

BAHRAIN

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Bahrain's people leave behind a year of pains and gains Welcoming the year of human rights

A new year, a new resolve. The people reiterated their constitutional demands as their peaceful and civilised protests continued. They left behind a turbulent year in which the mercenary terror forces led by Ian Henderson killed citizens, hundreds added to overcrowded jails, several exiled, more dismissed from their jobs for their political beliefs and civilian areas ransacked.

However, the people had a cause for jubilation. They found their cause recognised by international governments and organisations at an unprecedented levels. The British government and parliament, the European parliament, the United Nations Sub-Commission for Human Rights, Human Rights NGOs, and others, identified with the people of Bahrain and added their voices in support of their just demands. The people view these developments positively and aspire to attain more in 1998. What adds to their enthusiasm is the fact that less than two years have remained before the new millennium. The world powers with interest in Bahrain must realise that the status quo in Bahrain cannot be continued as it is an affront to all norms of civilisations.

Last year was introduced by the Amir of Bahrain to his people with the announcement that a new army of repression was to be created. The Amir (royal) decree named it the "National Guards". The people viewed it as yet another example of the extent to which the Al Khalifa regime would go in its exploitation of the country's resources not to develop and build the infrastructure of the country but to create armies of terror. The 1997 Strategic Survey issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies put the number of security personnel employed by the Ministry of the Interior at 9,500 (without taking into consideration the new force of National Guard) compared to 11,000 in the armed forces. The two forces are predominantly made up of mercenaries. Put together, they represent about 5 percent of the native population. The ruling family has also imported 40,000 Bedouins from the Syrian desert and granted them favourable treatment in an attempt to destabilise the structure of Bahrain society.

This year's present to the people was a draconian law to enable the regime to confiscate people's possession if they are

suspected of political activity. This is of a similar magnitude in terms of repression and confiscation of civil rights to the State Security Law of 1974. That "Law" which was engineered by Henderson, empowered the minister of the interior to order the administrative detention of any political suspect for a period of up to three years without either charge or trial. Since then tens of thousands of citizens were affected by this law which turned the country into one of the most repressive in the world. The new confiscation law marks a serious escalation in the confrontational policies of the Al Khalifa-led government with the pro-democracy activists.

To the people of Bahrain, the present government headed by Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, is the worst that could ever rule a country. It is backward-looking, uncivilised in its behaviour towards the people, unrepentant about its record on human rights, unyielding to the legitimate constitutional demands and uncompromising in its repressive policies. It is this conviction that drives the people to continue their protests against the tyrannical regime. The Al Khalifa family has become dominated by the prime minister to the extent that no variant voice will emerge from their midst. He has become so intolerable to other opinions and any voice of dissent would immediately be liquidated. He has found in Henderson a life-long ally who would observe no boundary in using terror against opponents. His hard time in Kenya in the fifties hardened his feelings and made him an extreme form of anti-human. In the past thirty years in which many Bahrainis were tortured to death under his command not one single perpetrator of these crimes was ever brought to justice or even questioned. On the contrary, officers who excelled in their torturing methods, such as Adel Flaifel and Khaled Al Wazzan (who tortured the 16-year old Saeed Al Eskafi to death in 1995) were given promotions and a free hand to deal in their own styles against the civilian population.

It will be premature to expect a serious change in the prime minister's attitude towards the people of Bahrain. The idea of creating a truly civil society is blasphemous in his dictionary. He has instituted an Algerian-style terror machine which has committed crimes and collective punishment against the people. Last month several families were held hostages by his men to

force some of their members to hand themselves over to Henderson. Many civilian areas were ransacked with houses and property destroyed in a way reminiscent of the tactics adopted by the most vicious dictators in the world.

However, what could be done by the world powers is to ensure that perpetrators of these crimes could not escape punishment. Furthermore, the rulers of Bahrain must be made aware of the fact that they could not be expected to serve their two-year membership of the UN Security Council without showing respect for international laws and norms. They must be asked to ratify all treaties that are related to human, civil and political rights. Of specific importance is signing the convention against torture and the creation of a way to monitor human rights abuses in Bahrain. Human Rights organisations must be allowed into the country to visit the torture chambers and meet with inmates, monitor the proceedings of trials at the State Security Court, and meet with victims of torture, inside and outside jails. The Red Cross is performing a humanitarian role. But their remit is a confidential one and does not enable the Red Cross to stop torture or abuse of human rights. Indeed, torture has become more sophisticated, and detainees under torture are not registered in official records, thus eliminating the involvement of the Red Cross.

The people of Bahrain have made plans to join the world in celebrating the 50th year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and will pursue the noble goals of democracy and respect of human rights with the means in their possession. The programme of civil resistance will continue to be the civilised option, and members of the Bahraini opposition will play active part on the world arena to defend the cause of the people.

The Bahraini government will have either to get along the path of civilised nations or leave the United Nations bodies altogether. Its membership of the Security Council must not be exploited by corrupt means to justify the repression to which the people of Bahrain are subjected. It is a duty of the world community to celebrate the year of human rights in style. This means that a regime with a bad record of human rights abuses must not receive warm welcome at the international scene.

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Press Conference:

Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain and the FCO Mission Statement

A press conference on Bahrain was held on 16 December 1997, in the British Parliament. The conference was chaired by Lord Avebury and addressed by Lord Nick Rea and Jeremy Corbin, MP, as well as opposition figures.

Lord Rea:

Lord Rea said "Things in Bahrain have worsened. Rule of law is not happening, and there is no independent judiciary. Trials that are held in camera are miscarriage of justice. People accused in absentia and sentenced in such a way is an amazing matter. I am a member of the government party, and I will be seeking information from Mr. Derek Fatchett, the Minister responsible for the Middle East. We must be able to put some pressure to release the iron grip and to allow due process of law, as recognized internationally. We must continue to discuss these matters and I will do everything I can to try to bring this issue to the attention of the government".

Mr. Corbin, MP:

Jeremy Corbin, MP, said "these are some of what happen in Bahrain. Systematic denial of human rights, denial of basic rights, torture of people, arbitrary detention, evidence of extrajudicial killing, no access of lawyers allowed to detainees, etc. The issues had been raised through questions, motions and the adjournment debate. Indeed, the first adjournment debate of this parliament was about Bahrain. We were able to put some pressure. The people of Bahrain are seeking a fairly limited constitution. Never the less, it is a basis for political reform. The government of Bahrain has no explanation why are these things happening. Forcibly exiling citizens and denying them their right to return violate all international conventions.

A person must be guaranteed a safe return to his homeland and that his safety must be secured after his/her return. In Bahrain, there is no press freedom. The press is used to denigrate people like Stan Newens, the European Member of Parliament, just because he raised the issue of human rights in Bahrain. The West must adhere to human rights and democracy. We must stop supplying arms and equipment unless human rights are respected. I intend, after this meeting, to propose another motion in the parliament and we will continue to apply pressure".

