

BAHRAIN

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The two Qataris may testify on their ordeal

Victims of Henderson's terror

When Bahrain's PM decided to boycott the GCC summit in Doha, his calculations were based on the assumption that other GCC states would rally behind his family and would "force" Qatar to acquiesce to his own way of dealing with border dispute and to withdraw the court case from the Hague. The response from the GCC states was less than encouraging, and almost all of them rejected his pleas. There was a widespread condemnation of the Bahraini decision to boycott the summit. It was reported that the Amir of Kuwait commented to journalists on this decision while flying above the islands of Bahrain on his way back from Doha to Kuwait by saying: "They have become insane". The Qataris did not budge from their stand and gave no concessions on the border dispute problem. They offered conciliatory remarks and expressed their hope that the Amir of Bahrain would eventually disobey the order of his brother and attend the Doha summit. The Saudi defence minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, flew to Bahrain in a last attempt to "convince" the Al-Khalifas to change their mind, but to no avail. However, some reports suggested that the prince had another agenda. His attempts were not whole-hearted. He had been at loggerheads with his older brother, Crown Prince Abdullah, and was happy to see the Bahrainis boycott the Doha summit. Since the departure of King Fahd from the political scene in 1995, the two summits that Abdullah had attended were crisis-ridden. The Muscat summit saw the withdrawal of the Qatari delegation, and if the Doha summit was to be boycotted by the Bahrainis, the Crown Prince would then be incompetent to lead the Kingdom which has always aspired to lead the Gulf states. However, the absence of Bahrain had only a marginal importance and the Al Khalifas were seen as the odd ones out. They had sown the seeds of further discontent in the region that could not help their cause.

What made the crisis more serious was the attempt by the Al Khalifa rulers to blackmail the Qataris to blow the dispute with them beyond any limits. In order to forestall the GCC summit in Doha, Mr. Henderson's department suddenly announced the arrest of two Qatari "spies", Fahd Al Bakir and Salwa Fakhri. They hurriedly tortured them, forced them to sign self-styled confessions and paraded the pair on their television screens reading their "confessions". That act infuriated the Qataris who remained silent until the end of the summit. The Qatari foreign minister went on the attack on the last day of the summit and accused Al-Khalifa of torturing the Qatari citizens, sponsoring a coup plot earlier in the year and

harbouring saboteurs. He went further to accuse the Al-Khalifa Crown Prince of being a hired person who was paid generously to take part in the plot against the new Amir of Qatar. The Al-Khalifas reacted by sentencing the pair to three years in jail in addition to US\$ 2650 fine each. The Qataris considered the sentences null and void and demanded the immediate release of their citizens. Three days later, the two were unexpectedly "pardoned" by the Amir of Bahrain who has never shown any such treatment to his own citizens. It is clear that Bahrain had come under intense pressure to close the ill-fated muscle-stretching exercise with Qatar. There was a Saudi-British-American displeasure towards the actions of the Al Khalifa and their pressure ultimately convinced the Amir that he would be the ultimate loser in this episode.

The Government had earlier refused to allow a delegation from the "Petition Committee" to meet the Amir and hand him the popular petition which had been signed by 25,000 people. The petition called for the reinstatement of the Constitution and the granting of political rights to women, amongst others. The refusal came in the form of threats from the private secretary of the prime minister's office, Abdul Latif Al Rumaihi, who sent verbal messages to the members of the delegation warning them of grave consequences if they ever tried to approach the Amir's palace. The claim by the Al Khalifa that the Amir's court was open to citizens was thus dealt a severe blow. It seems the doors are only open for those who are ready to say what the Amir wants to hear. This policy of clamp down on any voice of dissent could not help the cause of the Al Khalifa who are facing increasing international condemnation of their repressive policies. Last month, for example, witnessed an event that did not take place before. At Moses Room of the British House of Lords, four international human rights organisations blasted the policies of repression and injustice in Bahrain and called on the its government to abandon the State Security Court. They called for the immediate release of all persons sentenced by that court since their trials fell short of the intentionally-accepted standards of fair trials. The press conference took place on the day the opposition had called "the Day of the Martyrs" on 16th December. The ruling tribe had planned major festivities on that day to mark the 35th anniversary of the Amir's grip on power. However, the festivities never lifted off the ground. The people had their own alternative, and the country was plunged in chaos and disturbances for two weeks (5th - 20th December) to mark the second anniversary of the arrest

of Sheikh Ali i Salman which led to the ongoing popular uprising. For anyone visiting Bahrain in that period clear polarisation was evident and the government seemed incapable of commanding any degree of respect or love amongst its citizens. There were angry scenes throughout the country, and the foreign-staffed riot police struggled to put down the blaze from burning fires in almost all major roads.

