

BAHRAIN

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Membership of the Security Council carries international implications

Not a bad news

The sudden illness of Bahrain's prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, is bound to leave an impact on the internal squabbling of the Al Khalifa ruling family. Not only is the prime minister the dominant figure within it but his tyrannical rule has insured no one could undertake to challenge his rulings or present any alternative policies. It is for this reason that he recently blocked a Gulf initiative to mediate in the ongoing crisis for the simple reason that other persons had championed it. Therefore it is hard to see how it is possible to get the ball rolling towards a political solution. What Khalifa had hoped to achieve was to crush the opposition and send its leaders into oblivion. Now that aim has not been fulfilled the stage has been set for a prolonged conflict that could escalate fiercely. The hope is that a senior figure from the ruling family would have the courage to come forward with some proposals to break the stalemate that everyone believes could not be in the interest of the ruling family.

One of the most astonishing developments last month was the announcement by the minister of the interior that a group of opposition figures outside the country would be tried. No specific plans were made to ensure their presence in Bahrain to attend the trial and hence the whole thing remained a media talk.

Sheikh Khalifa's new hostile attitude towards Britain is not conducive to the crusade he is leading against the people of Bahrain. There are limitations to what he could do to challenge the British Labour Government, and he will soon find himself out of steam in his endeavour to "humiliate" the old friends. He ought to realise that the existence of his family rule over the past two centuries is owed to the British presence in the Gulf and specifically in Bahrain. The notorious Ian Henderson still carries the British legacy in the Gulf island and without him the whole structure of the ruling family could be endangered. There is now growing sentiments in the Gulf and in Britain with regards to the policies of the prime minister having failed in his continuous attempts to crush the opposition by the use of extreme forms of force and repression. The British feel that he has gone too far in his anti-Britain campaign at a time when he needs them most. They could not see any justification for his harsh reaction to them when they decided to uphold their international obligations against his odds. His rhetoric projected him in a much bigger position and he seems to enjoy it. The local press which is controlled by the government is doing its best to toe the line of the prime minister.

The dilemma being faced by the opposition has two folds. On the one hand they are resisting all forms of provocation from the governmental side to push the people to adopt a violent approach. So far they have successfully adopted a programme of civil resistance which proved to be capable of irritating the prime minister and mobilising the masses. On the other hand, they see the whole process heading to a dead-end with the possibility of a head-on collision with the government. The next few months will be crucial in pursuing the constitutional demands within the peaceful framework that they had chosen for themselves. The prime minister has not left a stone un-turned in his attempts to crush the opposition. He solicited the help of international public relations company, private detectives, and mercenaries from various places. He even enticed some London and Paris-based pseudo-academic centres to offer their help to salvage his government's reputation which had sunk to new low levels. Omar Al Hassan of the Gulf Centre of Strategic Studies in London is one of those who grabbed the opportunity to widen his financial resources by working for Bahrain. He, together with Saleh Al Tayyar in Paris are organising a seminar in Bahrain next February on behalf of the Bahraini government. Their brochures are depicting a false image to imply that the invited personalities support dictatorship.

The prime minister has exhibited endless joy as Bahrain became a non-permanent member of the Security Council for a term of two years starting next year. The General Assembly, on 15 October, elected Bahrain, Brazil, Gabon, Gambia and Slovenia as members of the Security Council. They will fill five non-permanent seats to be vacated by Chile, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, Poland and the Republic of Korea. The membership is proposed on the basis of regions and does not in itself provide that country with a certificate of "good character". The UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights has on 21 August condemned the Al-Khalifa feudal autocrats and they will continue to be monitored for their abuse of basic rights of Bahrainis.

The period of membership to the Security Council will end just before the new millennium which the people of Bahrain hope to enter with a degree of democracy based on the Constitution. They see Bahrain's membership of the Security Council as a positive step in the struggle to force the government to sign international conventions on human rights as well as political and cultural liberties. The opposition will seek to ensure that the government signs the international conventions against torture. Bahrain will start its tenure at the Security Council at a time

when the whole world will be celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is hoped that the prime minister will soon realise that membership of the Security Council obliges him to adopt modern democratic values and human rights. Bahrain will soon be exposed to the world that it has no elected legislative body, no trade unions, no press freedom, no civil liberties. Bahrain will be seen as the only country in the world that exiles its citizens and later seeks to try them in absentia or wages a war against countries that offer them asylum. While the government has attempted to exploit the selection of Bahrain to the membership of the Security Council and present it as a victory in its war against the pro-democracy movement, the opposition is happy to see Bahrain occupying a seat at the Security Council and hopes it will be the first step towards the democratisation of the country. The world has a duty to ensure that members of the Security Council possess a degree of integrity in their internal policies, especially that the issue of human rights has become extra-territorial. The government of Bahrain must be made aware of its international obligations and stop its attacks on the European Parliament, human rights organisations and international human rights activists for their support of the pro-democracy movement.

