

BAHRAIN

Popular uprising starts the fourth year The march forward against a backward dictatorship

As the popular uprising enters its fourth year, it has become apparent that it is almost impossible either for the government or anyone else to change the course of the public demands for greater freedom and democracy. If anything, the past three years have indicated to what extent the people of Bahrain have been resilient in their stands and strategies, and how the government finally realised that it was no longer possible to hide behind a fictitious normality. To the foreign expatriates, the activities of the opposition have never posed a threat to their security. None has ever been specifically targeted, and the movement has maintained its peaceful and civilised approach. The uprising has enjoyed a decent international coverage with a degree of sympathy and solidarity. The international human rights organisations raised their concern about the situation and have reserved no effort in condemning the terror of the government. Of particular importance, the role of Ian Henderson, the pseudo-colonial officer in charge of the terror machine in Bahrain for more than thirty years has been overtly disclosed to the extent that the notorious torturer may have now decided to spend his retirement life outside Britain.

Furthermore, the international political support has exceeded expectations and the reaction of the government has been both furious and unwise. Today, the Al Khalifa have become so hostile to the European Parliament, for example, that every ministerial meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council has been bullied into issuing hostile comments on it. International Human Rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been targeted with the same ferocity and antagonism. Even governments of friendly countries such as Britain were attacked by the Al Khalifa mouthpieces mercilessly. The world has, for the first time in recent history, been well educated about the true nature of the regime of Bahrain. The prime minister boasts of the fact that he is perhaps the most experienced prime minister in the world having remained in his position for more than 26 years. Surely, only dictators and despots manage to survive this long in the same position. It is therefore not surprising to see that the prime minister has become so obsessed by his post that he would go to every length to quash any opposition to his rule. Moreover, any would-be opponent is scared off to death by the huge terror machine ruling the country. Perhaps Bahrain is the only country in the world whose security service personnel is equivalent to the armed forces. The logic of things leads one to believe that this state of affairs could not be

sustained for long. Dictators often defy logic and manage to stay for longer periods causing more distress to innocent people, only to find themselves dumped by history.

Now that Bahrain has become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, it was hoped the Government would adopt a more civilised internal policy and enter into dialogue with the opposition. It was also hoped that the government would ratify the international convention against torture as well as the two conventions for civil, economic and social rights. The government must realise that it is the only government amongst those of the other members of Council, that has been condemned by the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission last August. This fact will be highlighted at every international level and no justification from the government could obscure the reality. National and international bodies which have, hitherto, remained adamant in their demands for political reforms in the country will continue to work to achieve reforms. The government still has the alternative to remain unresponsive to these calls. This will however lead to further escalation in international exposure, something the Al Khalifa rulers would not like to happen while they are members of the Security Council.

Last month's trial of eight political figures in absentia has not enhanced the image of the dictatorial regime. The eight, haphazardly grouped in one list, have pleaded their innocence and have challenged the government to hold an open court. The trial was held in secret, no lawyers were allowed to take up the cases and the defendants were not officially notified. What made the situation worse for the government is the fact that the verdicts of the State Security Court which passed the judgements are not appealable. The whole episode was therefore a farce, and international human rights organisations and lawyers have expressed their disgust and total disapproval of this barbaric injustice.

The Government of Bahrain is not being helped by the state of affairs within the Gulf region. Last month the Doha government started the trial of more than 100 people, mostly Qataris with some Egyptians and a Bahraini, suspected of taking active part in an attempt last year to topple the government of the present ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. The trial was in sharp contrast to what is happening in Bahrain, for example. Ambassadors of the five permanent members of the Security Council were invited and three of whom did attend the first session of the court. Amnesty International was officially invited to attend the trials and every possible legal help was offered to the defendants. This has angered the Al Khalifa

beyond belief, knowing they have some of the worst records in their legal processes. Their kangaroo courts are presided over by a member of the ruling family, and he thus becomes "the judge, the jury and the executioner" at the same time.

The trial of the eight Bahrainis has now ended. The question that is being asked by everybody is: Will the government reinstate the Constitution? Will it abolish the State Security Court? Is it going to enhance its record in the field of human rights and eliminate torture? Will it sign the international conventions prohibiting torture and regulating civil and political rights? Will it cooperate with international human rights organisations and other institutions?

These questions await definitive answers from the government of Bahrain. The peaceful and civilised popular uprising is set to continue for the time being as the situation remains volatile. It is hoped that the Al Khalifa have by now realised the high stakes of their repressive measures and opted for a different strategy. The opposition have remained peaceful, civilised and determined to pursue their constitutional goal.