The people demand to have the constitution restored is as strong and legitimate as ever, and the struggle to attain the basic freedoms and dignity will continue unabated. The two Qataris owe their freedom to their government which worked relentlessly to secure their freedom. The people of Bahrain, however, remain in the hands of the Al Khalifa who have no love or mercy towards them. This is why the struggle will continue until the Al Khalifa recognise the right of the people of Bahrain to live in peace.

A London Seminar on the Gulf

A one-day conference was held on 13 December at the London School of Economics and Political Science, London University, organized by Professor Fred Haliday, under the theme "The Gulf - 25 Years after the British Withdrawal". Speakers in the conference included Dr. Rosemarie Zahlan, Dr. Gerd Nonnmanne, Professor Konstantin Matveev, Mr. Joe Stork, Dr. Emma Murphy, Mr. Roger Hardy, Mr. Baqir Moeen, Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf, Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Nuaimi and Dr. Saeed Shehabi. The spectrum of intellectual participation presented in-depth analyses of the British legacy and the present state of affairs. The Gulf under Pax Britannica underwent phases of construction and many are wondering whether the Gulf is going through a phase of deconstruction under Pax Americana. Speakers highlighted that in the case of the Gulf, issues of human rights and democracy are not given a priority in view of the strategic need to ensure the flow of oil. Yet, neglecting issues of democracy would create a situation similar to the one that preceded the fall of the Shah of Iran. The current international and governmental responses to the various challenges are short term that are producing paralysis rather than a policy. The attention paid (by the hegemonic power) to details and sheer hard information is still lagging behind expectations. On Bahrain, Professor Matveev (from Russia) stated that the opposition in Bahrain has proven it sophistication and high standard of civilised demands, while the short-sighted government persisted in its resistance to democracy, in the same way as Czar Nicholas II refused to concede to modest demands and had to go at the end.

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December 1996: "Day of Martyrs" commemorated:..

2 December: The official "Al-Ayyam" daily reported that the "security organs arrested two Qatari nationals, a woman and a man, for spying for the State of Qatar". It named the Qataris (one woman and one man) as Salwa Jasim Muhammad Fakhri, 33, and Fahd Hamad Abdullah Al-Bakir, 28. Having gained "expertise" in making "discoveries" the paper stated that the two persons had "confessed" against themselves that they "came to Bahrain to gather information that could undermine state security and passed it on to the Qatari intelligence service". Furthermore, the paper said that "Salwa confessed to receiving payments from the Qatari intelligence service in return for carrying out that mission". To remind the world of other inventions, a security source stated that "a similar group was discovered in January 1987 on charges of spying for Qatar". A Qatari interior ministry official source completely denied Bahrain's statement "about the involvement of two Qatari nationals in a spying operation for Qatar", and expressed surprise over the statement which was issued a few days before the convening of the GCC summit in Doha at a time "when Qatar is exerting sincere efforts to host this important event."

4 December: The Al-Khalifa mounted a media war against Qatar. The two Qatari citizens are being put before an Al-Khalifa judge today, 4 December, on charges of "spying for Qatar". The ruling family invited the public to visit Hawar, virtually, free of charge. They have also announced that sports tournament will be organized in Hawar. The crown prince and the prime minister have been quarreling amongst themselves for the private ownership of the islands. Um-Ne'san, Jedda and Um-Subban have been occupied by the Amir, the prime minister and their younger brother, respectively. The Crown prince rushed and built a palace for himself on the main island of Hawar, at the same time the prime minister had expressed his intention to name the islands after himself.