Trial's date explains it all!

Sources close to the unconstitutional regime have revealed the panic and hysteria circulating amongst the officials in the various ministries. The interior ministry has failed to settle matters by force while the international community has become aware of the outdated nature of the uncivilized governing institution. The Official Gazette of 1 October was changed in the last minutes to include a statement by the general prosecutor for a trial on Saturday 7th of November. The latter date is a "Friday" and is a "Public Holiday". The officials seem to have lost the count in the same way as they lost their sanity. The opposition is challenging the unconstitutional government and its agents in all political circles. The despair of the government in announcing a trial will be one such landmark for trying those officials who continue to terrorize our nation. The opposition is also calling on international institutions to stand with the people of Bahrain in the same way as they supported the people of South Africa who had suffered from a regime possessing similar mentality. The Khalifa regime must be reminded that feudal-trialism does not belong to the 21st century.

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October 1997: Second Anniversary of the Historic

1 October: The Gulf News Agency distributed a press release saying that the Official Gazette published on 1 October the names of eight citizens wanted for trial on 7 November 1997. The eight are Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri, Dr. Saeed Al-Shehabi (both members of the BFM), together with the three religious scholars who were forcibly exiled by the regime on 15 January 1995: Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri, and Seyyed Haider Al-Setri. Three other names were lumped in the list: Sheikh Adel Al-Shu'la, Sheikh Khalil Sultan, and Sheikh Mohammed Habib Mansoor, all of whom had been forcibly exiled in the past 2-4 years.

Dr. Al-Jamri commented: "This statement reflects the state of despair within the ranks of the unconstitutional political system. The publishing of names lumped together in a haphazard way is intended for deflecting attention from the international condemnation of human rights abuses in Bahrain. The opposition advises these authorities to restore their senses by reinstating the rule of constitutional law. This is because the constitution is the only source of legitimacy for the political system. The opposition challenges the government to allow international observers to attend any trial that would abide by the constitution of Bahrain. Any law issued after the dissolution of the parliament in 1975 is unconstitutional".

1 October: To commemorate the 40th Day of the death of the national figure Aziza Al-Bassam, the opposition has called for one-minute stoppage on 1 October, at 11.00 am. The interior ministry had banned all ceremonies on this accession.

Lawyers were at the forefront in the commemoration. Court cases stopped for one minute. People in other places joined in the commemoration in a clear challenge to the unconstitutional and authoritarian regime. Abdul Salam Al-Ansari, a notorious torturer, summoned the leading members of An-Nahda Women Association and threatened them of grave consequences if they were to hold any commemoration service for Aziza.

1 October: The prime minister announced the start of the so-called Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. The council was established earlier in the year and is aimed at confiscating the religious rights of the Shia Community. The religious leaders of the Shia Community inside and outside the country have declared their total rejection of this body. The people have vowed to resist this council and all its orders. Prior to this announcement, the principal mosques of Sadiq in Qafool (Manama) and other grand mosques have been closed, besieged or attacked for the past 7 weeks.

1 October: The Paris-based Committee for Defence of Democracy in the Arabian Peninsula issued a statement on 1 October calling on the French MPs to condemn the autocratic rule of Al-Khalifa. The Committee also called on the French officials to reveal the nature of the recently announced a "Defence Agreement". It pointed out that the Al-Khalifa crown prince was in London for the same purposes but had seemingly been rebuffed. The Committee referred to the recent European Parliament Resolution recalling that the Euro MPs had called

for a ban on export of military and security equipment and expertise, unless the Bahraini authorities restore the dissolved parliament.

1 October: The Economist Intelligence Unit published its quarterly report on Bahrain this month. The report is damning evidence of the deepening crisis with the outlook for 1997-98 stating "the risk of domestic political instability over the next 18 months is strong" with little signs that the government is willing to negotiate a political solution.