Lord Avebury's intervention:

The first thing to note is that today, 16 December, is the national day of Bahrain, a day which is celebrated by the ruling family and their supporters, but is an occasion for mourning by the rest of the population, because they enjoy none of the benefits of human rights, democracy and the rule of law that we are here to discuss. Let me remind you of the words used in the Mission Statement, announced by the Foreign Secretary on May 12, only 11 days after the new government came into office. He said:

"We shall work through our international forums and bilateral relationships to spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy which we demand for ourselves".

First, then, let us review these values that

we demand, and then let us see how we are working to spread them in Bahrain. We demanded and got for ourselves a democracy based on universal suffrage culminating in the extension of voting rights to women in the twenties.

We demanded and got a democratic system that is pluralistic, giving people a choice of ideologies and of individuals. Anyone can belong to a political party, and take part in the selection of a candidate. We have the right to speak and write in support of the parties we belong to, or indeed to argue for opinions entirely our own. Thus our democracy is closely connected with freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We have adopted, by common consent, the principle of J S Mill, that the only justifiable reason for the state to interfere with the conduct of an individual is to avoid harm to others. The great principle underlying our liberty is that the individual may do anything which is not prohibited by law, and the state may do nothing but what is allowed by law. Thus the rule of law is absolutely fundamental, we believe, in a democratic system.

These and other freedoms our ancestors demanded and fought for, and we are still finding ways to improve our democracy today. It is not so long ago that we lowered the age of voting to 18, as I remember very well, having been in a minority of three in the Speaker's Conference of 1964-65 on this issue. And now we are thinking about changes in the voting system, to make our Parliament more accurately representative of the people's will, and to reform the House of Lords, first to get rid of its hereditary element. This has been one of our demands since 1910, when the Liberal Party won the election partly on the slogan 'End 'em, not referendum'.

Nobody would expect that states which have been governed by autocracies would suddenly embrace the principles of democracy and human rights overnight. They need time to develop the institutions of civil society which underpin democracy - trade unions women's Organizations, and the host of specialist groups representing the interests of minorities environmentalists, the disabled, the elderly, children and many others, which feed into the political process. Legal systems may be imperfect or in some cases virtually nonexistent, and they too have to be carefully advanced, together with the capacity of lawyers and others to understand and use them. The question is whether the states concerned have the collective will to attain higher standards, and the popular support for governments that accept the principles of democracy even where there are practical difficulties to be overcome.

In eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, in Latin America and large parts of Africa, in South Asia and even tentatively in parts of South East Asia, there is a movement towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and the UK is indeed helping to promote these values. We are spending very large sums of money helping the former communist countries to make the transition to freedom, and in countries like India, which already have democratic traditions, we are helping to maintain

them by paying for human rights educational material, visits of UK human rights experts to give lectures, the cultivation of links with human rights organizations by our diplomatic posts, sponsorship of visits to the UK by leading human rights activists, and so on.

We also make statements regularly on human rights issues, either by ourselves, or collectively with the EU. For example, the European Council following their meeting in Luxembourg over the weekend, set out the conditions required for strengthening Turkey's links with the European Union, including the alignment of human rights standards and practices with those in force in the European Union.

In Bahrain, it seems that our concern for human rights and democracy is not expressed in public. We don't help or encourage the democratic opposition, and we haven't done anything visible to promote the rule of law. Under the previous government I understood that our commercial and political interests were the dominant factors in our foreign policy, and required us to support the hereditary dictatorship. In the light of the Labour government's commitments, I had expected to see a change, and I was glad to see that when the Minister replied to George Galloway in an adjournment debate in the Commons, he repeated that our approach to human rights would not be a *la carte*, that it was a universal principle to be promoted in each case. However, he gave no answer to the most important question George raised, and that concerned our attitude to the restoration of the partial democracy which the country had enjoyed under the 1973 constitution, and it seemed from later correspondence that the government were not so keen on democracy in Bahrain as they were in other parts of the world.

This is what Derek Fatchett said: "We will press the Bahraini authorities to seek the widest possible consultation when determining future policies for the political and economic development of Bahrain. But we will not seek to impose specific forms of democracy. Nor do I accept that we should denigrate the shura system, which is a respected and accepted form of consultation within the region".

Subsequently the Minister got extremely cross when I gave a copy of this letter to Kathy Evans of The Guardian, and in a meeting I had with him, he said that the shura was seen as a stepping stone towards an elected system. I suggested that he ought to spell this out, but so far he has not done so.

Obviously, there is no statement of policy on the transition from systems of hereditary dictatorships like Bahrain to constitutional democracies, and the shura system is no longer an accepted form of consultation in Bahrain, or probably elsewhere in the region. You can hardly tell whether it is accepted or not unless there is some sort of popular opinion, but if it was approved in a free and fair referendum then of course what Mr Fatchett says would be confirmed.

In August, the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission passed a Resolution noting "that for 22 years Bahrain has been without an elected legislature and that there are no democratic institutions in Bahrain", referring to

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"the information concerning a serious deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, including discrimination against the indigenous Shita population, extrajudicial killings, persistent use of torture in Bahraini prisons on a large scale as well as the abuse of women and children who are detained, and arbitrary detention without trial or access by detainees to legal advice", and urging the government to comply with international human rights standards.

If the UK has taken any of these matters up with the ruling family, it has been behind closed doors, unlike their open criticism of regimes such as Myanmar, Sudan, or Democratic Republic of Congo. And the absence of any public message may have encouraged the government to take yet another step, in defiance of all the internationally recognised norms of justice. They put eight exiles on trial, seven of them either forcibly exiled, or outside the country for more than 20 years. The defendants were not officially notified of the charges against them; they have no idea what evidence, if any, was produced in the court; the court was held in camera; no lawyers were present, and after three short sittings, the defendants were sentenced to jail sentences ranging from 5 and 15 years, with

no right of appeal. It was the State Security Court in which these proceedings were held, an institution condemned by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other international human rights NGOs. Although one of the defendants is a British citizen and three others are applicants for political asylum in Britain not a word of criticism has been heard from Whitehall.

The Mission Statement was an important declaration of the new government's principles, and the steps being taken towards their realization are welcome. Bahrain is a country with close historical links to the UK, as the Ambassador himself underlines in his current newsletter, and it would be good if we could be seen to use our influence in favour of democratic reforms. The Ambassador says that although people here are aware of the relationship, this knowledge doesn't extend to the way people really live in Bahrain, as recent visitors have told him. No doubt this is one point we could agree on, because I know that most visitors spend their time in the hotels of Manama, or on escorted sight-seeing, rather than talking privately to the villagers in Jidhafs, Duraz or Bani Jamra. Nor would the authorities allow them to

do that, even if they were so inclined. Amnesty International are still waiting for permission to get in, four years after being told there was no objection in principle, and one could see how problematic it is to communicate freely with Bahraini citizens from the experience of Sue Lloyd-Roberts, whose contacts were arrested after she left. These matters are not mentioned in the Embassy's Newsletter, which focuses on Bahrain's social, economic and health development. Of course, social and economic rights are important as well as civil and political rights, but they are not a substitute for them.

