

BAHRAIN

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

The US State Department's damning report on Bahrain's HR crisis Another Indictment from a friend

The US State Department, which has hitherto refrained from expressing any support for the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain, has highlighted the extent of the human rights violations in the country. Although Madeline Albright had been an advocate of human rights prior to her appointment in her current post, she has exhibited unlimited reluctance in expressing a view on the wide-ranging human rights violations by regimes considered friendly to the US administration. However, the annual report by the State Department on human rights for 1997 has confirmed beyond any doubt what the opposition has been saying for the past decades, and specifically over the past three years.

The persistent violation of human rights by the Government of Bahrain has made it easily identifiable with the most repressive regimes in the world. Saddam Hussain's record which is often cited as a justification for the US-led military and political attacks against Baghdad's regime is undoubtedly one of the worst in the world. However, that of the Al Khalifa of Bahrain is not far from becoming notorious for its flagrant violation of the most fundamental principles of a good government.

The report has confirmed that at least 1300 detainees remained beyond bars by the end of December 1997. That is a large number compared with the size of Bahrain which is a tiny island in the Gulf. The opposition believes a more realistic figure to be in the region of 1500-2000. However, it also believes that one if one human being is oppressed then he is one too many. The figures become immaterial in determining whether a regime is seriously engaged in human rights violation.

One major difference, however, exists between a regime that seeks to defend itself against attempts to unseat it by force, in which case, casualties may occur in the process, and another that seeks to eliminate any dissenting voice while the struggle is merely for basic rights that have been codified by the country's constitution. However, no human rights violation is to be accepted by principled people. Dictators are the ones who often believe that their existence is an exclusive formula.

It is them who abide by no human, religious or ethical norm as they struggle to uproot any opposition to their tyranny. To them truth is what they tell their people, and justice is what they believe is good for these people. The decision making process is a one-way phenomena and the ruled has only one choice: to accept the status quo or go to jail. So goes the logic of what takes place in the smallest country in the Gulf. This much-hated formula clearly contra-

dicts the essence of the "good government", one which is based on trust, mutual respect and complimentary roles for the rulers and the ruled. It is at the heart of the struggle between the pro-democracy movement and the totalitarian regime in Bahrain.

The opposition is aware of the regional development in the Gulf that restricts the Americans and their allies in their approach towards democracy and respect of human rights in the countries considered friendly to them. As the atmosphere of war looms in the Gulf, more questions are being asked about the wisdom of fostering dictatorial regimes such as that of Saddam Hussain with the knowledge that they could turn against them. The tigers can be tamed for a limited period, but their lust for the kill can never be eliminated.

In the absence of a "good government" it is almost impossible to imagine a country enjoying a long-lasting stability and security. Oppression could only lead to dissatisfaction which, in turn, leads to more instability. The pro-Saddam stands throughout the eighties have set wrong examples by the powers who had projected themselves as worriers of the cause of democracy and human rights. However, a similar mistake is being committed at this moment. The decision by the US and Britain to strike against Iraq has made them dependent, or so they say, on the provision by undemocratic regimes of military facilities. The Bahraini government which has boasted of its position as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council plays two roles at the moment, a public and private one. Publicly, the Al Khalifa have expressed "opposi-

tion" to an American strike against Iraq, while privately they were made to offer facilities to the American forces fighting against Iraq. The Americans and their allies on the other hand have refrained from expressing a view in public against the lack of democracy and human rights in those countries. People view this as a compromise on principles.

The problem, it seems, arises, from the notion that politics is a dirty game and it is the art of the possible. At this moment of time, they argue, the time is not right for any pressure on these allies. The Americans had raised the expectations of the Iraqis in 1991 with tragic consequences allowing the uprising in Southern Iraq. People of the Gulf who had expected a change in the way they were being governed by their tribal governments found themselves imprisoned, tortured and perhaps exiled. Bahrain, for example, is the home of the largest American base in the Gulf. The human rights violations, which the State Department has acknowledged in unambiguous terms are being carried out in the shadow of the American presence on the island. In fact the regime often uses this American "good-will" as a justification for their oppression of the people. It is hoped now that the new State Department's report be taken seriously by policy makers, and a due pressure be exerted on the "friendly" rulers in Bahrain to end their tyranny and reinstate the country's constitution. The lesson from Iraq is that dictators must not be supported. That is the better way to avert war and save peoples from the wrath of dictators and despots.

restoration of parliament.