4 December: Bahrain ambassador in Washington DC, Dr. Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar, delivered a speech on Gulf Security in a seminar organised by Dr. M. Fandy. The Ambassador contradicted himself on all issues. Members of the audience asked him why is the government of Bahrain refusing to restore parliament and is preventing elections. He responded that Bahrain had elections from the 1930s to early 1970s. What about nowadays? He replied, the majlis of the Amir is "open". Members of the opposition distributed information packs exposing the atrocities of the security forces and the dictatorial nature of the outdated regime.

5 December (around 9.00 pm), a car exploded in the main Exhibition Road of Manama. Traffic jams were reported all around the capital as a result of the sieges and high alert of the security forces.

6 December: The detained opposition leader Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri ended a 7-day hunger strike that started from 30 November. Sheikh Al-Jamri, 58 years old, was re-detained on 21 January and kept in solitary confinement for nine months and 12 days.

The security forces started besieging the

central parts of the capital as well as the principal uprising areas from the early hours of 5 December. In the capital both Bab Al-Bahrain and Khawajah mosque were besieged. Khawaja and Momin mosques were closed down to prevent any gathering. However, groups of youth penetrated the sieges and challenged the foreign forces. In Sitra, Daih and Sanabis, the security forces positioned check point to intimidate the public. At evening, residents of Arad, Sitra, Sanabis, Daih, Khamis, Sehla, Aali, Hamad Town, Bani Jamra and Duraz, burnt tyres and defied the sieges and check points. Women in Sanabis marched through the streets denouncing the atrocities of the foreign forces and calling for the restoration of the parliament. All security forces and interior ministry employees were put on high alert with scores of arrests reported in uprising areas.

In the grand al-Sadek mosque in Qafool (a district of Manama), thousands of people gathered for the Friday prayers (6 December) at noon. The news of Sheikh Al-Jamri hunger strike spread all over the country and the gathering chanted slogans demanding the release of Sheikh Al-Jamri, the return of exiled leaders and the restoration of the dissolved parliament. The foreign forces pointed their machine guns at the gathering people but did not shoot. Had they done so, a massacre would have resulted and the price would be unbearable for the ruling Al-Khalifa family. Later on in Jedhafs, Daih and Sanabis, the foreign forces fired rubber bullets at gatherings and skirmishes were reported in all uprising areas. An interior ministry announced on 6 December that "four masked men had set fire to a big shop located in the industrial area of Sitra, southeast of Manama". Many fires were reported in Sitra, the scene of many clashes between the citizens of the country and the foreign security forces.

At least 60 people were arrested. At night (6 December), traditional religious processions took to the streets of Manama and other places. In the capital, the security forces attempted to intimidate the persons in-charge of the leading assembly halls (matams). However, more than ten thousand people participated and raised all the demands of the opposition, defying the interference of the foreign forces in the religious affairs of the community.

Earlier, both the Amir and prime minister were shown attending special crack down manoeuvres in the para-military town of Safra (all of its residents are foreign security units). The foreign forces were displaying their preparedness to kill the citizens of Bahrain. The opposition has called for the period 5-20 December to be commemorated.

Qatar said on 6 December that the Bahraini interior ministry "had tortured a Qatari man to obtain a confession of spying for Doha, setting what it called a dangerous precedent in Gulf Arab ties". The statement also placed the "responsibility of the safety of the man and a Qatari woman, who are standing trial in Bahrain on spying charges on Manama". "If found guilty they could be executed or face long prison sentences" lawyers told Reuters. A Qatari official said: "The timing of the case is illogical."

7 December: As expected, the failure of the

ruling family to command respect amongst the GCC countries and its miserable performance and absence from the GCC Summit that opened on 7 December was vented on the people of Bahrain. A member of the ruling family presiding over a security court passed hate-based sentences against eight Bahraini women on 7 December. The eight respected women were sentenced to three-month suspended prison terms. Another member of the ruling family sentenced a citizen to three years in jail for "joining an illegal organization aimed at overthrowing the political, social and economic system of Bahrain through the use of force."

On 7 December, at 8.00 pm the foreign riot police attacked Markh village using live ammunition and a new type of smothering gas (making clouds of white smoke that make people hard to breathe). Men, women and children were trapped in confined spaces and scores of people were injured. Many citizens were taken prisoners and hostages by the attacking foreign forces. The latter also vandalized private properties smashing 25 cars and breaking into houses.