The increases in spending on defence and the security forces, which are now considered necessary to contain popular unrest, could even cancel out the economic gains made in recent years. All the more essential, then, that we persuade the ruling family to abandon their attempt to maintain their absolute power by doling out some benefits, while using the iron fist against the democrats. This is not going to work, as Charles I, Louis XVI, the Bourbons, the Hapsburgs and the Romanoffs discovered and if the al-Khalifas want to survive they must change direction. The Mission Statement commits us to helping them do that.

Injustice equals instability

Arbitrary governance is a means of corruption

Over the past two decades, the name of "Bahrain" has become synonymous with torture, oppression, and tyranny. It also became a metaphor for injustice and "corrupted regimes". Despite its relegation to the periphery of the world concerns, Bahrain remains a critical setting for issues of stability and peace in the Gulf.

Bahrain, in the past three years exhibited a disturbing tapestry of artificially induced demographic changes, economic corruption and mismanagement, environmental destruction, eroding all margins of freedom of press and expression, tampering with the public educational sector, recurring government confrontations with the citizens, and systematic violation of human rights.

The adoption of a legislation such as the State Security Law, which empowers the minister of interior to order the administrative detention of any person for the period of three years without judicial review has never solved political issues. The State Security Court empowered with special proceedings deprived defendants from all constitutional guarantees for fair trials.

The systematic use of torture against detainees and prisoners continued despite the absolute prohibition of torture by both national constitution and international conventions. This fact has been documented by many independent sources. In Bahrain, the use of torture in state security related cases is systematic and commonplace especially during the pre-trial phase. This is used for extracting confessions from suspects and for venting hatred.

At a time when dictatorships and their "captive nations" are on the decline around the world, the rulers of Bahrain find themselves marching against the tide of history. The Bahraini government reacted in a reckless manner

to all human rights observers and campaigners. For example, it ordered its press to insult distinguished people, like the Euro MP Stan Newens. When the UK Minister, Derek Fatchett, urged the officials to allow Amnesty International an access to Bahrain, a government's spokesman went on record to say that "Amnesty International visited Bahrain and were very happy with the situation". This is taking place at a time when Amnesty had been asking for access to the country for more than five years without any response from the government.

On 16 December 1997, British parliamentarians addressed a press conference and exposed the atrocities of the regime. Later on in the evening, members of the opposition gathered in front of the Dorchester Hotel in Central London, where the Bahraini Embassy was holding a reception. The two events raised the voice of the people of Bahrain. They demanded freedom in Bahrain, civil liberties and human rights, serious dialogue with opposition, and the return of all the exiles.

Bahrain is now fully controlled by arbitrary rule. Such rule is conducted through "royal" decrees, made without reference to truly representative legislative assembly or to public opinion and enforced in complete disregard to Bahrain constitution and international conventions. Both legislative power and judiciary are fully absorbed into the executive structure of the state. The doctrine or rule of constitutional law does not exist in Bahrain. In fact, law in Bahrain is nothing more than what unaccountable officials practice. This unaccountable practice is then codified by royal decrees and published in the Official Gazette. The appalling consequences of arbitrary rule are corruption, repression, forcible exiling, unjust imprisonment, unfair courts without appeals, torture, and killing for citizens

whose crimes are nothing more than their disagreement with the regime and their demands for political rights.

The Bahraini ruling elite is becoming a destabilizing factor in a vitally strategic region and has never ceased attempting to widen discrimination and dictatorship. Today's Bahrain is nothing other than a military and security-based self-serving bureaucracy. Military officers have turned the University of Bahrain into controlled barracks that are subjected to ethnic cleansing in a way similar to the political direction adopted in Bahrain's security and defence services. Mosques and religious places have been attacked and confiscated by the state for the first time in Bahrain's history. A council of handpicked stooges was named to rubber stamp official decision to close religious places and to detain citizens attending these places. All foreign journalists and correspondents have been kicked out of Bahrain. The national newspapers have been handed to people who share corruption with the appointing officials. Lawyers have been intimidated and threatened of revenge. Business community is being sidelined. The entire system is being overturned to serve the arbitrary wishes of the few who depends on sheer force to intimidate the population.

Practicing injustice can never establish political stability. For this reason the pro-democracy movement continues to strive for the constitutional rights of the nation and continues to call on the international community to help bring pressure to bear on the ruling Al-Khalifa family to stop repressing the Bahraini people. This is the shortest and surest path to true stability. The Bahraini ruling establishment ought to learn a lesson from all those who refused to give in to modest demands only to find themselves in the dustbin of history.

December 1997: "Day of Martyrs" commemorated

1 Dec: Between 70-100 people have been arbitrarily arrested in the past few days. Hooraa Police Stations is fully crowded with citizens dragged every day from their houses or taken away from the main streets for torture, intimidation and ill-treatment. The head of the station, Abdul Salam Al-Ansari, is personally directing and participating in the torture of citizens. Clashes, burned tyres, and/or loud gas-cylinder explosions were reported in many areas in the past few days. Wall-writings have intensified with "Week No. 99" spreading all over the country. The number "99" refers to the number of weeks since Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues were re-detained.

3 Dec: The unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced the following citizens. Seyyed Hussain Saleh Kadhim, 16 year old, received one year term; Ibrahim Salman Haider, 16, one-year term.

5 Dec: The security forces attacked the residents of Bilad al-Qadim on 5 December, at 2.00 am (after mid-night) and arrested many people including five brothers Abbas Salman, 21, Maitham Salman, 19, Zakaria Salman, 17, Abdul Zahra Salman, 16, and Husain Salman, 14. The residents went out in a spontaneous demonstration by uniting against the dawn raids.

5 Dec: Some 500 detainees in the Dry-Dock Prison Camp were attacked by the riot police deploying tear gas for breaking up a protest by prisoners marking the third anniversary of the uprising. The riot police attacked the detainees in Block "C" and dragged the youths to the outside, tearing their cloths and torturing them in groups.

One of the political prisoners, Mr. Ali Sangoor, had been transferred to hospital suffering from wounds inflicted on him during intensive torture sessions. Events started when one of the torturers, Mohammed Darraj, started torturing a prisoner by the name Mohammed Jamil (from Ma'amir), in Block C. The screams of the young man ignited protest in the entire Block. The torturer, Mohammed Darraj, together with another torturer, Khalid Al-Fadhlah, ran to call for more torturers. All prisoners in Block C were then taken out to the open ground and tortured by tearing-off their cloths (in cold weather) and beating them in groups.

5 Dec: Security forces were put on high alert since the dawn of 5 December. Lorries packed with foreign mercenaries were stationed at all strategic locations. Principal mosques were besieged and people were prevented from practising their religion. Despite all this, burned tyres blocked several highways. Students boycotted canteens on 6 December.

5 Dec: A government spokesman rejected a call by the UK Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Derek Fatchett, to allow human rights organisations to visit Bahrain. Mr. Fatchett was speaking at the annual meeting of the Bahrain Society on 4 December. The government spokesman also lied by saying on 5 December that "a number of human rights delegations had visited Bahrain and expressed their admiration and appreciation of what they had seen". He said that these organisations included "Amnesty International (AI), the Red Cross and the British

and European parliaments". AI has been applying to go to Bahrain for more than five years and had been consistently refused entry.