The main highway near Jedhafs, Mussalla and Daih was blocked on 27 January, at around 2.00 pm by burnt tyres. The residents were enraged by news about the deterioration of the health of Sheikh Al-Jamri in detention.

The London based newspaper "Al Quds" published an article for the opposition figure, Mr. Abdul Rahman Al-Nuaimi who said "since the arrival of the ruling family to power it had never sought to reduce the gap between itself and the citizens. On the contrary, they adopted an imperious and rodomontading attitude. They started their rule two centuries ago by confiscating farmers' lands, and did not hesitate at the turn of the century to impose poll tax on the Shi'a only to demarcate them from the rest of the oppressed citizens".

He added "Yes we are against terrorism, sabotage and burning acts, but, in fact, the blame rests with the ruling family who refuses to rule by the constitution."

"Eid" of civil resistance

People around the country gathered in mosques to mark the end of Ramadan on 29 January proclaiming the solidarity of the nation. Children and families of the martyrs and political prisoners were showered with presents in a show of unity at a testing time. Youths gathered around the house of the detained pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Al-Jamri, in Bani Jamra, and called for his immediate release. Cemeteries containing graves of martyrs were crowded with visitors pledging to continue the peaceful civil resistance until the restoration of civil rights.

Later on the Eid day, skirmishes and burnt tyres were reported in several areas. In Jabalat Habshi and Duraz, main streets were blocked with residents proclaiming that "There is no Eid while Al-Jamri and his colleagues are in jail". Balloons were seen flying in different places along the north-western region carrying pictures of the jailed leaders and posters calling for the

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Historic Letter Released by the CPP on 18 January 1998

The Committee for Popular Petition (CPP) published a letter it submitted to the Amir of Bahrain on 1 December 1997 and commented on the response to its letter. The letter was released on 18 January 1998. Translation of the Arabic text follows: "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

His Highness Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the Amir of the State of Bahrain

On the basis of our belief in the peaceful approach and dialogue for the good of our beloved country, we request your Highness to specify an appointment for meeting with the Committee for Popular Petition (CPP) in order to formally receive the Petition and to discuss the demands it contains.

Your Highness: On 15 January 1994, you received a delegation representing the first Petition. That delegation comprised the late Hamid Sangoor, Sheikh Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, Mr. Mohammed Jabir Sabah, Mr. Isa Al-Joder and Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain. The meeting with the delegation followed the submission of the first Petition on 15 November 1992.

Two years after the formation of the Shura Council, the second Petition was signed by more than 23 thousands citizens. The latter reaffirmed the same demands of the first Petition and requested from your Highness the restoration of the articles of 1973 constitution.

We had attempted several times to submit the Petition. However, on 3 January 1995, His Excellency the Justice Minister requested that we delay the submission.

On 6 March 1995, the office of His Highness the Prime Minister requested that we do not submit a letter to request your Highness for a meeting because the country was undergoing critical events demanding patience. When, on 28 July 1997, the CPP decided to submit a letter to your Highness to specify an appointment, the Governor of the Capital summoned two members of the CPP, Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan and Mr. Ibrahim Kamal-u-Din to Hooraa Police Station. For the third time we were requested to delay the submission of a letter to your Highness. As your Highness is aware that the events started towards the end of 1994 and they are still negatively overshadowing the environment of our dear country. Since both government and people are aiming to exit these crises, we, the CPP, request your Highness to specify a date for meeting with you and for discussing the popular demands contained in the Petition.

Our extreme concern for the interests of our dear country, which owns our loyalty and love, has motivated us to request you to initiate the process of dialogue. We hope that all noble efforts come together to shoulder in the construction of a shining future for the country and its people. Please accept our regards and respect. Peace be upon you.