"Naturalising mercenaries"

The government said on 27 November that around 50,000 foreigners in Bahrain have so far legalised their presence. Official figures show foreigners make up almost 39 percent of Bahrain's population, which increased in the year to end-June 1997 to 620,378 from 598,625 a year earlier.

However, the real news is the fact that the government had imported around 40-50,000 people from the deserts of Syria and from other countries, such as Yemen, and Pakistan (Baluchistan). The government is creating a time-bomb by importing people from outside Bahrain in a drive to change the demography of the country. These are awarded passports, salaries and preferential treatment. This massive programme is a reflection of the insecurity felt by the ruling establishment that failed to address the basic demands of the nation.

One of the journalists attempted to address this "time-bomb" problem by writing to "Akhhbar al-Khalij" few weeks ago. He said "The process of naturalising mercenaries and beggars is a gross strategic error and a dangerous move that will adversely impact the society". His writing was not published and he had been ordered to shut-up. It is a matter of concern that the government uses cash received from the Gulf countries for creating more problems.

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The sham of justice: Desperation of a dictatorship

The government-controlled newspaper, Al-Ayyam, said on 29 November that "security authorities are preparing extradition files, an established procedure implemented through diplomatic channels or Interpol" to call upon countries to hand-over political activists living abroad. This is a shameless statement coming from a politically bankrupt dictatorship. If the government were to use this political trial as a means for suppressing the democratic aspirations of the nation, the subsequent events proved otherwise. The Interpol stated that "it is strictly forbidden for the Interpol to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious or racial character". According to the interpretation given to Article 3 (of Interpol constitution) "a political offence is one which is considered to be of a predominantly political nature because of the surrounding circumstances and underlying motives, even if the offence itself is covered by the ordinary criminal law in the country in which it was committed". Needless to mention that the State Security Court (SSC) which sentenced the defendants is designated for political cases only. The first aim of Interpol is to "ensure and promote the widest possible mutual assistance between all criminal police authorities within the limits of the laws existing in the different countries and in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

The SSC was condemned as falling short of all internationally accepted standards of justice and human rights by organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, France Liberte, International Federation of Human Rights, the Bar Human Rights in England,

International Commission of Jurists, Article 19, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Arab Organization for Human Rights, and others. The draconian State Security Law and SSC are illegal according to both the Constitution of Bahrain and all international human rights conventions.

The opposition has demanded the restoration of the rule of constitutional law and submitted petitions calling upon the Amir to initiate a process of political dialogue. The ruling Al-Khalifa family refused to do so and instead authorized its foreign-staffed security forces to launch aggressive attacks and to conduct collective punishment programmes against the populations. One result of these atrocities was the killing of at least 35 citizens under torture or by police bullets.

What angered the government most were the following. On 3 June 1997, the UK Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Derek Fatchett, stated that the Bahraini opposition is a "moderate" one with a set of moderate demands. This was followed, on 24 July 1997, by a 109-page report by the US-based Human Rights Watch detailing the violations of human rights and the lack of justice in Bahrain. The most important condemnation came on 21 August 1997 from the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission, which clearly stated that abuses in Bahrain have reached a level that can not be tolerated. This historic resolution was followed by another one issued by the European Parliament on 18 September condemning the government of Bahrain and calling on all European countries to stop supplying arms or assistance so long as the Bahraini government continues to abuse human rights and refuses to reinstate the rule of

constitutional law.

Furthermore, the government felt it was losing the ground when, in September, a leading Gulf personality initiated a process aimed at reconciling matters in Bahrain. The Prime Minister was angered that such an initiative was ever contemplated. Moreover, he became furious when he realized that a different channel of communication with the ruling establishment was approached for activating that initiative. His response to this initiative was to announce the trial of leading oppositionists who had been calling for dialogue and peaceful resolution of the political crisis.

As regards the trial itself, the following points are important. Seven out of the eight activists have either been forcibly exiled at the start of events or had been outside the country for 20 years. Members of the BFM who were mentioned in the list of defendants had been publicly active since 1982 and published all their demands and thoughts in their monthly newsletter "Voice of Bahrain", all of which echoed constitutional and peaceful demands. The Arabic version of "Voice of Bahrain" has now been regularly published for fifteen years, with its sister English publication issued since January 1992. The defendants were never officially notified. The court was held in-camera and without the presence of lawyers. It sentenced the defendants in absentia after three brief sessions on 8, 15 and 22 November. The State Security Court allows no appeal against its sentences. The government also failed to respond to calls by the exiles in respect of holding a trial in accordance with the Constitution of Bahrain and in the presence of international independent observers.