6 Dec: Syed Hayder Isa, 22, from Karrahanah, completed his 3 years term of imprisonment. He was told by one of the security officers that his term has been extended two and half more years unless he pays a "tribute" of BD 30,000 (more than \$80,000). Similarly, Ali Al-Habshi, 23, from Iskan Aali, completed his three years term but had not been released and his family are not aware of the reasons.

7 Dec: Balloons were seen in the sky carrying the pro-democracy slogans and the pictures of the jailed pro-democracy leaders. Wall writing has intensified across the country calling for the restoration of the elected parliament and the release of the detained pro-democracy leaders.

11 Dec: The government's press published the names of three people and accused them of planting a sound-bomb in Yateem Centre in Manama two years. These persons had been freed more than a year ago and were told that the intelligence department has other people in their hands that are accused of this case. It is worth noting that the national figure, Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, had filed a court case against both "Akhar Al-Khalij" and "Al-Ayyam" for publishing falsified statements accusing him of involvement in "arson and sabotage".

13 Dec: The Bahraini opposition commemorated the third anniversary of the uprising on Saturday 13 December, 4.00 pm, at Medborgerhuset, Norre Alle 7, 2200 Copenhagen N. The Danish "TV STOP" also showed a documentary film on the uprising in Bahrain on 22 December, 11.00 pm.

13 Dec: The military officer imposed on the University of Bahrain ordered the cancellation of all examinations this week. He also instructed students to participate in the "celebrations" of 16 December. The people have named this day as "Martyrs Day" in commemoration of the death of the first and second martyrs of the uprising in 1994.

15 Dec: Clashes between the foreign-staffed security forces and citizens were reported in several places on the evening. An eyewitness said "riot police surrounded Duraz at around 6.30 pm and deployed tear gas that was pouring inside the houses. Burned tyres were seen in many places and Budaya Highway was blocked at several locations.

16 Dec: clashes were reported in many places with security helicopters flying low above the residential areas in a combat mode. For example, in Malkeya, a helicopter chased a group of youths with flashing lights signalling to the foreign forcers who surrounded the area and committed atrocities and tortured seven youth in public. One child was stripped in the cold weather and beaten to bleeding condition. Burned tyres blocked the main highways in the west, east, north and south of the country. Columns of fire were to be seen in many places. In Daih, Daih, Sanabis, Sehla, Sar, Qadam, Bilad al-Qadim, Jedhafs, Karrahanah, Bani Jamra, Duraz, A'ali, Bori, Karzakkan, Nuweidrat, Sitra, and other places, were amongst the uprising areas that witnessed the resurgence of activities on the "Day of Martyrs". Balloons carrying pro-democracy slogans and pictures of the jailed

leaders were flown and seen by people.

16 Dec: The 15-year boy, Ibrahim Ali Mohammed, from Malkeya, who had been shot by security forces on 16 December, is in critical condition. A rubber bullet penetrated his chest, breaking two ribs. One of his kidneys failed and had to be removed by doctors at Bahrain International Hospital. The security forces abducted him from the hospital on 21 December. No one knows his whereabouts.

16 Dec: The government issued a 'communiqué' saying the Amir released some of the citizens in his jails. In fact, scores of people were arbitrary arrested and taken to torture centres. These include the following. From Sanabis: Hassan Ibrahim Abdul-Hay, 18, Ageel Mirza Abdul-Hay, 28, Abbas Al-Ghadeiri, 18, Salman Mahdi Al-Hayat, 16, Hussain Ahmad Ali, 23, Jaffer Ahmad Khalaf, 16, Seyyed Hussain Ali, 16, Seyyed Kamil Mahdi, 35. The police also arrested a 40-year old lady, Sameya Mansoor, beaten her in public and released her. A 48-year old man, Isa Dawood, was also intimidated and taken prisoner. Other persons arrested from other places include: Mansoor Amr-Allah, 16, Isa Al-Mo'alim, 19, Hussain Ali Isa, 20, Ali Yousif, 20.

16 Dec: Scores of houses were damaged and ransacked during the attack which was backed-up by a helicopter. In Ma'amir, the mercenaries attacked the citizens and tortured several youths in public. One of them, Seyyed Jabir Seyyed Amin was badly hurt.

16 Dec: The Bahraini embassy in London organised its annual "celebration" on 16 December, evening, in the Dorchester Hotel, central London, where scores of Bahrainis picketed and distributed packages of information to attendants. The cries for democracy and human rights reached all attendants, who realised that the government-in-celebration had little in common with the people of Bahrain who are mourning the martyrs who had been shot dead by mercenary troops. A TV camera crew working for MBC was ordered by embassy staff to avoid picking any sound or picture for the demonstrators, a task that forced the crew to hide in the hotel.

17 Dec: Uprising areas across the country exhibited the solidarity of the people when lighting was switched-off on 17 December at 7.30 pm (local time). The people of Bahrain demonstrated their steadfastness and dedication to their cause.

17 Dec: It has transpired the detained pro-democracy leader, Mr. Hassan Mushaima'a has been placed in solitary confinement for several months now. The solitary cell is sized 1 x 1 meter and this confinement is a punishment for his refusal to testify to the Red Cross (ICRC) that Sheikh Ali Al-Nachas, died naturally in jail earlier in the year.

17 Dec: The opposition handed a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations urging him "to take up the issue of democracy and human rights in Bahrain as an urgent matter", and not to allow the government to exploit the Security Council for implying that its "harsh policies of repression against the people enjoy the blessing of the UN".

17 Dec: In the past few days, balloons carrying slogans of the uprising and pictures of

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the detained leaders were seen flying in the sky. Slogans included "No solution without a parliament", "No... to security courts", "We demand freedom", and various other constitutional demands. The security forces have been imposing sieges against principal mosques around the country. Haj Hassan Jar-Allah, the person in charge of Al-Sadiq Mosque in Duraz, was summoned twice and threatened of arrest. Haj Hassan had spent one year in arbitrary detention before his release earlier this year.

18 Dec: A teacher from Sitra, Ibrahim Kadhim Juma, who was arrested 2 weeks ago, had been spotted in Nabih Saleh Police Station. His condition was described as very poor, suffering from extreme forms of torture.

19 Dec: The people showered the families of martyrs with roses and expressed their determination to continue calling for bringing the killers and torturers to justice.

20 Dec: The mercenary troops raided houses in Bani Jamra, smashed the contents, and conducted collective punishment. The security forces attacked the house of Fadhil Abbas Al-Adraj, 18. Since he was not there, the security forces attacked several other houses and took the following as hostages: Mahmood Mohammed Ali Habib, 18, Seyed Nazar Abdul Nabi, 27, Malik Mohammed Amin, 17, John Ali Taher, 25, Hussain Atteya Slaman, 26, and his brother Ahmad Atteya Salman.