Members of the Committee for Popular Petition:

1. Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri (detained since January 96) 2. Mohammed Jabir Sabah 3. Ali Qassim Rabea 4. Ahmad Al-Shamlan 5. Ibrahim Kamal-u-Din 6. Abdul Wahab Hussain (detained since January 96) 7. Hesham Al-Shehabi 8. Dr. Monira Fakhro 9. Isa Abdulla Al-

Joder 10. Abdulla Moteiwa 11. Saeed Al-Asboul 12. Abdulla Abdul Rahman Hashim

End Note: On 27 December 1997, a CPP delegation comprising Mr. Mohammed Jabir Sabah and Mr. Abdulla Rashid Moteiwa approached the Diwan (Royal Court) of His Highness Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the Amir of the State of Bahrain, to submit a letter requesting an appointment with His Highness for formally submitting the Petition and for discussing its constitutional contents. The Diwan noted down the private telephone numbers of the delegation and promised to come back. Since then, we had made several contacts with the Diwan, but to date we have received no response".

Two Years in Detention

By the end of January, the health of Sheikh Al-Jamri has deteriorated seriously. Sheikh Al-Jamri, and other pro-democracy leaders, such as Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain and Mr. Hassan Mushaima'a, have been in solitary and semi-solitary confinement for the past 2 years. Mr. Hussain was denied proper medical attention and instead is suffering from ill-health and ill-treatment. Similarly, Mr. Mushaima'a has spent the last six months harsh conditions of solitary confinement as a punishment for his steadfastness and insistence on the constitutional demands for restoring the parliament. Sheikh Al-Jamri was detained in solitary cell the first nine months, and had been put back in solitary confinement several times. The second anniversary of their arrest falls on 21 January, and on this occasion, the people renewed their allegiances to their pro-democracy leaders and vow to continue resisting the outdated feudal autocracy.

House of an entire family confiscated

The start of 1998 witnessed a new arbitrary policy. The Bahraini government initiated a new policy of collective punishment that violates all civilized norms and behaviours. Haji Abdullah Jassim Ahmed Abdullah and his family were forced out of their house in Hamad Town. The family was informed that this is a punishment for their son's involvement in anti-government activities. The son, Shawki, was amongst many youths arbitrarily arrested by the security forces last year. The confiscated house is in Hamad Town 21st Roundabout, House No. 810, Road 1614, Block 1216. This new policy is being codified in a new law to be issued by the unconstitutional government any time.

The nation was shocked at the way the family of Haj Abdullah Jassim Ahmed Abdullah, had been ordered to evacuate their house. Haj Abdulla received a summons to attend Rifa'a Police Station. He was interrogated by an officer by the name, Khalifa bin Sultan. During the interrogation, the officer presented Haj Abdulla with a letter spelling out the evacuation order. The officer also refused to hand a copy of the letter and ordered Haj Abdulla to read it inside the Police Station only. The letter carried the signature of an official in the name of the Housing Minister to evacuate the house. The officer said "You do not deserve this house. We will give it to another family that is worthy of the house". The opposition calls on all human rights organizations to intervene and put

an end to this new policy of collective punishment that contravenes all civilized norms and behaviour.

Citizenship denied

The Gulf Daily News of 9 January said, "the Cassation Court has upheld an earlier verdict rejecting three applications for Bahraini citizenship. The applicants had been told by the Court of Appeals to prove their eligibility beyond doubt. The Immigration and Passports Directorate told the court that the applicants did not deserve Bahraini citizenship since their father was of Iranian origin". It is worth noting that the Al-Khalifa family has imported 40,000 Bedouins from Syria in the past two years, granted them citizenship, free accommodation, and provided them with many privileges in an attempt to destabilize the Bahraini social structure.

The 1997 US State Department report (issued in January 1998) on human rights in Bahrain says "Approximately 3 percent of the indigenous population, the "bidoon," or stateless persons, mostly Persian-origin Shi'a, do not have passports and cannot readily obtain them, although they may be given travel documents as Bahraini residents (see section 5). The Government occasionally grants citizenship to resident non-Bahrainis who are Sunni Muslims, mostly from the Arabian peninsula and Egypt".

Torture on the highway

Security units in northwestern region adopting a new policy for stopping cars on the highways, arbitrarily picking some of the citizens, torturing, intimidating and then releasing them. On 4 January, Baqir Hamid Ibrahim, 24, was beaten severely near Sar and was told that so long as there are wall-writings in that area, the security forces will continue punishing the citizens in such away. Ali Hussain Ali, 27, and his brother Salman were stopped, summarily interrogated and intimidated. Abdul Aziz Nasser, 78, Ja'afar Mohammed Saleh, 59, were also intimidated and threatened with arrests.