3 October: More than a 100 houses in Duraz are still without power for the third day. The security forces conducted collective punishment against the residents of Duraz in the past 2 weeks. Some of those injured are still being treated. They include a 3-year old Ali Mohammed Saleh, and elderly women (the mother of Ali Seyed Ahmad, another security forces conducted collective punishment against the residents of Duraz in the past 2 weeks. Some of those injured are still being treated. They include a 3-year old Ali Mohammed Saleh, and elderly women

4 October: A big fire gutted several stores, believed to be owned by the Kazerooni, one of the important Bahraini businessmen on 4 October. The fire near Daih and Sanabis was sighted at around 8.00 pm local time. Fire engines were very slow in responding despite the enormity of the fire. They waited for one hour before attempting to extinguish the fire. A British intelligence officer was directing the various personnel belonging to the interior ministry. The fire reached the residential area and at least one house (belonging to Abdul Karim Al-Ekri) was gutted. The cause of the fire is not yet known. It is however widely believed that the security forces were behind several arsonists attacks against successful businessmen. The opposition denounces all arsonist attacks.

4 October: Sources close to the government have revealed that an order has been issued for expelling thousands of people from the country. These are people who had been denied their right to citizenship. The policy has already started. For example, Abbas Yousif and his wife had lived in Bahrain for more than 50 years is now detained in Bahrain Airport. Two months ago he and his wife traveled to Iran and on 4 October they headed back. Upon their arrival, the husband was told that he is not a Bahraini anymore. He is now jailed in the Airport. His wife and family were left to agonize about the fate of their guardian.

6 October: The Kuwaiti interior minister arrived in Bahrain for inviting the Amir to attend the next GCC Summit. Ian Henderson was shown on the TV welcoming the Kuwaiti visitor. The Al-Khalifa government is attempting to come out in the open about the role of Ian Henderson who has been leading a campaign of terror against the peaceful people of Bahrain. The Al-Khalifa regime depends on the services of mercenaries imported from all over the world. Henderson was imported in 1966. Since then many people were tortured to death and many others had been shot dead during peaceful demonstrations.

6 October: A Bahraini professor was driven to resign from the University of Bahrain. He

had been subjected to many restrictions reflecting the racist policy. Dr. Saeed Abdulla submitted his resignation. Al-Ghatam has been implementing an ethnic cleansing policy in the University of Bahrain. Dr. Abdulla is the last person from the Shia community who occupied a position of "Dean of College". Al-Ghatam appointed Dr. Waheeb Al-Nasser in his place.

7 October: Amnesty International issued an urgent appeal calling on the interior ministry to end the torturing of a Bahraini citizen, Muhammad Ahmad Juma's Shafi'i. Mr. Shafi'i had been arrested on 3 September from his home in Hamad Town, and nothing has been heard about him since then.

8 October: The London-based Al-Quds newspapers published on 8 October a special report from Bahrain. The article detailed how the rulers had converted Bahrain to a prostitution centre by importing and abusing women from the countries that used to be called the Soviet Union. These batches of women are imported for two weeks to serve as "call-girls" during these periods. Al-Quds also revealed that this trade is well connected to the rulers and those who are in-charge.

10 October: A group of youths that were camping in a farm in Bani Jamra were attacked at the early hours of 10 October. The youths were beaten with electronic batons while sleeping. The foreign forces then dragged several youths to the swimming pool and tortured them by immersing their heads inside water until exhaustion. After these sessions of torture, the foreigners started laughing and left out.

11 October: The unconstitutional State Security Court, which is headed by a member of the Al-Khalifa family, sentenced on 11 October three young men and two girls as a punishment for demanding the restoration of the dissolved parliament. Mohammed Yousif Abdul Wahab was unfairly sentenced to four years imprisonment. Hashim Taj Hashim and Mahmood Ahmad Dhafir were sentenced for two and on year consequently. Similarly, the Al-Khalifa judge sentenced two Bahraini girls to three months suspended jail and a fine of 50 dinars (\$133) each as punishment for participation in a pro-democracy demonstration. The two girls are Zahra Ali Saleh Al-Shehabi and Amal Omran Ali Omran.

11 October: Sheikh Isa Qassim, the senior religious figure and member of both the Constituent and National Assemblies issued a statement declaring that the newly established "High Council for Islamic Affairs" is a tool for confiscating religious rights. He re-affirmed his call for all those concerned to boycott and resist this illegal apparatus which represents the most dangerous attack on religion in Bahrain.