20 Dec: The security forces attacked a religious assembly hall (for women) in Iskan-Jedhafs, at dawn, and set it on fire. All contents of the assembly hall were destroyed by the fire. This criminal act is not the first. The mercenary forces had ransacked and destroyed many mosques and assembly halls in the past three years. The security forces adopt this tactic as a form of revenge and as a means for activating its stooges in the so-called "High Council for Islamic Affairs". Bahrain suffers from a regime that fails to identify with the aspirations of the nation.

20 Dec: While a unit was busy burning the religious assembly hall in Iskan-Jedhafs, another unit of mercenaries was attacking the tombs of martyrs in the cemetery in Sanabis. Mr. Isa Dawood was taken hostage until his sons Abdullah, 16, and Salman, 18, handed themselves to the torturers. Abdullah had earlier been detained but had to be released when his health deteriorated. The re-arrest of a 16-year old sick person is a gross violation of human rights and is an indication of the extent of atrocities committed by the government's terrorists.

20 Dec: The Kuwaiti news agency said that the Amir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, ruled out, in a press statement the possibility of discussing security partnership between the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states and Iran. It is worth noting that the two countries are presently exchanging ambassadors, but the Bahraini government is frightened that if it admits to reality and normalises its relations with neighbouring countries, it would lose all pretexts used now to blame the outside. It is an irony that while the opposition strives for independence and constitutionality of the political system, the government insists on undermining both the sovereignty of the country and

continues to violate the basis of political legitimacy of the system.

21 Dec: A group of intelligence officers forced their way into Bahrain International Hospital and forcibly taken away the 15-year old youth who had been shot by security forces on 16 December. Ibrahim Ali Mohammed, from Malkeya, had two broken ribs in his chest as a result of a rubber bullet fired at him by the mercenary troops. Doctors urged the intelligence officers to let them complete medical treatment, but could not stop the tortures from abducting the young person. His family has been prevented from seeing him and no one knows his fate. He is in need of critical health care and the torturers are not known for their kindness. Two other 15-year old boys from Malkeya were taken by the mercenaries: Seyyed Hassan Abbas and Hassan Mohammed Hassan.

22 Dec: The mercenary troops stormed the house of a person who is in jail and sentenced for life. The mercenaries claimed that Abdullah Nasser Al-Toq, 24 year old, from Sitra-Wadyan, had run away from jail. They destroyed all the contents of his parent's house. The mercenaries took three of his brothers hostages: Mohammed, 29, Saleh, 28, and Hussain, 26. They then stormed several other houses of relatives and destroyed all that came in their way. Ransacked houses include: Abbas Mohammed Al-Toq (uncle of the prisoner), Mohamed Ali Al-Jufairi (uncle), Seyyed Jaffer Seyyed Shubbar (relative), Matam Al-Juffairi (a religious assembly hall in Wadyan), and a shop belonging to Isa Radhi Al-Toq. The entire population is enraged by these atrocities. The mercenary forces conducted many raids of collective punishment in the past three years. The present pretext, whether true or false, can never justify the destruction of private properties and intimidation of people.

24 Dec: Government's press said that a new law will be passed whereby citizens "will be made to pay the costs of the damage they have caused to property". This law will lay the ground for confiscating the assets of targeted sections of the society. In a public spectacle, the press said that the powerless Shura Council was attended by a high-profile delegation from the Al-Khalifa family including Justice and Islamic Affairs Under-Secretary Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Khalifa and Manama Governor (ex-torturer) Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Atyatallah Al Khalifa. This confirms the recent trend of refusing to release those political prisoner who had served the full [unjust] sentences, and whereby extra punishment cash was demanded in return for their release.

25 Dec: The people went out in a protest demonstration in Sanabis (Marwazan area) and blocked the main Budaya Highway. They were protesting against the abduction (by security forces) of an injured 15-year old boy from the International Hospital as well as the collective punishment raids in Abu-Saba'a and Sitra where members of entire families were taken hostages. The security forces raided several houses in Ma'amir and arrested Ali Abdul Mahdi, 17, Ahmad Mohammed Amin, 17, and Jasim Mohammed Hassan, 17. These irresponsible acts are agitating the situation and continue to exacerbate the crisis by widening the gap be-

tween the ruling establishment and the people of Bahrain.

27 Dec: 27 December, the security forces attacked several residential areas and arbitrarily arrested scores of people. A 13-year old boy, Mohammed Jasim Al-Basri, from Karranah was amongst the detainees. Similarly in Daih, a 13-year old "dumb" boy by the name Talib was taken also taken to the torture centres.

27 Dec In Karbabad, a 20-year old university student, Hasan Radhi Abbas, was arrested, tortured in public and then taken to one of the detention centres. The house of Saeed Mansoor Makki Al-Saeed, 27, was raided by the security forces. The latter destroyed contents of the house. The house of Saeed's father in Bilad al-Qadim was also attacked. Saeed was tortured in front of his family before disappearing with the mercenaries. Those arrested from Ma'amir included: Abbas Abdul Nabi Sarhan, 19, Jasim Mohammed Hassan, 20, Ahmad Mohammed Amin, 17, Ali Abdul Wahab, 17.

28 Dec: Reuters reported on 28 December that "Arsonists set fire to a five-storey furniture showroom in Bahrain on Sunday (27 December), causing heavy damage but no casualties, witnesses said. The building, one of the biggest furniture showrooms in the Gulf Arab state, was gutted by the fire in Sehla. "Four men attacked the building in the early hours on Sunday and set it on fire," its owner, Jamal al-Koothaji, told Reuters. "A guard inside the building saw four people fleeing the scene after the attack." One witness said the attackers smashed a window in the building and threw a petrol bomb inside.

A spokesperson for the BFM condemned the arsonists and repeated the call for an independent investigation into all acts of sabotage.

The security forces launched a collective punishment raid against the residents of Sehla, ransacked scores of houses and arbitrarily arrested many citizens. Amongst those arbitrarily arrested were: Salman Ahmad Al-Mughlag, 32, Seyed Mohammed, 35, Abdul Amir Abbas Saleem, 19, together with two of his nephews; Majid Rashid Abdul Karim, 17, and two of his twin brothers Abdul Mohsin, 15, and Mahmood, 15. The opposition believes that the security forces commit arson and sabotage and utilise every opportunity to practice collective punishment and torture of citizens.

29 Dec: The distinguished Bahraini personality and member of the dissolved National Assembly, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah, wrote an article in Al-Quds news paper on 29 December describing the appointed Shura Council as a means for expressing the wishes of dictatorship. He challenged the official explanation of the concept of Shura (Consultations) by proving that the Quranic description of Shura matches the requirements for an elected parliament that can hold the government accountable for its actions. Mr. Sabah said that the appointed council has no relation to the issue of popular participation. Those appointed to the council can never question the official who appointed them, they are indebted to him, and have no legal or moral representation link with the people. He pointed out that the starting point for development towards a modern society is freedom of thought and expression.

Sheikhly fall-out

"The Economist", 6 December 1997.

"By Ordering the trial of eight leading Shia Muslim activists, Bahrain's prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa al-Khalifa, may have put paid to any early hope that the country's four-year-old troubles can be settled peacefully.