A security officer by the name Saeed led a group of mercenaries on 20 January for practicing their routine collective punishment. At 11.15 pm, in Sar, the mercenaries stopped the car of Seyyed Abbas Salman, 24, dragged him out (by pulling his ear) and torturing him. Following the hurling of bad language and insults, the mercenaries encircled the young citizen and tortured him severely with the ends of their weapons. The mercenary officer, Saeed, said to the young man "as long as there are wall-writings in your area we will continue to practice this punishment".

This type of beating by the same mercenaries has been taking place on a daily basis. Other citizens recently tortured in this manner include: Jawad Hashim, 23, Hussain Mirza, 23, Baqir Hamid Ibrahim, 26, Mohammed Ahmad Ibrahim, 14, Mosa Hussain, 19, and Seyyed Saeed Radhi, 27, together with his children. All these were stopped, dragged out of their cars, encircled, kicked and punched until exhaustion. The leader of the mercenaries stated the same message to all of them.

These atrocities are taking place in the north-western region of Bahrain where a new Police Headquarters had been inaugurated a month ago. The headquarters house extended facilities for detaining and torturing Bahrainis.

Lawyers Society speaks out

The Bahraini Lawyers Society organized a seminar on 14 January that was attended by a large number of intellectuals and addressed by the pro-democracy leader Dr. Monira Fakhro as well as the journalist Mr. Hafedh Al-Sheikh. The audience cheered and greeted Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, the leading democracy campaigner as he entered the hall. Members of the Popular Petition Committee (including Al-Shamlan, Dr. Fakhro) championed the call for restoration of the dissolved parliament. Dr. Fakhro rebuffed the claims that Bahrain's development index is a high one and a reflection of reality. She said that she had been involved in the work of the Labour Ministry and knows the extent of poverty in Bahrain. She stated that there are many thousands families suffering below the minimum standard of living. She also reiterated that there are no real prospects for Bahrain without returning to the constitution. Mr. Al-Sheikh referred to the mounting corruption and the government's controlled press.

Gagging citizens!

On 22 January, the notorious Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa (so-called Governor of the Capital) summoned the leading pro-democracy figure and member of the dissolved parliament, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah. Mr. Sabah wrote an article in the London daily "Al-Quds" discrediting the appointed Shura Council, which he described as representing the ruler rather than the ruled. Also, on 27 December 1997, Mr. Sabah led a delegation that visited the Amir (ruler) requesting a meeting to formally submit the Popular Petition calling for restoration of the dissolved parliament. During the interrogation, Mr. Sabah was ill-treated, threatened with grave consequences if he continues to call for democratic reforms. After four hours of interrogation (7.30 pm to 11.30 pm), Mr. Sabah was released and asked to come back for further interrogation on Monday 26 January. On this day, the ex-torturer interrogated the pro-democracy figure for the second time. Mr. Sabah is in need of medical treatment. His passport had earlier been confiscated but has now been returned. The ex-torture said to Mr. Sabah: "Why do you ally yourself with the Shia?". The heroic pro-democracy figure said that "all citizens are equal before the law and all share the same aspirations". Members of the Committee for Popular Petition (CPP) are coming under intense pressure from the government to force them to give up their demands. The CPP comprises of twelve personalities, two of whom are in detention: Sheikh Al-Jamri and Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain.

On the other hand, it has been revealed that the Justice Minister, Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalid Al-Khalifa had summoned last week the president of the Lawyers Society, Dr. Abbas Helal and reprimanded him for organizing a seminar in the society hosting the pro-democracy leader Dr. Monira Fakhro. The Justice Minister threatened members of the society with reprisal actions if they are to continue with their cultural programme.

Other News

* 6 January: Al-Jazira TV Channel presented a debate about the appointed Shura Council in the Gulf. Two views were put for-

ward. A member of the Saudi Shura Council, Dr. Fahad Al-Araabi Al-Harithi defended the appointed Shura council, while Dr. Majid Al-Alawi, an exiled Bahraini oppositionist, defended the other view, in support of elected parliaments.

* 7 January: The security forces raided the house of Majid Saeed Ali Al-Molla in the early hours of the morning, arrested him, ransacked the contents of the house, intimidated members of the family, and confiscated all their passports. The arrest of Mr. Al-Molla is part of a campaign arbitrary detention in Sehla.