"If we were planning to topple the government, we would have not been acting in public"

The unconstitutional State Security Court passed sentences on 22 November ranging from five to fifteen years jail terms against eight people in absentia. The eight oppositionists were haphazardly grouped together by the interior ministry. They had either been forcibly exiled by the same interior ministry or have not been in the country for more than a decade or two. A spokesperson for the BFM said "this move was designed to divert attention from the main issue confronting the government, namely the suspension of the constitution and the arbitrary governance of the country. The opposition has vowed to continue its demands for the restoration of parliament and rule of the constitutional law, which is the only source of political legitimacy for the government".

[Text of report by Radio Monte Carlo on 22nd November]: Bahrain's State Security Court has sentenced eight leaders of the exiled opposition to between five and 15 years in prison for attempting to overthrow the regime. The eight were tried in absentia without defence lawyers in a closed-door trial. The verdicts cannot be appealed.

Mansoor Abd al-Amir al-Jamri, spokesman for the London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement, Sa'id Abd al-Nabi Muhammad al-Shihabi, Adil Ali Husayn Ali al-Shu'lah, Khalil Abd Ali Abdullah Sultan, and Muhammad

Habib Mansoor Muhammad were each sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Five-year prison terms were handed down to three others, Shaykh Hamzah Ali Jasim Kazim al-Diri, Haydar Hasan Ali Hasan al-Sitri, and Shaykh Ali Salman Ahmad Salman. [Note: The first five who were also the first five who were served the stiffest sentence of 15 years jail, were also each fined BD5,000 each. our Mohammed. The court also ordered the first six defendants, pay compensations to an aggregate value of BD5,709,247].

Regarding these sentences, we interviewed Shaykh Ali Salman against whom a five-year jail term was issued. He is one of the most prominent Bahraini figures. His arrest on 5th December 1994 led to riots in which 38 people were killed.

[Shaykh Ali Salman - recording] Regarding these sentences issued in absentia, we clearly and frankly stated through several letters and statements that we were prepared to go and attend our trial provided there were some international guarantees, such as the presence of [foreign] observers, and also provided we would not be tried under the repressive laws that were rejected by the National Assembly. We should be tried in accordance with the constitution and with the laws issued when the National Assembly was operational. Outside this framework

our attendance would be considered recognition of the laws we demand be abolished.

[Unidentified correspondent] Is there a specific response to these sentences?

[Shaykh Ali Salman] There is a general response, namely that we will continue our movement inside and outside the country. Our peaceful movement calls for the restoration of the elected National Assembly, the reactivating of the constitution and the right of every Bahraini citizen to return to his homeland. This movement will continue its peaceful methods inside and outside the country and will not be affected by these sentences.

The BBC interviewed Dr. Saeed Shehabi on 22 November who said: "These sentences are invalid. Now that the government issued such sentences it is time for her to answer the questions raised by the people. When will the rulers restore the constitution? When will they reinstate the elected parliament? There is an ongoing crisis and these desperate attempts will not solve anything. If we were planning to topple the government, we would have not been acting in public. All our activities and statements are in the public domain. Our demands are clear and focused. These demands are known all over the world. We demand the restoration of the constitution and the abolishing of emergency laws imposed on the country".

Statement of Opposition Figures: Hopeless manoeuvres for diverting attention

We received, with a surprise, the news transmitted on 1 October 1997 by the official [Bahraini] Gulf News Agency about a date set for the trial of Bahraini opposition figures living abroad. The date was firstly said to be Saturday 7th of November, 9.00 am. We note the following:

1. We checked the calendar and found that Saturday is not the 7th of November, rather the 8th. A government's paper then corrected the official statement saying it will be Saturday the 8th of November. Another statement issued on 6 November said that the time is 8.00 am and not 9.00 am as stated earlier.

2. The list of opposition figures contained the name of Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri who was described as a "fugitive Bahraini". This contrasts with an official Bahraini statement made to Reuters on 20 January 1996 saying, "the Bahraini citizenship of Mansoor Al-Jamri had been dropped as a result of him carrying the British citizenship".

3. The group of people were never official sought or notified. The British authorities confirmed they had received no official request for this matter. We are not aware of the real charges or the proofs to any of them.