Earlier in the afternoon (7 December), more than ten thousand people converged on Sanabis for a religious procession that raised the slogans and demands for political reforms. Women marched on the street carrying banners and placards calling on the ruling family to stop using the citizens as escape goats for its failures.

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9 December: The GCC Summit ended with press conferences in Qatar and Bahrain. The border dispute between Bahrain and Qatar was not tackled, but the media war has peaked.

10 December, the UK BBC2 TV channel showed a programme about the torture conducted by Ian Henderson in Bahrain prisons. The programme is part of the series Human Rights and Wrongs.

11 December: A significant reorganisation of the interior ministry was announced by the Bahraini government with plans to create more capabilities for intelligence services and repressive units. The new organisation was designed with the view that Ian Henderson, the Scotsman who controlled all security operations in Bahrain since 1966, may not be in charge of the new structure in a short time.

12-13 December: The security forces mounted an oppressive operation on Thursday and Friday 12-13 December and closed down grand mosques in Duraz, al-Sadek (Qafool), Khawaja and Momin mosques (Manama) were closed down with riot police jeeps besieging the areas. On Thursday, the intelligence department summoned Haj Hassan Jaralla, the elderly person in-charge of Al-Sadek grand mosque in Duraz (Haj Hassan has just been released after eight months in solitary confinement). He was ordered to close down the mosque and hand-over the keys or face revenge. On Friday (13

..Media war with Qatar failed; Attacks on Mosques

December), the foreign forces attacked the residents of Bilad al-Qadim and deployed tear gas and rubber bullets.

14 December: The State Security Court, presided by a member of the ruling family, resumed the trial of a Qatari man and woman on charges of spying for Doha.

15 December: Residential areas across the country switched of the lighting declaring their sadness and defying the foreign forces that were deployed for intimidating of the citizens. All shops and restaurants were closed down and the streets in all the uprising areas were emptied from people. Earlier in the day students in all major schools boycotted the classes. The students knew of a forced celebration programme and responded to the call of the opposition to boycott the classes. The foreign forces attacked several areas and tyres were seen burning in Sanabis, Daih, Karbabad, Duraz, Bani Jamra, Adhari, Bilad al-Qadim, Sitra, Hamala, Aali and other places. One of those injured in Bilad al-Qadim is Mohammed Al-Saffar. Loud explosions were also heard in Iskan-Aali and Duraz. The smell of burnt tyres was present in most places. The preceding nights had also witnessed demonstrations in many areas where the foreign forces attacked the houses of the citizens and implemented their collective punishment programmes, such as ransacking the contents of houses and taking hostages.

16 December: Clashes, columns of fires, fire-engine sirens, rubber bullets, tear gas were present in most areas. Starting from Sanabis and going through all towns and villages to Bani Jamra and Duraz, the residents defied the foreign forces and commemorated the Day of Martyrs. Similarly in Sitra, the Western, central and Muharraq regions, the population commemorated the martyrs and declared their intention to continue resisting the outdated feudal dictatorship and its mercenary forces led by Ian Henderson. The most affected areas were Sanabis, Bilad al-Qadim, Sehla, Zinj, Sitra, Karzakkan, Dair, Hajar, Abo-Saiba'a, Maghaba, Bani Jamra and Duraz.

The Amir, in his annual speech on 16 December, threatened Qatar that he will go to war over Hawar. The statement of defending the integrity of Bahrain "with all legitimate means" was echoed by the press which reported that Hawar will be a "tourist resort".

On 16 December, 6.00-8.30 pm, the forcibly-exiled Bahrainis picketed in front of the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London, where the brother of the foreign minister (recently installed as Bahrain Ambassador) was holding a "celebration". The forcible exiles distributed information packs to attendants and exposed the extent of oppression and torture in Bahrain. Four groups of the opposition issued a joint statement affirming their just demands.

17 December: A 4.00 pm, a mass demonstration of women went out in Sanabis. After fifteen minutes of marching, the undisciplined foreign forces attacked the peaceful demonstrators with rubber bullets and tear gas. In Bilad al-Qadim, a demonstration marched to the main street and clashed with the foreign forces. In Sitra, clashes erupted following an attack on several demonstrations that surfaced simultaneously. The foreign forces attacked the house

of Ali Jassim Khudhair, and when they did not find the named person, they took his brother, Abbas, as a hostage. At 6.00 pm, the residents of A'ali took to the main highway that connects to Hamad Town and Rifaa and clashed with the foreign forces.

