

BAHRAIN

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

The fall of Suharto serves as a reminder

Political reform must be contemplated seriously

The United Arab Emirates has recently been engaged in efforts to mediate between Qatar and Bahrain in relation to the border dispute involving Hawar islands. Those efforts are positive signs that there is a feeling, at least in certain quarters of the Gulf, for the need to end the cold war in the region. Whether the governments of Bahrain and Qatar will respond favourably to UAE initiative or not is the key question. Last year the UAE president himself, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan took personal interest in the issue of Bahrain's internal political crisis and tried to mediate between the opposition and the senior members of the Al Khalifa ruling family. The latter refused to cooperate and the Prime Minister unashamedly brought the initiative to a halt by staging a kangaroo court for some exiled members of the opposition. The recent UAE mediation comes at a time when the problems in the region seems to have become more serious as the oil prices continued to stumble in the world market. The Al Khalifa feel that money is one weapon to counter ever-growing popular demand for a serious reform of the political system.

They have blackmailed the business community to stay away from the political movement and have used bribes at a large scale to buy off some journalists and political figures. They even attempted to bribe human rights organisations in Geneva in August last year.

The fall in oil prices has become a serious hindrance in this process, and the Al Khalifa are fearful that their leverage over certain sectors within the society may be seriously affected. They still need to please the UAE so that financial help continue to flow into "some" pockets. The UAE president had reportedly become furious when the Bahrain's Premier killed his initiative for solving the internal political crisis. This time the stakes are too high for the Prime Minister to enrage Sheikh Zayed. At the same time it is difficult to see how this initiative could succeed when the basic ingredients of success are not existent. It is hard to see how Bahrain's Premier could moderate his stubborn and destructive policies.

Political observers believe that, apart from Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries are serious in their endeavour to create a peaceful climate in the Gulf. One of the pre-requisites for stability is a coherent internal policy which is absent in the case of Bahrain. Saudi Arabia, the largest of the

GCC states have shown seriousness in its dealings with the political situation in the Gulf. It has gone to a great length in improving its relations with Iran. Last month visits to Teheran by both the foreign Minister and the Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs have re-affirmed the Saudi commitment to improve the relations between the coasts of the Gulf, a move that has been greatly appreciated by the people of the region.

It is also reported that the political efforts to bring about settlements of the dispute between the UAE and Iran with regards to the three islands in the Gulf, are making a headway. Iran's foreign Minister's visit to Abu Dhabi has contributed to enhance the chances of a real breakthrough in the ongoing dispute. If those efforts are successful, the most serious obstacles in the relation between Iran and the GCC states will be removed.

Iraq remains a sour problem. However the recent stance by Saudi Arabia and the UAE with regards to Baghdad have contributed to reduce the tension in the region and prevented another attack on Iraq by the American-led forces. But the Iraqi crisis will remain as long as Saddam Hussain remains in power. The lack of a serious political reform in Iraq over the past two decades has led to the chaos engulfing the country. On the other hand, the GCC states want Saddam to leave the scene altogether so that a calmer atmosphere in the Gulf leads to more stability. However, Saddam removal could lead to one of three possible outcomes. Another dictator may take over and the expected stability may never materialize. Secondly, Iraq may become fragmented into three statelets for the Kurds, the Shia and the Sunni, a development that could lead to destruction and more instability in the region. Thirdly, a more democratic regime in Iraq will start the ball rolling in the region towards democracy and internal political reforms.

All of these outcomes are dangerous from the perspective of the political leadership in the Gulf. It is therefore important that a new situation in the region must develop in such a way that internal political openness is becomes a necessity that is inescapable. The ongoing efforts to reform the bilateral relations between the countries of the region are positive and constructive. But a more serious endeavour is required for a lasting peace and stability in the troubled, but vital region of the Gulf.

The internal political crisis in Bahrain is an example of the fragility of the political situation in the region. It cannot be contained by the mere use of force and repression. Financial inducement may help the government to strengthen its position but it cannot defeat the reform process.

The fall of Suharto of Indonesia serves as a reminder that a change in the economic situation could spark the political process in a way that is

beyond any containment. Suharto was not more corrupt than the Prime Minister of Bahrain whose immediate family members enjoy unlimited privileges and dominate the financial economic sector of the country. A serious political reform is the only way to thwart Indonesian type-upheaval.

The West turns a blind eye

The Amir of Bahrain left the country to France and the US on 26 May. Ian Henderson, the British Security Advisor (Head of Intelligence for 31 years until Feb 98) was shown on Bahrain TV escorting the Amir to the plane taking him to France. The Amir starts a visit to France on 27 May where he is secluded to meet the French President. The visit has been planned to pass a message to the West that Bahrain under the present dictatorship is better for the West. The Bahraini government is expected to host a "cultural event" towards the end of this year in France in exchange for silencing the French News Agency AFP. AFP had extensively reported on the abuse of human rights in Bahrain.

The visit comes also after the meeting in Brussels by European Foreign Ministers in which it was agreed that European countries would voluntarily stop supplying arms and supports to countries that violate human rights. Last September the European Parliament issued an historic resolution calling on the European governments to "to refrain from supplying arms or security support to the Government of Bahrain" and requested the European Council to take "initiatives in order to obtain similar restraint at international level until democratic conditions have been restored". The Euro resolution also called upon the "Bahraini authorities to admit internationally respected human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to the country and allow organizations with similar peaceful democratic concerns to operate in Bahrain".

The British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robin Cook, said in Brussels on 26 May "We have agreed common standards for army exports". He also said, "so although we will continue to compete on price and quality, we will not be competing by driving down human rights standards. This is important both for Europe and for those who must otherwise suffer repression from arms exports".