At the end of last month, a state security court sentenced the eight in absentia (five of them live in London) to prison terms of five to 15 years. The charges were that they had spied for an unnamed foreign country (meaning Iran) and wanted to see the Sunni rule of the al-Khalifa family overthrown. Such charges are hard to refute. In any event, the eight were denied legal representation.

Sheikh Khalifa in effect runs Bahrain, although his elder brother, Isa al-Khalifa, has been ruler since 1961. He may have decided on the trial to undermine his nephew, Sheikh Hamid al-Khalifa, who is the ruler's heir. Sheikh Hamid, who hopes to inherit a less troubled little island-state, had been encouraged towards a political settlement by Sheikh Zayed, the president of the United Arab Emirates.

The crown prince and the UAE's ruler share many interests, including camel racing and Arab verse. So Sheikh Hamid was disposed to listen when Sheikh Zayed urged reconciliation with the London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement—and offered, if this happened, to help Bahrain's impoverished countryside.

Before Iraq disgraced itself by invading Kuwait, Sheikh Khalifa tended to look to Saddam Hussein as model. Sheikh Hamid, fearing that his uncle's hard line will radicalise the opposition's still relatively restrained call for political rights, prefers to look for example to Jordan's King Hussein. But mounting international criticism, most recently by the European Parliament, of the regime's repressive methods has small effect on a government that banks on support from America (Bahrain is host to the Fifth Fleet) and Saudi Arabia, itself anxious about Shia radicalism."

Home Thought:

The past twenty-two years have conditioned many people to view Bahrain in the context of, and indeed, as a synonym for perpetual turbulence. On several occasions during this period, events in Bahrain briefly grabbed world attention. The rest of the time, however, the country experienced a ferocity that was barely felt beyond its borders. At the centre of the past decades events is the 1975 suspension of parliament and the consequent implementation of the State Security Law.

Since the advent of the Popular Petition of 1994, the Bahrain government sought with perseverance to create an image of a Shiite-led violent movement intent on overthrowing the regime. The allergic reaction which the ruling regime developed to anything related to Shiites of Bahrain has precluded any serious policy of engagement in peaceful settlement.

Yet the "Bahrain Factor" for peace in the region is important in itself, and continues to play a crucial role in any prospective regional arrangement. No real durable settlement in the region can indefinitely postpone addressing the issue of Bahrain. By the same token, Bahrain's realistic hope of eventual recovery from the ravages of prolonged suffering lies firmly em-

Human Rights Reports on Bahrain

The US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) published its 1998 report and covered the events in Bahrain. HRW said, "the human rights situation showed no improvement in 1997 and in some respects worsened. Street protests and clashes between security forces and demonstrators calling for political reforms, which had first erupted in December 1994, continued throughout the year, intensifying in June 1997. Sheikh Abd al-Amir al-Jamri and seven other Shi'a community leaders, arrested in January 1996, remained in detention without charge".

The Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) condemned unjust judiciary and lack of due process of law in Bahrain. Reflecting on the fact that the Amir had suspended Article 65 of the Constitution, which mandates the existence of an elected parliament, ICJ described how the judges' decisions are driven to be "favourable to the government". ICJ covered the cases of Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, Mr. Abdullah Hashim, Mr. Abdul Shahid Khalaf and Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri. The government responded with its customary backwardness and racism.

In its latest issue of "Human Rights Monitor" No. 38, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) commented on the historic proceeding of the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission of 21 August, when a resolution was passed against the government of Bahrain. ISHR said "the debate (on the resolution) got somewhat out of hand... Ms Palley intervened to explain that she had been pressured by the delegation of Bahrain, which had offered US \$100,000 for [a] voluntary fund, if the test was withdrawn. It was not hard to understand that if the government were ready to contribute US \$100,000... it would perhaps be willing to offer "incentives" to convince other cosponsors". The bribes failed to rescue the human rights abusers and the resolution was passed calling on the UN Commission to add Bahrain to the main agenda in March/April 1998.

bedded in restoring the rule of constitutional law. The issue is therefore how would Bahrainis regain their dwindling personal and communal freedoms and how would these be balance with the the overall requirements for regional peace.

Small and "Fragile" are usually foremost among the many adjectives used to describe Bahrain and, on the whole, Bahrain has always exhibited these two traits. In describing constituent components, however, one can add irreducibility, since Bahrain is essentially a collection of about nine religious communities (divided roughly into Shiites and Sunnis) that have demonstrated a remarkable resilience and durability throughout often turbulent history. These communities have strove to forge a degree of collective identity without compromising their distinctive and autonomous communal features. In the best times, a uniquely consociational version of democracy has emerged - something rare in the region - which has conferred upon Bahrain a well earned respect of the world community. Bahrain continue to demand its rightful attention within the Gulf region. It is unfortunate that the ruling elite cab not identify with the nation's aspirations. Situated, as it is, in the middle of the Gulf, the notion of quarantining it to fester in isolation no longer applies.

Sheikh Al-Jamri: "Jailed for calling for reform"

Amnesty International's Campaign to Defend the Defenders of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, December 1997

Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri is a well-known religious scholar and writer in Bahrain. He was an elected member of the National Assembly, which was dissolved in 1975 by the Amir (ruler) of Bahrain. Since then Shaikh al-Jamri has been a determined campaigner for the restoration of the National Assembly. The right to participate in government is guaranteed by Articles 19 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Hundreds of Bahrainis, including Shaikh al-Jamri and eight other prominent Shi'a Muslim clerics, were arrested in January 1996 following anti-government protests. The majority was held in incommunicado detention and were at risk of being tortured.

The January 1996 demonstrations were prompted by the security forces closure of a number of mosques where prominent Shi'a clerics had been calling on the government to restore the National Assembly. The protests were part of a series of demonstrations, which have swept Bahrain.

Shaikh al-Jamri was one of 14 people representing different religious tendencies who in 1994 organized a petition signed by 25,000 people cafor the restoration of the National Assembly. The government responded by clamping down heavily on all opposition, and in the months that followed protests escalated, some involving violence.

Several thousand women, men and children were arrested and held without charge or trial. Torture and ill treatment of detainees became widespread and systematic. Today, over 1,000 people are detained in connection with anti-government protests, the majority without charge or trial.

In April 1995 security forces cordoned off the area where Shaikh al-Jamri lived, forced nearby residents to leave their homes and arrested him and 18 members of his family. The security forces shot dead two unarmed people protesting about the arrests.

When the families of the dead men tried to mourn them in public, they were stopped by the authorities. Shaikh al-Jamri was held incommunicado, without access to the outside world, until September 1995. His daughter, 'Afaf al-Jamri, was detained and reportedly beaten, in violation of Article 5 of the UDHR prohibiting torture and ill treatment.

Prisoner of conscience Shaikh 'Abd al-amir Mansur Al-Jamri was put in prison because he asked for political reform. He has been denied rights that the world has said should never be violated.

Ask for his immediate and unconditional release.