* 9 January: The security forces launched an aggressive raid against the residents of Markoban in Sitra and arrested several children including Mahmood Mirza, 10 years old, Jasim Hasan Maz'al, 14, Habib Ahmad Habib, 14, Ahmad Ali Abdul Nabi, 15, Mahmood Ma'tooq Al-Sanadi, 15, and others. These are believed to have been taken away to the torture centre in Nabih Saleh Police Station. A month ago the security forces raided the same area and arrested Jalal Ibrahim Al-Attar, 20, and Zuhair Ibrahim Al-Sanadi, 20. The whereabouts of these two people is not known.

* 12 January: In Sitra, members of the intelligence department entered mosques and assembly halls to intimidate the people. Some of these mercenaries went directly to the microphones and switched them off in order to agitate the situation. One of the heads of the mosques, Haj Abdulla Ali Al-Abod, was detained when he attempted to question the excuses for such provocation.

* 14 January: The security forces attacked Shakhora and arrested several children including Seyyed Mohammed Salman, 11 years, Abbas Ali Salman, 11, and Osama Saeed Ahmed. Seyyed Mohammed Salman was taken to the nearby beach (in cold weather) and tortured in the open before being returned to his parents in an exhausted condition. Abbas Ali Salman's mother was beaten severely by the mercenary attackers when she attempted to prevent his arrest.

* 18 January: The prominent figure, Sheikh Isa Qassim in a statement on 18 January 1998, noted the second anniversary of the detention of the pro-democracy leader Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, who has been in detention since 21 January 1996, and stated that any "settlement to the current problems can only be through negotiation".

* 24 January: Sayed Saeed Khalaf and twenty other political prisoners staged a hunger strike demanding restoration of their families' visits. The prison authorities responded by placing the group in the Dry Dock Prison Camp for further torturing.

* 26 January: Bahrain - Qatar relations are further strained with national newspapers reporting that Qatar is to pull out of the joint Gulf Air. In Bahrain, it was reported that the Amir will visit Hawar islands on the day of Eid (end of Ramadan). Hawar islands represent the main focus of border-dispute between Qatar and Bahrain.

* 29 January: A brother and a sister were summoned on 24 January and interrogated by torturers in Adelya Prison. Mahdi Ahmad Al Abod, 29, and his sister, Fawzeyya, were both intimidated and asked to attend for further interrogation during the following week.

Pyromaniac regime: Forcing arson on the nation

On 16 January At 12:30, mid-day, fire gutted "Sar Club" and reports spoke of 60% damage to the club's building. Administration room and main hall were completely destroyed. The club is a very popular social institution and the intelligence department has been monitoring the activities of the club. The residence of Sar, who are the beneficiaries from the club, believe the security forces have burnt the club to intimidate the residence and to use it as an excuse for launching attacks against the peaceful people. The burning of Sar club follows the recent fire that gutted several other clubs that served their communities, including those in Bani Jamra, Barbar, Duraz, and Shakhora. The opposition denounced all arson and called on the people to be vigilant and to expose the mercenary security forces that lack affiliation and loyalty to Bahrain.

Reuters reported that "a fire broke out on Saturday (10 January) at a commercial building in the Bahraini capital Manama, injuring some 60 people and damaging 15 shops, a government official said. The official said at least eight people had been taken to hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation. Many others were treated on the spot. "Many were injured by thick smoke caused by the fire," the official told Reuters.

This vicious cycle has been fermented by the government, which is attempting to emulate the Algerian style of governance. A BFM spokesperson condemned all acts of violence and reiterated the call for establishing the rule of law as prescribed in Bahrain's Constitution.

The security forces announced on 3 January that six people arbitrary arrested from Sehla have "confessed" to the burning of Koohaji Building. The opposition has condemned this criminal act, while the people believe that the security force were the real perpetrators. This is to enable them for initiating the new policy for confiscating the properties and assets of the indigenous population.

The residents of Sehla protested at the way the racist authorities arbitrarily arrested some of the youths and then forced them to perform an act depicting how Al-Kohaji building would have been burnt. The security authorities gathered a crowd for watching while youth aged between 15-17 years were brought to the scene for the intimidating act. The youths were arrested few hours after the burning of the nearby Kohajio building last week. The people believe that the security forces have set the building on fire. The young victims arbitrarily arrested were: Majid Rashid Abdul Karim, 16, his brothers, Abdul Hassan, 15, and Mahmood, 15, Abdul Amir Abbas Salim, 17, and his nephews Hussain Ahmad Kadhim and Jaafer Ahmad Kadhim.