4. We declared our preparedness to attend any trial with the conditions that such a trial must be in accordance with the Constitution of Bahrain and in the presence of international observers. The Bahraini Government never responded.

5. The Three Religious Scholars (Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Seyyed

Haider Al-Setri) were forcibly exiled from Bahrain on 15 January 1995, as all people know. They had never been fugitives.

6. We are all part of the National Opposition that is demanding the restoration of the Constitution. We had always adopted peaceful and civilized means for achieving this noble aim. There is no way that we would ever come down on these demands. We belong to a general tendency that is based on national consensus demanding the restoration of parliament. We condemn all forms of violence from whatever source. The Government will never be able to prove otherwise.

7. The Bahrain Freedom Movement, and since its foundation in 1982, never stopped publishing statements and monthly newsletters that reflect its positions, thoughts and aims. The BFM is not in need for the foreign experts [who work for the Bahrain Government] to enforce or deny the members of the BFM any affiliation to any organization. Our affiliation is connected to the roots, history, tradition, culture, and future of Bahrain.

8. Judicial experts, as well as international human rights organizations, have confirmed to us that there no legal bases for the announcement of the Bahrain Government. Moreover, the Bahraini courts lack all the basic requirements [for a fair trial] as demanded by the Constitution of Bahrain and international conventions.

9. We believe that the only real exist to the current political crisis is through dialogue. The security-led solution has failed, and this is

proven by the fact that the uprising is completing its third year these days.

10. We believe that the Government of Bahrain announced this trial to prevent a recently Gulf-led initiative that was aiming to mediate in the crisis and to initiate a political dialogue.

11. We believe that the framework of the Constitution of Bahrain must bound the legitimacy of the present Government. There is no legitimacy for the government beyond the Constitution. The use of force and the codifying of oppression [through passing arbitrary unconstitutional laws] will never provide legitimacy for the ruling establishment.

12. We believe that the Government and the People of Bahrain can coexist peacefully under a just and civilized political system with mutual respect as had been specified by the Constitution of Bahrain.

Lastly, what concern us are the freedom of our people and the achievement of a just and civilized state. We will remain faithful to our aims for the achievement of the constitutional demands. We see this matter [announcement of a trial] as a tax in the path of gaining freedom. Our people are paying their taxes [through the government's imposed suffering] in their walk to freedom.

London - 7 November 1997

Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri

Dr. Saeed Shehabi

Sheikh Ali Salman

Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri

Seyyed Haider Al-Setri

Research on Bahrain: A civil society governed by a backward mentality

The case of Bahrain was amongst the topics covered and discussed on 22 November at the 31st annual conference organised by the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) held in San Francisco, California, USA. One of the papers was delivered on 22 November by Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri explained the cultural and political backgrounds of the people of Bahrain, the ruling establishment and the home-grown opposition. The paper contained nine sections: Introduction to the political crisis, tribal culture of the ruling establishment, background to the rise pro-democracy demands in the twentieth century, an analysis of the present uprising, encounters and challenges faced by the pro-democracy movement, assessment of external factors affecting the democratic movement, background and assessment of the moderate approach adopted by Islamists and patriotic forces, and conclusions.

The paper is available on the "Voice of Bahrain" homepage [http://ourworld.computererve.com/homepages/Bahrain].

Explaining some aspects of tribal culture the author said "Interestingly, the definition of the "State of Bahrain" may be found in "Bahrain Telephone Directory". The directory usually lists four names in the section entitled "State of Bahrain". These are "H.H. Shaikh Isa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, the Amir of the State of Bahrain; H.H. Shaikh Khalifa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, The Prime Minister; H.H. Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa; Crown Prince and Commander-in-Chief of Bahrain Defence Force;

and H.H. Shaikh Rashid Bin Isa Al-Khalifa". Such definition is similar to the one declared by the French King Louis XIV (1638-1715) who said, "I am the state".

Historically, it has been persistently demonstrated that tribal tradition denies people their constitutional rights. The ultimate concession would be to allow for advice to be expressed on some aspects of public life. In any event, it is up to the sovereign to accept or reject any advice".

The paper illustrated the moderate discourse adopted by all Bahraini political tendencies and how this discourse had taken roots through events and uprisings that started in 1938 and continued until the present time. The strength of the popular awareness of socio-economic and political rights played a pivotal role in the susceptibility of a community-based opposition. The paper also explained why and how the tribally-controlled state continually rejected the demand for restoring the parliament. "The participation of the nation in public affairs through its representatives and in preserving the rule of law that was enacted together by government and citizenry clash with the notion of tribal supremacy". At the same time, a hardened community-based opposition has deepened the conviction of the population that there is no bright future for the country beyond the rule of constitutional law. The events in Bahrain confirm the comment reported by the Financial Times survey on Bahrain (dated 31 May 1983) which said: "It is widely remarked

by Bahraini liberals in all sections of society that just as there may be a cost in electing a new assembly there may also be a cost in delaying".