11 October: The security forces raided at least fifteen houses in Eker and arrested scores of people including: Raed Ali Jawad, Yousif Ali Jawad, Hussain Ali Hassan, Jamil Isa Al-Delki, Jaber Hussain Yousif, Hamza Ahmad Sharaq, Jassim Hassan Khamis, Jabir Abdul Redha, Hussain Ali Al-Mahoozi, Abbas Mansoor Jassim, and others.

11 October: The main Sehla Highway (stretching from Abdul-Karim Roundabout) was sealed off following skirmishes between the foreign security forces and the citizens. In

Ten-Day Strike Commemorated

Karabad, the citizens pained the "Wall of Freedom" with pro-democracy slogans. The "Wall of Freedom" is guarded round the clock because of its strategic position.

12 October: "Al-Mushahid Al-Seyasi", 12-18 October, the news magazine of the BBC Arabic Service featured extensive interviews with four opposition figures, Sheikh Ali Salman, Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri, Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Nuami, and Seyf Bin-Ali. The Middle East Mirror (14 October) also covered the 8-page feature with commentary and analysis.

15 October: The security forces attacked several mosques and congregation halls. Seyed Hashim Al-Toblani Mosque and Matam Shahid al-Islam (in Toble) were attacked and ransacked on 15 October. Two congregation halls in Sanabis were also attacked. Matam Abdul-Hay and Matam Bin-Khamis were attacked after midnight and had their contents damaged.

15 October: The regime continued its policy of forcible exile. Abd Ali Sarhan, 35 years old, returned from Kuwait to Bahrain on 15 October. This is his fourth return to his country. Just like all other time, he was forcibly returned to Kuwait. On 30 September, Haji Abdul Hassan Al-Saro, 77 years old, returned to Bahrain from Iran together with his family (three sons and one daughter). The family was detained and then forcibly exiled to Sharjah in the UAE.

17 October: At 3.30 pm local time: Residential areas stretching from the streets near Mani (off Sanabis) to Qafool (Mo'yyad Traffic Lights) witnessed an upsurge in the byming of tyres and closure of main roads. Sanabis, Daih, Southern Sehla, Bilad al-Qadim, Zarare'a, Jablat Habshi and several other places, had simultaneously decided to prove to the tribal dictatorship and its mercenary forces that Bahrainis are not anything less than human. The roads were closed and the demands of the nation were raised again to those in the ivory tower who had not been able to hear the voices of the nation.

21 October: In Manama, the security forces surrounded key mosques, like Khawajah Mosque, and threatened those attempting to pray with arrest. On 20 October, the residents of Abo-Quwwa woke-up to see an assembly hall (Matam Imam Ali) stormed with its contents damaged and destroyed. The security forces demolished the main gates and damaged loud speakers, the kitchen, toilets and other facilities. Copies of Quran and other books were torn and scattered on the floor. The security forces also attacked a mosque in the nearby Hajjar village and damaged its contents. A similar attack was also reported in Demestan where a mosque had been stormed and damaged.

22 October: The government intervened in the elections of the Chamber of Commerce and this has caused the low turnout of 38%. Out of 3600 members, only 1384 participated. The Commerce Minister summoned several candidates and demanded that they withdraw their nominations as per government's instructions. Two of the nominees who had been forced to stand down were Taqi Al-Zeera and Dr. Nizar Al-Bahrani. Six candidates were forced to stand down and this intervention has caused the low turnout.

23 October: People around the country

switched-off the lighting on 23 October starting from 7.00 pm local time for commemorating the second anniversary of the 10-day hunger strike staged by Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues in 1995. Shops closed down in most areas and residents emerged in groups of cars, sounding horns and challenging the autocratic tribal dictatorship.

It was two years when Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues agreed with the government to calm down the situation in return for the initiation of political dialogue. The security forces back-slid on the understanding and started attacking schools mosques and gathering, thus re-igniting clashes with the population. Two years ago, the crisis was about to end. Two years ago, the unconstitutional government decided to resort to the use of violence against the citizens. Two years on and Bahrain sees no end to the political crisis.

24 October: Dozens of teenagers were dismissed from schools (names available with the BFM). These children are denied their rights for basic education and the ministry of education is attempting to destroy their future. This move can only radicalise the situation where youths are driven to revenge against this hate-based policy.