Write to:

* His Highness Sheikh Issa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Office of His Highness the Amir, P.O.Box 555, The Amiri Court, Rifa'a Palace, Bahrain

* His Excellency Sheikh Muhammed Bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa, Minister of Interior, P.O.Box 13, Al-Manama, Bahrain

A new study about Bahraini women by Prof. May Seikaly

Bahraini women's influence has accelerated through activism

A new book entitled "Organizing Women", ISBN 1 85973 915 6, dedicated one chapter for studying political activism of Bahraini women.

Chapter 6 "Bahraini Women in Formal and Informal Groups: The Politics of Identification" was authored by Professor May Seikaly.

Professor Seikaly started her analysis by saying "At the beginning of April 1995, 310 Bahraini women signed and circulated a petition presented to the ruler of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa Bin Salman al-Khalifah, expressing their concern with the mounting wave of riots that had engulfed the country, and had left deep rifts in its society, grief at the number of deaths and strong bitterness and frustration at official handling of the crisis. Since December 1994, an uprising had erupted from among the less favoured strata of society demanding employment, better opportunities and justice. This was the tip of the iceberg and the circle of opposition, anger and accumulated bitterness acquired momentum and adherents in spiralling speed and vociferous activities. In addition to the class dimension of the conflict it also expressed sectarian and ethnic differences and animosities, and one common demand from all elements was the return of the short-lived democratic process that had been scrapped by the ruling family in 1975. Strife conditions created a network of common grounds between various currents, elements, groups and strata of the Bahraini society, Shiis and Sunnis, liberals, leftists and Islamists, workers, professionals and intellectuals, men and women. As a result contacts, relationships and exchanges between them were activated, thus clarifying and exposing ideological differences and channels of cooperation.

In this particular petition, the women of Bahrain, citizens and mothers addressed the grievances of the nation and its fears and demanded in clear and concrete terms redress of the deteriorating conditions through grassroots reforms of the political system. A return to a constitutional democracy was advocated as the channel in which women are to be involved in the process of political decision-making and sharing in national development.

In the statement, this group of Bahraini women were attempting to achieve two goals in one battle - national and social liberation. While their national commitment is clear, non-sectarian, in favour of social equality and participation, they were also proposing a gender agenda of equality and social justice. They were striking while the iron was hot. It is clear that they refused to mask their gender requests in the fervour of nationalist demands; demands that incorporated and masked the wide spectrum of societal categories of class, sectarian and ethnic groups, but not women. In view of the highly volatile and politically dangerous conditions that the country was passing through, such a challenging act, similar to the case of women driving in Saudi Arabia, is an expression of the autonomous, courageous, and undefeatable spirit of women even under excruciatingly trying conditions. It is also an act which bespeaks of an underlying array of developments that Bahraini women as a group, and in groups have undergone and found now an opportunity to express.

It is indicative and cynical that the reaction to their petition from the authorities in Bahrain was again in the same spirit of backlash that the Saudi women received - intimidation and unemployment... It was enlightening to relocate Bahraini activists who had experienced and lived through the anti-colonial demonstrations of the 60s and the 1971-5 Parliamentary protest movement in Bahrain. These secular nationalists were trained in the school of liberal nationalism of the 60s and 70s of the Nasserite era. During the peak of their activism, this brand of nationalists had fought for equal participation and a role in national development but were disillusioned. Today it is in the same spirit that Bahraini secular nationalists have petitioned for parliamentary participation again after twenty years.

After an in-depth assessment, Professor Seikaly concluded "In a quickly developing society, Bahraini women have experienced tremendous changes in the idiom and form they projected in order to express their particular gender identity, autonomy and subjectivity. While in the 1960s and 70s it was the idiom of national liberation, constitutional democratization, Western dress and political radicalization, in the 1980s and 90s it is the idiom of Islam, activism to fulfil its message for a proper Muslim life and the veil as a symbol of its triumph. In both phases it has been women from within the rapidly changing social classes who have expressed these roles. In the earlier stage it was the urban middle-class women who had travelled, been educated, and broken the barriers of tradition. In this more recent generation it has also been the middle classes, mainly lower, and the lower classes mostly from rural backgrounds and still attached to conservative and traditional ideologies. Islam has found fertile grounds in a class still in transition and vulnerable to the economic and political pressures of the 80s. This explains, in some measure, the division and gaps between these two generations of visible women activists. The liberal, pro-secular first generation also come from conservatively religious backgrounds; however due to various causes they could never break through the class, ethnic or religious barriers to touch the rural, mainly Shii women's sector. That needed another generation and Islam to do it.

Today, nearly four years after the Gulf War, the region as a whole and particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are facing the repercussions of policies binding the region to Western hegemony and economic controls. These states are confronting very serious backlash in the form of opposition/revivalist politics. In Bahrain, this opposition has taken the form of a popular grass-roots uprising which has been going on since the summer of 1994 and accelerated after December 1995 with a clear alliance between the liberal professionals and intellectuals, a wide range of Islamist structures (both Sunni and Shii), the lower middle class and the economically depressed lower stratum of society. In Bahrain as well as Kuwait there are clear indications of women's involvement in these reactions, whether within the organized frames of the Islamist groups or from among the liberal intellectuals and independent elements.

The demands of all opposition platforms is for a larger margin of democratization and more equitable share in the wealth distribution of the state. Kuwaiti and Bahraini women have been insisting again on the right to vote and to have a say in the direction of development.

In the latest events, Bahraini women were given exposure through the media due to their contribution in the activities of the opposition, in the negotiations and in giving the crisis a gender dimension. They have taken an active and physical role in demonstrations, particularly those which have been campus-based. Women students at the university have, in some instances, become their families' breadwinners when brothers, fathers or husbands have been arrested. Their academic life and their family life have been disrupted by these disturbances and the reaction of authorities against their villages and communities. Whenever the situation has been reported in the international press or in the underground press of the leftist and Shii Islamist opposition fronts, the issue of women's demand for democracy and their participation within it, are given prominence. Amnesty International has reported cases of young girls and also women having been arrested and whose whereabouts remain unknown, and to cases where women have been detained without access to their families or to medical and legal advice. More recently women have also died as a result of the violence while protecting their children and families. It is clear that women's involvement in the opposition has increased as in the latest reports, together with teenage girls, women professionals, teachers and nurses, are reported to have been arrested and dismissed from their posts. The issue of arrests and long internment with no legal action and no recourse to humanitarian aid has added to the feelings of anger, frustration and bitterness. But of particular impact have been reports of physical and sexual abuse that young women detainees have been subjected to.

The all-women petition discussed earlier stands as a very significant contribution by women to the protest and reform movement in Bahrain. The first popular petition which at least 6000 women signed, many of whom came from Shii villages, is also of great symbolic and political import.

Whether all these activities and events will lead to an immediate change in the condition of women is doubtful, but this is just one more step in the path for women's struggle toward social liberation and to a better awareness of her capabilities, justifiable rights and the potential for a significant role in national development. Similar to Palestinian women during the Intifada, Bahraini women's social and political consciousness has accelerated through political activism. This consciousness is central to their identity. It is clear that at every juncture of radical activism, women in Bahrain were able to extract some openings to improve their conditions then, and thus accumulate status-giving achievements. In the 1960s, women came out in the streets in opposition to Western colonial presence and repression. In the 1990s, they are again demanding constitutional rights and political participation—for society and themselves".