Riot police had earlier besieged the Hoora Cemetery in Manama to prevent the citizens from commemorating the martyrs who were forcibly buried (following their death under torture or by live ammunition) without the presence of their relatives.

18 December: A security court presided by a member of the ruling family adjourned until December 25 the case against two Qataris accused of spying for Qatar. On the same day the Al-Khalifa foreign minister stated that he wished for an improved relations with Qatar!

19 December: Sanabis, Daih, Karbabad and Bilad al-Qadim witnessed intensive clashes on 18 and 19 December which followed the break out of demonstrations for the commemoration of the "Day of Martyrs". The foreign forces attacked the citizens and fired haphazardly injuring at least two women and several youths. The also besieged the area and arrested scores of people. Clashes were also reported in almost all areas of Bahrain with heavy presence of foreign forces at main exits and entries of principal areas.

Hoora Cemetery of Manama as well as cemeteries in Duraz, Bani Jamra, Dair, Sanabis, Sitra, Nu'aim, and Karzakkan were besieged on 19 December to prevent the citizens from mourning the martyrs who were killed, tortured to death or executed by the foreign forces on behalf of the Al-Khalifa tribe. Riot police surrounded Hoora causing a traffic jam as many citizens waited on the peripheries reading Quran for the souls of the martyrs. A member of all-appointed Shura Council had obtained a special permission from the prime minister to mourn one of his relatives at the time of the siege. The citizens utilized the opportunity and marched into the cemetery chanting the slogans of the opposition and defying the mercenary forces.

Later on the people marched towards Khawaja mosque in the capital and performed prayers in a solid show of people's strength. Mr. Ian Henderson, the British chief of intelligence, had ordered the closure of major mosques in the country by summoning the people in-charge of Sadiq grand mosque (Duraz), Sadiq mosque (Qafool) and Karbabad grand mosque.

20 December: For the past five days, residents of Sanabis have continuously demonstrated and clashed with the foreign mercenaries in the security service. On 20 December, the brave youths of Sanabis opened their chests to the foreign mercenaries and challenged them to shoot if they wished. Security forces stopped many cars and started beating drivers entering or leaving Sanabis indiscriminately. Columns of fire in Sitra were visible from a long distance. More than fifty people were arrested. Sitra is one of the down-trodden areas and is also one of the most-hated by the ruling family. At night security helicopters were flying low over the residential areas.

24 December: the Al-Khalifa crown prince, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa, was quoted by local papers that he intends to form a "national

guard" force for "internal security". The crown prince heads the Bahrain Defence Force and is at logger head with his uncle the prime minister.

The residents of Daih were out on the street. Similarly in the principal areas of Duraz and Sitra, the foreign forces attempted to intimidate the citizens of the country and the smoke of columns of fire could be seen from a distance.

25 December: A member of the ruling family, Abdul Rahman bin Jaber Al-Khalifa, sentenced a Qatari man and woman to three years in prison and fined them 1,000 dinars (\$2,650) each. The Al-Khalifa accused the two Qataris, Fahad Hamad Abdullah Al-Baker and Salwa Jassim Mohammed Fakhri, of spying, a charge that carries the death sentence.

The foreign security forces acting on behalf of the Al-Khalifa tribe attacked a gathering in Zenj on the evening of 25 December. The citizens were harassed by the foreign forces which closed down the local mosque. At 3.30 pm (local time), fifteen riot police jeeps blocked the entrances and exits of Daih with two intelligence officers directing the operation, Adel Flaifel and Khalid Al-Ma'owdah. At 4.15 pm, the residents of Daih marched in a demonstration defying the siege of the foreign forces and reached the main traffic lights (on the main highway) between Daih and Jedhafs. Clashes erupted with the two notorious torturers (Flaifel and Ma'owdah) directing the foreign forces in their attack against the citizens.

Naeema Falah is the wife of a well known lawyer Ahmed Jasim. On 25 December, Naeema was stopped by the foreign forces which besieged Daih at around 3.30 pm. When she explained that all what she wanted was to visit her father who lives in the besieged part of Daih, she was ill-treated and roughly handled. As she was about to reverse her car, a foreign officer fired two rubber bullets on her wind-screen smashing the front window and injuring her. Then, the blood-stained woman was taken to the notorious Al-Khamis detention centre.