Answering the FT queries, government officials responded that an election "would encourage outside interference in Bahrain politics". By this they of course meant Iran, which would spread "the political passions of its Shia co-religionist on the island". Had the Financial Times carried the story in the fifties and sixties, "outside interference" would have meant Egypt, while in the seventies, South Yemen and Socialist countries would have been to blame. Another important observation by the FT survey of 1983 says "those who are of a genuinely liberal persuasion add that some of the people at the top of the Government - notably Sheikh Khalifa bin Sulman - simply do not think that the creation of a new assembly is very important. They, and several of the technocrat ministers outside the ruling family, believe that it would only hinder development".

"The government position seems to remain the same over time. On the one hand, there is the perceived outside interference while on the other there is a need to avoid hindrance to development. In fact these two arguments seem to cover up a deeper problem inherent in the culture of the political establishment".

"The roots of demands for greater popular participation in Bahrain go back to the year 1938 following the introduction of modern education and discovery of oil". The Bahraini society had developed, but not the government.

November 1997: Demands for civil rights will not cease

1 November: The opposition has called for peaceful commemoration of the second anniversary of the 10-day hunger strike by Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues. The gathering in front of Sheikh Al-Jamri's house on 1 November 1995 was the biggest ever in the history of Bahrain with 80,000 people raising their hands and demanding the restoration of their constitutional rights. On the second anniversary, fasting was observed for half a day and many schools witnessed a total boycott of eating during the school-hours. The commemoration was started on 23 October by switching-off the lighting for one night.

1 November: The jailed pro-democracy leader, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain was admitted to Salmanya Hospital (Emergency Unit) for an emergency operation. Mr. Hussain is one of the main co-signers of the popular petition that was supported by 25,000 citizens. The interior ministry backslid on an agreement to calm down the situation and re-arrested him alongside Sheikh Al-Jamri and other leading personalities in January 1996.

2 November: Religious scholars are routinely arrested and intimidated. Sheikh Mohammed Turki from Tobli was taken for interrogation on 2 November. The torturers threatened him with grave consequences if he were to continue practicing his religion. Two weeks ago, Seyyed Alawi Al-Sharakkani was detained and interrogated. A security man (non-Bahraini) ordered the mosque attendants to switch-off the microphone. When his orders were refused, the religious scholar was arrested and asked whether he had been permitted to pray by the recently formed "High Council for Islamic Affairs".

3 November: Security forces besieged several areas in Bahrain and prevented the citizens from participating in traditional religious programmes. A military lorry packed with riot police besieged Matam Bin-Salloom (congregation hall) and prevented the people from practicing their religion. Similarly in Duraz, where most congregation halls had been closed down, people were denied their rights to practice their religion. Never the less, religious processions took to the streets of Manama and other places amid tight security measures aimed at intimidating the people.

5 November: Local papers published the names of four teenagers who had been selected by the security forces for receiving the blame for a fire that gutted a building containing car show room (30 October). The four youths are Salman Ibrahim Marhoon, 18, Shawki Abdulla Jassim, 17, Hassan Abdul Karim Saleh, 18, and Ali Hassan Al-Shajjar. Mohammed, 10-year old, brother of Ali Hassan Al-Shajjar was amongst those arbitrarily arrested in the past few days from Bilad al-Qadim.

7 November: The Egyptian president visited Bahrain on 7 November. In Bahrain he said that the "age when governments can do what ever they like without due consideration for the wishes of the people have gone". This is a correct statement and hopefully the rulers will understand the message. Mr. Hosni Mubarak also visited Awali Hospital where the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa,

is receiving medical treatment after his collapse last month. An Egyptian official said that both sides agreed that participation in the Doha Middle East and North African Economic Conference "depends on progress in the peace process". Qatar has invited 92 countries and organizations to the regional economic forum, to be held in its capital Doha on November 16-18.

8 November: The security forces attacked Al-Zahra Mosque in Shahrakkan and destroyed its library, videocassettes, audiocassettes, windows, gates, Quranic posters, stole the donations box, and turned all contents upside down. This is the fifth time this mosque comes under attack from the security forces. Few nights before this vicious attack, Innam Ali Mosque in Dar Kulaib was also attacked by security forces that stole a computer and other ancillary equipment.