25 October: Seyed Mohammed Abdulla Shams, 30 years old, from Jabalat Habshi, died in jail. He was not a political prisoner. However, the ill-treatment he suffered was evident on his body. He had been in jail for the past one and half years.

25 October: The prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa was admitted to hospital. He was believed to be in comma.

26 October: A Bahraini citizen working in Kuwait was prevented (together with his family) from re-entering Kuwait on 26 October. Ali Al-Jareesh was stopped at the Saudi-Kuwaiti border (Nowaiseeb checkpoint). Six months ago, the Kuwaiti intelligence department interrogated him, but was later cleared. He was returning from a holiday with his family in Bahrain. The Kuwaiti authorities are still holding four Bahrainis for unspecified periods and without a judicial review.

26-28 October: In Karranah, the security forces attacked the residents on 25 and 26 October and arrested Saeed Al-Subaihi, 16, Fadhil Isa Nasser, 16, Qassim Mohammed Makki, 15, Saleh Juma Kadhem, 15, his brother Jalal, 14, Jaffer Ahmad Al-Bori, 17, Jaffer Ahmad Fadhil, 15, Abdul Rasool Ibrahim, 15, Khalil Ibrahim Mesh'al, Khalil Ibrahim Jaffer, 20. The latter was not at home, and hence the security forces destroyed many elongings and contents of the house, took a member of the family as a hostage (Seyed Noor), until the person handed himself to the torturers.

On 28 October, the security forces attacked Tashan and arrested Jalal Abdulla Al-Alwani, 24, Hussain Ali Al-Tashani, 23, and his two brothers Hasan, 20, and Abbas, 18. On 26 October, the forces attacked Matam Ansar-al-Hussain (a religious community centre in Bilad al-Qadim) and ransacked its contents. They also arrested Abd Ali Marhoon for one day.

Mohammed Jawad Al-Mesbah, 14, from Qadam was arrested on 27 October. On 26

October, the forces attacked Bani Jamra and arrested Hussain Ibrahim Al-Najjar, 18, and his brother Ahmad, 16, Ahmad Ali Al-Ghanmi, 17. Others arrested include: Hussain Saeed Al-Masqati, 25, from Bani Jamra; Shakir

Ma'atooq Ibrahim, Seyed Hussain Salman Hussain, 18, both are from Sar. From Karabad, the following were arrested on 26 October: Nasser Mohammed Al-Sahjjar, 23, and Mahmood Abdulla Kadhem, 20.

29 October: The security forces have committed several atrocities in the residential areas. The people have painted the walls with slogans calling for an end to dictatorship and for release of jailed leaders. On 29 October, the security forces attacked several houses. They stormed the house of Mirza Ahmad Mushman'a, took their 15-year old son, Monir, and beaten him severely in front of his parent. The child was then taken to hospital for emergency treatment.

30 October: About half the shops in Manama's town centre closed following skirmishes between the security forces and youths of the uprising. Burnt tyres caused the blocking of several main streets. Similarly, the main roads near Jabalat Habshi, Daih, Sanabis, Sehla, Qadam, Duraz, Bani Jamra, Sitra, Karzakkan, Ma'amir and other places witnessed intensive activities with burnt tyres blocking the main roads.

30 October: A fire on 30 October gutted a multi-storey building (UNISYS) belonging to the distinguished business family, Al-Zayyani. Several new cars were burnt in the show room of the building. A spokesperson for the BFM said, "the opposition condemns arson and sabotage. It is believed that the security forces have been targeting successful business families in a desperate attempt to pave the way for other parasitic business activities".

31 October: The security forces attacked Ma'amir and arrested several people including a 13-year old child, Ibrahim Jaffer Mohammed Ali. From Bilad al-Qadim, the following were arrested: A TEN-year old boy by the name Mohammed Abdulla Al-Shajjar together with his older brother Hussain, 18, Ismail Abdulla Ahmad, 18, Hassan Abdulla Al-Dafari, 18, Yaser Hasan Al-Sammak, 28, Mohammed Ramadan Ahmad Al-Saffar, 28, Adel Ali Al-Sodani, 28. From Qadam: ELEVEN-year old boy Mahdi Jawad Ahmad Abdulla and another ELEVEN-year old Abdulla Ibrahim Al-Jaziri. From Bani Jamra: Ahmad Ali Ahmad Al-Ghanmi, Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Najjar and his brother Borair.