A journalist working for Akhbar Al-Khalij protested to the stooges running the paper (Helal Al-Sahyji, Abdul Monem Ibrahim, etc) at the way the names, photos and descriptions of the young persons of Sehla had been reported. The paper insulted the youths and called them "criminals", thus violating all norms of civilised behaviour.

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Forcing arson on the nation....*(Continued from last page)*

Having people "confessing" is a practice, which the intelligence department excels in performing. For example, nine pupils arrested in January 1997 were found innocent after claiming that they had "confessed" of burning a place. But the intelligence officer, Adel Flaifel, told them that he would keep them in jail so that they lose their secondary school education. The young pupils include Ammar Al-Tal, 16, from Tobli; Ali Mosa Al-Oreibi, 16, from Kawarah; Taher Abbas Mahfood, 16, Kawarah; Sadiq Ali Al-Shofa, 16, Tobli; Mohammed Al-Sheikh, 16, Isa Town, Nabil, 16, Isa Town, Mahmood Ali Salman, 17, Kawarah; Najj Ahmad Salman, 16, Kawarah; and a ninth person.

Similarly, three people which the intelligence department claimed to have them "confessed" for a fire in the Sheraton Hotel sometime ago were found to be innocent but are still languishing in torture cells. They are Zuhair Al-Algam, 26, Yasir Omran, 17, and Jalal, 17. All are in Adelya Prison now. Another case was handled by the Jordanian torturer, Mahmood Al-Akkori involving four youths from Sitra, who were proved to be innocent but are still in Adelya Prison. They are Ibrahim Juma, 22, Habib Al-Abboud, 17, Hasan Al-Slail, and Ibrahim Abdul Hamid, 18.

On 12 January, arsonists working for the intelligence department set fire in a house in Iskan-Jedhafs. Haj Abdulla Al-Asfoor, 55, whose five sons are amongst those arbitrarily detained, woke up at 5.00 am to see fire spreading in his house and burning its contents. Haj Abdulla received many threats from the security forces after the arrest of all his sons few months ago. This is another proof of the involvement of the security forces in arson and sabotage.

Arson and sabotage by the security forces are facts of life. The forces have been quadrupled in the past two years and it is even getting out of control from central command with units competing against each other in repressing and harassing the citizens. These forces are predominantly staffed with non-Bahrainis and led by some 30 British officers, headed by Ian Henderson.

The deliberate and purposeful fire setting on more than one occasion to private paraphernalia serves only to fulfil the pyromaniac mentality of the Al-Khalifa. Their pleasure is derived by the need to fudge scenarios for denigrating innocent people by forcing them to depict acts, most probably they never committed. Innocent people are then dragged to the unconstitutional and internationally-condemned State Security Court.

The nugatory accusations thrown out at the citizens will not serve as a presidio for the regime. The main aim sought in adopting such a Gothic attitude is to cloud the true situation in the country and to intimidate the population.

While "security and stability" remains their main alibi for battering the people, behind the hype and glitter surrounding the regime's buzzwords, however, lay the reality of their policy which endeavours to varnish and embellish transgressions and to gain sympathy from the international community for their deeds, presupposing that they could divert attention from core issues relating to human rights and democracy.

British MPs sign a motion

Sixteen British MPs tabled a motion on 14 January in the House of Commons in which they noted and expressed concern about the continued violation of human rights in Bahrain. The motion (Notice of motion, No. 602) stated "That this house notes with dismay that during 1997 human rights violations have continued to take place in Bahrain despite condemnation by international human rights agencies: is gravely concerned that, since December 1994, those participating in popular demonstrations, calling for democratic reforms and the reinstatement of 1973 constitution, have faced violent repression, extra-judicial killings, and arbitrary detention under the unconstitutional 1974 State Security Act, which allows detention without charge or trial for up to three years, is appalled that detainees are held incommunicado, denied access to families, lawyers and doctors, and face torture and ill-treatment, and even death while in custody, calls on the Bahrain Government to abolish the State Security Court, where trials are held in camera and whose procedures violates basic human rights; urges Bahrain to introduce fair public trials and due process of law according to accepted international standards; and calls on the Bahrain Government to bring to an end these human rights abuses, to immediately release all political prisoners, and to allow the hundreds of Bahrainis forcibly exiled because of their political activities to return safely to their homeland".