Bahrain Uprisin: 3 Years Old

When Bahrain's security forces decided to attack the residential areas on 5 December 1994 in a "show of force", they never anticipated the resilience and strength of resistance of the Bahraini people. In October 1994 the broadly-based pro-democracy movement collected 25,000 signatures from the public in support of a petition demanding the restoration of the dissolved parliament and rule of constitutional law. These three years have founded a new history for Bahrain. The three years have demonstrated to the world how civilised the people of Bahrain are.

The popular movement in Bahrain has survived the most hostile internal and external environments. Awareness of, and belief in, natural and civil rights have been solidly deepened amongst the population. The internally-led and home-grown movement is the only one of its kind in the Middle East that brought together Islamists and secularists on the basis of a moderate agenda. This moderate agenda was formulated by the various political forces inside and outside the country. Its pillars were and remain: national consensus and constitutional framework.

It is this approach that angered the ruling establishment in Bahrain. The tribal government strove to divert the process by attacking one section of the society and by accusing this section of receiving backing from a foreign country and a foreign organisation. The pro-democracy movement appreciates the complex local and regional situations, and had guarded its independent and national approach, thus defying all the odds and all government's attempts.

The government of Bahrain has shown total disregard to the interests of the citizens, the country and the region. It preached and practised racism and sectarianism on a scale unprecedented in modern history of Bahrain and the region. The government's forces tortured to death and killed by bullets 35 citizens. Not a single torturer or killer has been brought to justice. Members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family, working as state security judges, arbitrarily sentenced than 450 citizens to death, life imprisonment, long terms and fines of millions of dollars. More than 10,000 people have been detained during the last three years. At any time there are 1500-2000 detainees in some 27 detention centres and jails. More than 500 citizens have been injured by security forces. More than 800 houses, cars and private properties have been damaged by security forces during the implementations of collective punishment programmes. Mosques and religious places are continually attacked and ransacked. More than 40,000 people have been imported into Bahrain for changing the demography of the country. The University of Bahrain as well as the high offices of the State have been subjected to ethnic cleansing.

Despite all these vicious policies, the pro-democracy movement consolidated its national and independent approach. The uprising has strengthened the resolve of the people to continue the civilised struggle against outdated policies. All attempts by the government to run away from the political agenda set out by the opposition has failed. The future can never be for despots who ignore laws of history.

Parliament is a pre-requisite for resolving the crises

By Dr. Abdulhadi Khalaf
Sweden, 15 Dec 97

It is necessary to recall the role of Sheikh Abdul Amir al-Jamri and his colleagues in the Petition Committee. Their initiative facilitated dismantling the barriers of fear that were erected in Bahrain since the dissolution of its elected parliament in 1975. All leaders of the constitutional movement have repeatedly underlined that our country cannot possibly hope to resolve the prevailing political crises without repealing all unconstitutional measures, decrees and policies enacted by the government during the past two decades, in the forced absence of the National Assembly.

The moderate demands put forward by Sheikh al-Jamri and other leaders of the Petition Committee, and their conciliatory tone generated a massive endorsement by the people in spite of intimidation and reprisals. The government responded by heavy clamp down. The disproportional heavy measures taken by the government against the fourteen national figures who sponsored the constitutional petition as well as against pro-democracy activists have not succeeded in driving the movement into despair or into submission.

The Bahraini rulers' adamant refusal to see the futility of their ways has plunged the country deeper and deeper in social, political and economic crises. Increased allocations to security services and other ill-conceived projects to change the demographic structure of the coun-

try have taken their toll on the country's finances and its resources. Once again, Bahrain's rulers are adopting futile measures that hit the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

Skewed labour market policies, corruption, and discriminatory practices have given some new dimensions to the current social and political crises in the country. Unemployment has hit particularly hard on women and young people. Recently released figures show that between 16-18% of households in urban areas (Manama, Muharraq and Isa Town) are dependent on financial support and assistance in-kind disbursed by private charities. The situation may be deemed worse in the rural areas where strict requirements for security clearance have led to higher rates of unemployment. The already announced additional budgetary allocations for security forces and defence are expected to result in additional cuts in allocations for health, education and social services. The ramifications of the current social, political and economic crises may become disastrous as a generation of young Bahrainis find themselves pushed into despair. I believe that it is in our interests, opponents of the regime as well as its supporters to continue our endeavours to make the rulers of Bahrain see that restoration of the constitution is a pre-requisite for peacefully resolving the current crises, for re-establishing the legitimacy of the regime itself and for readying the country for an era of a sustainable stability, development and prosperity.

BFM Statement: Bahrainis are entitled to struggle for their rights

"The Bahrainis I met were virtually unanimous in wanting a fully independent sovereign State. The great majority added that this should be an Arab State". This was the concluding sentence of Mr. Winspeare Guicciardi who briefed the United Nations Security Council on 11 May 1970 about the findings of his exploratory mission to Bahrain. The fifteen nations of the Security Council unanimously accepted and voted for a sovereign and independent State of Bahrain based on the wishes of the people of Bahrain.

Mr. Guicciardi, the Personal Representative of the UN Secretary General, toured Bahrain in March 1970 and met with dignitaries and various sections of the society. The will of the people was reflected clearly for an "independent sovereign state". Bahrain was accepted as a member of the UN after consulting the wishes of the people of Bahrain. This is why the Constitution of Bahrain states in Article (1) that "the system of government in Bahrain is democratic, under which sovereignty lies with the people, the source of all powers. Sovereignty shall be exercised in the manner specified in this Constitution". The first article continues to say, "the citizens shall enjoy the right to participate in the public affairs of the State and enjoy political rights, beginning with the right to vote".

The Constitution of Bahrain is an intrinsic part of the "independent sovereign state", and the governing rules are above the whims of holders of authority or law-makers. This is also in compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 21 of the UDHR states that the "will of the people shall

be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures".

The Al-Khalifa ruling family unilaterally dissolved the parliament in 1975 and suspended the important articles of the Constitution which mandate the existence of an elected National Assembly. Since 1975, the Al-Khalifa family resisted all calls for the reinstatement of constitutional rule. By doing so, the "independent sovereign state" had been undermined. The Bahraini people have suffered immensely from arbitrary governance. The opposition has peacefully campaigned for the rights of the people and for the sovereignty of Bahrain as specified by the Constitution. The ruling establishment used brutal force, torture, extra-judicial killings, forcible exiling, arbitrary detention and sentencing as well as various other means aimed at abolishing the basic freedoms of the nation. The ruling establishment has adopted policies based on racial, religious and tribal discrimination amongst the population. Tens of thousands of people had been imported, awarded citizenship, recruited in security and defence forces, and granted favourable treatment in an attempt to change the demography of the country.

The people of Bahrain are entitled to struggle for their rights. The pro-democracy movement is bound by the will of the people on the basis of national consensus. Such consensus is based on pluralist and civil rights concepts commonly enshrined in Islamic values, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of Bahrain.