31 October: Reuters reported from Bahrain that a bomb, planted under a car, went off on Friday (31 October) Friday near the International Exhibition Centre outside the Bahraini capital Manama. The explosion occurred at around 7.00 pm local time. A government official said that the explosion damaged the car and shrapnel from the blast injured a passenger who was in another car. Bahrain had been suffering from a vicious cycle of violence caused by the atrocities of the security forces. The opposition has called for ending this deplorable state of violence and urged the government to respect the country's constitution.

Abdul-Ghaffar reveals his racism on TV

The Bahraini Ambassador to the US said in an interview with the Arabic TV Channel (ANN) on 26 October that the opposition has "Batani" feature (meaning those who hide their true beliefs). This specific term (Batani) is an old abusive word specifically used for insulting the Shia Muslims. The Ambassador was challenged by political commentators to provide any rationale for dissolving the National Assembly in 1975. He was the only one reading from a pre-prepared text and had to repeat several sentences in "broken" Arabic. The representative of Khalifa government in the US has been repeating his racist remarks in many places and in front of a lot of people. His lack of knowledge about the Bahraini people is evident in his deliberations. He thinks the only way to woo the Americans is by emphasising such terms as "Hizbollah", "Iran" and "Shia". The opposition has made its demands and concepts clear enough for decent human beings to appreciate realities.

Two political commentators, Farid Al-Khatib and Saleh Jaowdeh challenged the Bahraini government to initiate dialogue with the opposition for agreeing on an agenda to restore democracy. Mr. Jaowdeh said that "the Kuwaitis have restored their parliament, the Qataris are promising elections, the Omanis have developed their experiment to include women through one form of election", and this leaves Bahrain the odd one out.

Mr. Jaowdeh also said "the Shia of Bahrain are Arabs and citizens, and they should not be forcibly exiled, banned from returning home". The racist Ambassador attacked the pro-democracy opposition saying that 'the majlis (courts) of his highnesses are open for all people'. These open courts (majlis) have failed to solve a single important issue for Bahrainis and are not recognized as any thing more than an occasion for drinking coffee with their highnesses. Hafeed Al-Merazi, the interviewer, asked the racist Ambassador "when would the Parliament be restored?" The Ambassador searched for an answer in his pre-prepared text but could not find any sentence. So he continued in his "broken" Arabic without explaining what he meant and without responding to the question.

On 23 October, the Middle East Institute organized a seminar on Bahrain in the US capital, Washington DC. The seminar was addressed by Mr. Joe Stork of Human Rights Watch, David Ransom, the ex-US Ambassador to Bahrain and the racist Ambassador in Washington, Mr. Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar. Mr. Stork, the author of a 109-page report on human rights abuses in Bahrain, described the abuses of civil liberties and lack of justice in arresting, trying and sentencing Bahrainis. Mr. Stork set out the main concerns of human rights activists in Bahrain where people are denied the right to express their views and where the security forces are given free hand in abusing the basic rights of citizens. The Bahraini Ambassador failed to defend his government while the ex-US Ambassador attempted to maneuver the debate. Mr. Stork challenged the Bahraini Ambassador to allow the publication of the full text of the seminar in the Bahraini press, if he insists that people are free to read and express their views.

Opposition figures interviewed

The London-based newsletter "Middle East Mirror", 14 October 1997, covered the interviews made by the BBC Arabic magazine al-Mushahid Assiyasi. Four leaders of Bahrain's opposition provided for an 8-page cover story in al-Mushahid Assiyasi of 12 October. These are some extracts from the interviews with Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri, Sheikh Ali Salman, Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Nuaimi and Saif Bin-Ali (Ahmad Al-Thawadi).

* NO PLOT: "Mansour al-Jamri whose father Sheikh Abdel-Amir al-Jamri is the most prominent opposition leader jailed in Bahrain on charges of inciting unrest, told al-Mushahid Assiyasi the Bahraini government had failed to prove that there had been such an Iranian-backed plot. The published confessions of those arrested in connection with the purported plot were so contradictory and implausible that they exposed the government, he said. In any event, "we denounce any Iranian or non-Iranian attempt to meddle in our affairs," Jamri said.

Salman noted that the story of an Iranian plot died down after a few months and the government began to talk about a third country backing the Bahraini opposition. It's all too easy to blame a foreign country for one's failures, he remarked.