8 November: The Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi arrived in Jeddah on 8 November, starting a multi-leg Gulf tour on a mission said to be for "boosting ties amongst neighbours". After Saudi Arabia, Kharrazi will travel to the other five Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

16 November: The security forces attacked the residents of Sanabis who gathered around a congregation hall which had been shut down (by the security forces) for nearly a year. Matam Bin-Khamis was attacked several times last year. The people marched by the side of the hall. The security forces attacked the peaceful gathering and deployed tear gas as well as rubber bullets. Loud sounds of gas-cylinder explosions continued to be heard until mid-night.

17 November: (Reuters) - Bahrain's Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Sulman al-Khalifa has underwent successful and simple surgery, a government official said on Monday. The official said Sheikh Khalifa underwent the operation in Bahrain on Sunday. He gave no details on the kind of surgery.

Prime minister since Bahrain's independence from Britain in 1971, Sheikh Khalifa was admitted to hospital last month for whooficials said was a medical check up. He had suffered a series of heart attacks in 1985 and underwent a triple by-pass operation in Saudi Arabia in 1988.

17 November: The security forces attacked several residential areas in the past week and arrested scores of citizens including three 8-year old children from Sehla: Shakir Abdul Nabi Mansoor, Isa Rashid Mansoor and Yousif Jaffer Yousif. From Querayah, they arrested a 13-year old child, Hussain Ali Soroor.

19 November: In a seminar organised by the Bahraini "Graduates Club", Dr. Ahmad Al-Rubi' (Kuwaiti political personality) spoke of the necessity to open-up the regional political system and to provide genuine channels of communications for conducting debate and dialogue. It is only through these rational approaches that the security of the Gulf can be guaranteed. An attendant of the seminar commented "the Bahraini government considers anyone who speaks about these matter an enemy. Had the speaker been a Shia, he would have been accused of membership of a Hizbolla,

who is attempting to overthrow the government. The Bahraini government thinks that by repeating these baseless phrases they can win the support of the United States and western governments for crushing the democratic aspirations of the people".

22 November: The unconstitutional state security court presided by a member of Al-Khalifa family issued arbitrary sentences ranging from 5-15 years against eight exiles (see special report). The court held three short (30 minutes) sessions on 8, 15 and 22 November.

24 November: The Kuwaiti authorities resumed the trial of four people who had been detained earlier in the year accused of distributing leaflets critical of the Bahraini government. The date of next trial has been set for 15 December. The four Bahrainis are: Hussain Al-Hayki, Mohammed Mirza, Isa Al-Hayki and Hussain Sa'af. The four had been held in detention despite the fact that they had not violated the Kuwaiti laws.

25 November: The security forces attacked Manama on the evening of 25 November as part of their aggressive drive to confiscate the religious affairs of Bahrainis. Riot police attacked the people near Matam bin Zabar, Matam al-Qassab, Matam Haji Abbas and Matam bin Salloom. Before the attack, the foreign-staffed security forces had besieged the area in a show of force aimed at provoking and intimidating the public. At 7.00 pm local time, the foreign forces staged their aggression deploying tear gas, rubber bullets, cluster bullets and various other types of bullets that are now customary used against the peaceful citizens. They then entered the holy places (Matams) and started beating youths and arresting scores of them. Lorries packed with innocent citizens were seen after the atrocious attack. Clashes were reported in the surrounding streets of the capital. It was also noticeable that the security forces deployed many of their foreign agents in civilian dress and these were called to commit aggression against the peaceful people of Bahrain.

25 November: Human Rights organisations from 55 countries meeting in the Senegalese capital, Dakar, condemned the Bahraini government. The organisations were participating in the 33rd general assembly of the International federation of Human Rights (FIDH). The resolution expressed the concern of the human rights organisation at the deteriorating situation and the unconstitutional practices of the State Security Court and other organs of the government. The statement called for the release of all political prisoners and for the initiation of political dialogue for resolving the mounting crisis. The gathering supported the European Parliament resolution (18 September 97) as well as the resolution issued by the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission (21 August 1997) and called on the government to end abuse of human rights.

26 Nov: Residents of Sanabis and Duraz went out in marches denouncing the atrocities committed by the security forces. Riot police attacked the peaceful people of Duraz with tear gas and rubber bullets. Columns of fire were spotted in different places.