26 December: The foreign forces attacked the assembly hall (matam) in Daih and destroyed all its contents. The 6 persons in charge of the place were taken prisoners. The Musala mosque of Nuaim (a district of Manama) is still under siege with three jeeps surrounding the entrance since 21 December. A mosque in Barbar was also closed down and the persons in charge were summoned and intimidated.

27 December: Worshippers headed towards the grand mosque of Ras-Romman in the capital (near the British Embassy) to pray behind a senior religious scholar, Seyyed Jawad Al-Weda'i. Half way through the prayers, the foreign forces launched an atrocious attack with rubber bullets and tear gas that left hundreds people injured. They have not only disrupted the prayer, but smashed the windows and contents of the mosque, battoned the worshippers and chased them on the main streets surrounding the grand mosque.

28 December: The two Qataris sentenced three days ago were freed!!

29 December: A joint opposition statement called on the government to search for a dialogue approach to resolve internal and external crises and to safe-guard the interests of Bahrain.

Human rights groups call for an end to the era of abuses

Security Courts' sentences are null and void

Four major human rights organization held a press conference in the British parliament today, 16 December 1996, to state their position on the deteriorating human rights crisis in Bahrain. The conference was chaired by Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group (PHRG), and was addressed by Jeremy Corbyn, Vice-Chairman of the PHRG and member of the British House of Commons, Hania Al-Mufti of Amnesty International, Joe Stork of the US-based Human Rights Watch and Dr. Abdul Hussain Sha'aban of the Arab Organization of Human Rights.

Lord Avebury stated that today "is meant to be the occasion for celebrating the accession of the Amir of Bahrain, but for most of the people of the State, it is a reminder of their misery and oppression". "For over 20 years he and his family have ruled the State more autocratically than Charles-1 ruled England in the 1630s. He has no parliament to deal with; the media are totally controlled; the leaders of the democracy movement are jailed without trial, and the State Security Courts, two chambers of which are presided over by members of the ruling family, routinely pass harsh sentences after trials which violates all judicial norms. The mildest and most respectful critics are dismissed from their jobs or compulsory exiled. The state has moved to control the appointment of Shi'a Imams, and to close mosques where the Imams have displeased them." Lord Avebury explained that as a result of the ICRC recent visit to Bahrain, the authorities have resorted to new types of abuses, where persons are taken for few days, roughed-up and released. This serves to hide the cases from the ICRC and serves as a reminder to the general public of the reprisals awaiting them.

Dr. Abdul Hussain Sha'aban stated that "We have been following up the situation in Bahrain for a long time. We wrote to the authorities but they do not respond. The trials' proceedings are all against international laws and the constitution of Bahrain. Those sentenced must be released or allowed to have a fair re-trial in accordance with accepted conventions. The people who are suffering inside the jails must all be released. We call on the Bahraini government to allow us to send a delegation for assessing the situation. It is not enough to check on cells conditions, as has been agreed with the ICRC, which is a good step, but not enough" Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour MP stated that "the British government is a major arms supplier and trade partner and therefore has a role to play. We can use our position to press for respect of human rights and for restoring democracy. We understand that the government of Bahrain is very hostile to the opposition (inside Bahrain) but the least that they can do is to allow for monitoring the situation to assist those who suffer".

Joe Stork stated The ruling family ought "to remember that there would not be a national day had i not been for the referendum on the question of the status of Bahrain in 1970. The very foundation of the state had been subjected to a minimal level of popular will. The government of Bahrain must bear this in mind. The constitution that was developed was a Bahraini one,