Jamri brushed off the suggestion that Bahrain's Shiites aspired to return their country to the fold of "the motherland," i.e. Shiite-dominated Iran. "There isn't one politician prepared to commit suicide and claim that he is demanding to return to the motherland" he said.

By speaking of an Iranian connections Jamri said, the government was trying to win Western support, virtually telling the West that "we the local dictatorship in Bahrain, are better than people who might establish a regime similar to that in Iran."

Moreover, Jamri said, the Al Khalifas resort to attack as a means of defense because they suffer from an "inferiority complex" resulting from the fact that they do not originally hail from Bahrain. This explains why they encourage foreigners to reside in Bahrain while banishing the country's natives. "They shouldn't be frightened," Jamri said of Bahrain's rulers. No one is thinking of driving them out of Bahrain, but nor should they expel natives from the country.

Salman disputed the contention that Bahrain's Islamist movement did not emerge until after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini staged the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. As a matter of fact, he said, the Islamists entered the political arena via the short-lived parliament elected in 1973 and even a year earlier, when they set up a Shiite association that came to dominate Islamic social activities in Bahrain. As to the Sunnite Islamists, they have a total of four associations, one of which groups Moslem Brotherhood activists.

* SUNNITE vs SHIITE: Abdorrahman al-Nuaimi, who serves as secretary-general of the leftist-nationalist Popular Front in Bahrain went further in accusing Bahrain's rulers of playing the Sunnite-Shiite card, saying they were exporting the sectarian crisis" to other Gulf Arab states. The region's rulers were annoyed by the Bahraini government's conduct, Nuaimi claimed. When Saudi Arabians Defense

Minister Prince Sultan bin-Abdelaziz proposed that the Bahraini government talk to its opponents, Crown Prime Sheikh Hamad bin-Issa Al Khalifa rushed to the kingdom to inquire about his remarks. "What the Bahrain government is doing endangers security and stability in the Gulf... They are exporting the sectarian crisis to everyone, Nuaimi said.

Saif Ben-Ali, secretary-general of Bahrain's National Liberation Front similarly denied any intention or seeking the overthrow of the ruling regime. Ben-Ali said Islamist and nationalist opposition factions were demanding the reactivation of the constitution, the restoration of parliamentary life, the release of detainees and dialogue between the authorities and the peoples including the opposition.

• VIOLENCE: When People took to the streets in 1994, they were met by live ammunitions and the authorities started besieging villages and attacking property, Ben-Ali said. Salman said the government had blown up arson attacks perpetrated by protesters, which were no more than "isolated" incidents which "we do not endorse," "Ours is a political movement, and we have specific demands. We don't have weapons. I tell the state stop the torture... and let's play politics".

Private Eye: "Manamarama"

"Private Eye" published a commentary on 15 October criticism two Labour PPSs (Private Parliamentary Secretaries). The magazine said:

"Two parliamentary private secretaries to cabinet ministers have spent four days in Bahrain at the expense of an organisation, which supports the Bahraini dictatorship and has regularly made undeclared payment to an MP. Dennis Turner MP, PPS to Clare Short, secretary of state for international development, and Ken Purchase MP, PPS to Robin Cook, foreign secretary, flew to Bahrain as guests of the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies. The third member of the "delegation" was David Wilshire, Tory MP for Spelthorne. Eye readers (No 918) will recall the photographs of the generous five hundred Pounds cheques paid each month by the GCSS to William Powell, then (now no longer) Tory MP for Corby, who did not declare them. Mr. Powell then took on GCSS's Omar Al Hassan as researcher, thus ensuring for the first time in the history of the House that a researcher paid for his employer/MP. Omar Al Hassan was later thrown out of the Pugin room of the House by Emma Nicholson, who had to call two orders before the cigar-puffing sycophant agreed to leave. The GCSS's chief purpose is to suck up to the dictators of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia>

Interviewed on Bahraini TV, Dennis Turner praised the Shura council, a clique of toadies appointed by the Amir of Bahrain to replace the partly elected parliament he dissolved in 1975. Without mentioning the recent resolution of the European Union (denouncing torture, imprisonment without trial, etc in Bahrain), Turner was quoted as saying that on the MPs' return they would alert the British government to the "false information which finds its way into the British press as a result of the activities of hostile groups". Perhaps he means the Bahraini opposition in exile; many of whose distinguished leaders support the Labour party and are about to be tried in their absence for treason in Manama".