

The government in Bahrain is characterised by despotism, nepotism, corruption and patronage, and those who either practise these or benefit from them apparently see nothing evil in the system. Bahrain obviously faces an uncertain future. Insignificant in global terms, with slender resources, with a multitude of workers, security and military men from every corner of the globe, it is less a nation state and more an international workshop. While foreign "non citizens" are welcomed, the Bahraini government maintains a custom that goes back many generations - namely forcibly deporting citizens.

As a political alternative, democracy as practised has many imperfections. We know in Britain, held up as an example of liberal democracy, that it is necessary for scores of thousands of volunteers to band together in numerous non-governmental organisations to keep a check on government - the UK government and foreign governments.

There is a groundswell around the world for punishing governments with bad human rights records. The favoured method is economic sanctions, as applied to apartheid South Africa and Iraq and now threatened for Nigeria. Are Bahrain and other Gulf states too insignificant to warrant this treatment? Activities in Bahrain, the disorders, the non-violent demonstrations and the pro-democracy petitions, have been matched overseas by forthright debates in the European, British and US parliaments, public demonstrations, and direct appeals to the Amir from members of the British House of Commons and House of Lords and from human rights campaigners and public petitioners.

While these measures have stiffened the resolve of the Bahraini regime, leading to harsher laws and banning of assembly, there is also sign of movement. It might, if the past is a guide, amount to nothing. When the shouting dies down, life can get back to normal. And yet, one suspects, there can be no turning back. Bahrainis, men and women, at home or forced into exile, are too well educated to cower like their parents and grandparents. If they wanted restoration of parliament and the constitution in 1995, they will want it more in 1996 or the year 2000.

Twelve months after the uprising began, we ask: Did they die in vain? Each one of us must answer that question by our future actions.