not a Westminster-product. All Bahrainis (including the ruling family) have settled for a compromise in the constitution. Any change from this agreement must be referred to ALL Bahrainis. No single party on its own (such as the Al-Khalifa) is entitled to re-negotiate without the consent of the others. The suspension of parliament in 1975 goes beyond what is officially stated. There is a total denial of freedom of expression; sharp interference in the affairs of the individuals, medical doctors, lawyers and professional find it difficult to progress their careers if they express their views, stringent control to prevent speaking to journalists, the BBC and any other body, forcible exile, torture, arbitrary detention, etc. Those who say that democracy is not part of the local culture must answer whether these abuses are part of Bahriani culture? I was in Bahrain last June when the government claimed that it uncovered a plot by a Hizbolla. No one mentioned that these people who were shown on TV had been in detention for at least six weeks and some of them for many months. And that these, most probably, have been subjected to the routine torture and ill-treatment to force them to appear before the TV. The sectarian polarization (fostered by the government) is poisoning the country. This is like poisoning the ground water which takes time to purify. We appeal to the Bahraini government and to London and Washington to take a closer look at the situation and to implement remedial actions."

Hania Al-Mufti stated that "the abuses of the authorities are not new. What is new is the attack on women and children and the intensity of abuses. Bahrain is unique in the way it expels its citizens from their country". She then described a typical case when a Bahraini is arrested. "The citizen is arrested in a dawn raid, normally in a violent way. Members of his family will be abused. Contents of his house will be ransacked and some will be confiscated. The arrest is probably carried out by the SIS or the CID. No judicial warrant is present or is necessary for the arrest (in accordance with the State Security Law). The citizen is not informed about the reason of the arrest and is then placed in one of the detention centres. Under incommunicado detention, the person spends days, weeks and months being tortured until he agrees to confess. Once a confession is extracted, the person is taken to an investigating judge. The judge asks him one question "Did you commit the crime?". If the person says no, he is then taken back for another cycle of torture and confession extraction.

Once the person agrees to say to the investigating judge that he did commit the crime (what ever it may be in order to have the torture stopped), then the papers are transferred to the State Security Court. The court waits for a time so that the wounds of the detainee disappear and then brings him before the judges. Up until that moment the detainee had not been allowed to meet with a lawyer. The first time he see a lawyer is just before the start of the first session. The next time he sees his lawyer will also be before the start of a session. There is no time to study the papers and defend the accused. The

accused is put in a cage at a distance from every body else. If the defense lawyer protests that the accused was tortured, the judge take a look at the detainee from the far distance and makes a judgment whether the accused has been tortured. In the rare cases, the accused may still look exhausted. The accused may be subjected to an examination. The result of such an examination never changed the mind of the judge and never resulted in the punishment of those who tortured the detainee. After three or four sessions, the judge pass an arbitrary sentence without explaining why and how he arrived at the sentence. The lawyer is not given any written confirmation of the sentence and has to refer to an office where he can only read the final version. This is the way Bahrainis are detained and sentenced, which is a gross violation of international human rights conventions and the constitution of Bahrain".

Giles Elgood of Reuters reported from the conference saying "Human rights campaigners Monday (16 December) urged the United States and British governments to put more pressure on the authorities in Bahrain to release political prisoners and end abuses such as the torture of detainees.

On the day Bahrain marked its silver jubilee, British human rights campaigner Lord Avebury said he had been told of demonstrations, a student boycott and reports of explosions in the Gulf state.

Listing human rights abuses such as the forced exile of dissidents, the dismissal of government critics from their jobs and unfair trials, the campaigners called on Bahrain's ruling family to enter into a dialogue with pro-democracy activists". Reuters also reported "Amnesty International official

Hania Mufti issued an appeal to the British, U.S. and other governments "to exert more pressure to try and alleviate the suffering of the people of Bahrain." Lord Avebury "said that Sunday, according to local people, lights had been turned out in residential areas of Bahrain in an anti-government protest, students had boycotted classes, tyres had been burned in the streets and two explosions had been heard, while one civilian had been injured...

Avebury welcomed decisions by the Bahrain authorities to release a number of prisoners and to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to people in detention. But he said 18 people, including three boys aged between eight and 15, had been arrested this month and a pattern was emerging whereby people were detained for short periods and abused before being freed, to avoid Red Cross scrutiny.

He also criticized the British head of the Bahrain security service, Ian Henderson, who is believed to be about to retire to Britain. "Torture in Bahrain is unfortunately rather common and it is a matter of shame and regret that the man in charge of the security apparatus and so ultimately responsible for these atrocities is a Briton, Mr Ian Henderson," Avebury said. "I hope the law will allow him to be sued in the (British) civil courts by some of his victims or their bereaved families."