British SAS trains National Guard!

"Al-Quds Al-Arabi" said on 2 January 1998 said that the "National Guard" established by the Bahraini Crown Prince in January 1997 will be ready by end of 1998. The Crown Prince heads about 12,000-strong defence forces equipped and trained by the USA. These forces possess about 100 (M60) tanks, 500 armoured vehicles, 100 artillery equipment, other military equipment, various types of missiles, 24 jet fighters (12 off F16 Falcon, 4 off F5 Tiger), 12 Helicopters (Cobra), 12 other types of helicopters, a frigate (Perry).

In addition to the army, there are 9,000 security forces and police personnel. The new National Guard will be formed from a 500 to 600-strong unit armed with light equipment. The National Guard will be used for internal security as a special unit of commandos for defending the ruling family, the political and military leaders well as guarding sensitive locations. The National Guard will then be increased to 1000-1500 and will have heavier equipment. Al-Quds also said "contrary to the way the defence forces is equipped and trained, the National Guard will be equipped and trained by British SAS personnel". The paper added that the deal with the UK is expected to be finalized in the coming weeks.

Al-Khalifa insult Britain

In an interview with the government's daily "Akhbar Al-Khalij" on 10 January, the foreign minister, Mohammed bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, attacked the United Kingdom for granting political asylum to the citizens who had been forcibly exiled by his Al-Khalifa family. The interview reflects immaturity in politics despite the fact that the foreign minister has been in his Jurassic position for 28 years.

A British MP offers smiles

In the last week of January, Foreign Minister and Crown Prince made their annual trip to London as part of the Military Cooperation agreement, part of which includes the training of the National Guard by the British SAS. The visit followed the verbal attacks made by the Bahraini foreign minister against Britain's policy regarding political asylum.

Government's papers said on 30 January that the Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, his brother and Bahrain's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, and the Minister of Housing, Municipalities and Environment, Sheikh Khalid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, had met with Dr John Mirk, MP in London on 29 January and agreed to establish a "group" at Westminster. This group is supposed to counter the British MPs, sixteen of whom signed a motion in January calling for an end to the abuse of human rights in Bahrain.

British "Private Eye" explains

The British magazine "Private Eye" wrote the following article in its latest issue (21 January 1998):

"So much for Labour's "ethical" foreign policy: it has done nothing to alter Britain's relations with the torturers of Bahrain.

There was no official complaint last October when [the Private Eye] No. 935] revealed that Dennis Turner, MP for Wolverhampton South East and parliamentary private secretary to Robin Cook, the foreign secretary, had been on a five-day freebie - sorry: "study tour" - to the kingdom at the expense of the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies. As Eye readers know, the GCSS is run by Omar Al Hassan, who in 1994 paid the then Tory MP for Corby, William Powell, regular monthly £500 cheques which the MP did not declare. Dennis Turner does declare his October freebie in the new register. He also discloses that his wife, who went with him, was showered with "gifts of jewelry" from the emir. The standard emir's gifts for MPs is a £15,000 Rolex watch, but his emirness is traditionally much more generous to women.

Ken Purchase, MP for Wolverhampton North East and PPS to overseas development secretary Clare Short, also tagged along. He also took his wife and she also got "gifts of jewelry" from the emir. David Wiltshire, MP for Spelthorpe, went on the freebie as well and his wife got jewelry too. But then he is a Tory.

Given the gifts of jewelry it seems churlish to mention that the Bahrain government's cavalier approach to human rights was on display again on 9 January when five boys aged 15, two aged 14, and one of them just 10 years old, were arrested by the emir's police and courted off to the torture chambers on the island of Nabih Saleh. At least 20 other suspected dissidents are held incommunicado there under the control of the island's British-born and British-trained intelligence chief, Ian Henderson. At the same time, the British foreign office has received a strong demand from Bahrain's foreign minister Sheikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, a cousin of the emir, that Bahraini dissidents here should be extradited to Bahrain so they too can be tortured properly. At least the foreign office is inclined to reject the demand - but it will be rejected politely".