Unfortunately, both the UK and France are supplying arms and training for the National Guard corps that are operating near residential areas and are using the training and equipment

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Turning a blind eye.. Cont. from Page 1

for suppressing the Bahraini nation. Last week, for example, the National Guard established the routine checkpoints on Sitra Bridge and intimidated citizens. The National Guard is a new type of security apparatus deployed against Bahrainis calling for the restoration of parliament. Both French and British governments are defying their own policies.

The commander of the "National Guard", Mohammed bin Isa Al-Khalifa, son of the Amir, visited the United Kingdom on 11 May. The Bahraini opposition believes that the Al-Khalifa emissaries may attempt to say that the National Guard is not for repression. Mercenaries imported from the Syrian Desert (see the *Financial Times* of 28 May 1998) are being trained as a repressive force against the people of Bahrain. On this subject, Lord Avebury asked Her Majesty's Government "For what purpose the Commander of the National Guard Sheikh Mohammed bin Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa visited the UK in the week beginning May 11, and which officials and Minister he saw; and how they propose to monitor the activities of the National Guard, so as to ensure that arms supplied by the United Kingdom, or training given by British military personnel, do not enhance the capacity of the National Guard for internal repression?"

Supporters of the people of Bahrain in France sent a letter to the Bahraini Ambassador in France requesting an urgent meeting with the Amir in Paris to raise with him the concerns of the international community about the abuses of human rights in Bahrain. Mr. Marc Pellas, the Secretary General of the Committee for the Democracy in the Arabian Peninsula explained in the letter dated 27 May the concerns expressed by Amnesty International, Pax Christi, FIDH, Human Rights Watch and other organisations. Mr. Pellas enquired from the Ambassador whether or not the Amir is willing to listen to the demands for releasing political prisoners, ending arbitrary arrests and torture, allowing exiles to return, abrogating the state security law, and reinstating the elected parliament as stated in the Constitution of Bahrain.

The Amir is also expected in the US for an official visit starting on 1 June. Representatives of the Bahraini opposition submitted a letter to the US Administration saying "Unfortunately, the US also has turned a blind eye to all the peaceful calls for respect of the constitution in Bahrain, including the call to reinstate the National Assembly which was dissolved in 1975. Our people in Bahrain have made it very clear for all concerned parties that they continue to advocate democracy, respect of the constitution of 1973 and abide by all its articles". The opposition reiterated that "our demands are moderate and they simply include the respect and implementation of the constitution and restoration of the dissolved National Assembly. We want our people to enjoy the basic freedoms such as electing their members of the legislative power, freedom of expression, association, assembly, and religious practice without discrimination. We want free civil institutions including the right to form and join trade unions. These institutions are prerequisites conditions for a free society and economy, which we believe is in the best interest of the whole world, and particularly the democratic societies in the West".

"State Security Courts" turned into a "production line"

The State Security Court (SSC) arbitrarily sentenced six young Bahrainis following a prolonged period of torture and detention. The six were accused of setting on a fire a religious assembly hall, something that is only practised by the foreign security forces in Bahrain. These forces have ransacked, burnt and destroyed mosques and assembly halls in the past four years without any hesitation. Then, they attacked Jedhafs and arbitrarily arrested youths that had been threatened of reprisals by members of the intelligence department for their constitutional activities. The unjust sentences issued on 27 May were as follows:

1. Hussain Jassim Al-Haddad, 19 years old, 7 years jail sentence
2. Abdul Redha Taher Al-Same'a, 21, 7 years jail
3. Hamad Isa Salman Al-Mawlani, 20, 7 years jail
4. Bashir Naser Matrook, 21, 5 years jail
5. Ahmad Abdulla Ahmad Al-Asfoor, 19, 5 years jail
6. Aqeel Radhi Mansoor Ali Sabba'a, 19, 5 years jail.

The three chambers "State Security Courts" that are presided by members of the Al-Khalifa ruling family and foreign judges are in full swing of operation. A lawyer described the workings of the courts as a "production line" whereby groups of citizens are brought for "quickie" sessions for procession a "routine" administrative procedure of "issuing" sentences.

According to the judges, lives of Bahrainis are cheap enough for them to run their "production line" in full capacity. On Saturday, 23 May, at least seven groups were brought before the three chambers. One of the groups being tried comprises 10 out of 16. Another comprises 19 persons from the small village of Jannossan. Another one involves 6 people including Mr. Abdul Adheem Rajab and Sadiq Abdul Aziz.

The State Security Court (SSC) was formed following the dissolution of parliament in 1975. On June 1976, the Amir issued Decree Law No. 7/1976 forming specific procedures for the SSC. In 1982, the SSC powers were extended via another decree No. 4/1982. In March 1996, the powers of the SSC were further extended to effectively institutionalize the state of emergency imposed on the country. These powers transferred the SSC into an administrative office for "expediting" the issuance of pre-prepared arbitrary sentences. These courts violate both the Constitution of Bahrain and all international conventions. They base their evidences on confessions extracted under duress without the presence of lawyers. They are an insult to human beings. They represent the crudest form of medieval injustice.

The government of Bahrain is encouraged to continue abusing human rights by the double standard policies of the West. While the US and Europe speak for human rights and democracy in other parts of the world, no pressure is brought to bear on countries they consider to be "friends". Bahrainis are suffering in a similar way as the Iraqis suffered. When Saddam Hussain was friendly to the West, it did not matter when he gassed his people with chemical weapons. It only mattered when he became an awkward dictator. The US President will be receiving the Amir of Bahrain on 1 June. Would he say anything about these abuses?

Interior Minister fails to whitewash atrocities

In an interview, the first of its kind, the interior minister Mohammed bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa exposed himself to the world by offering explanations that do not hold water. While The Red Cross confirmed that the number of political detainees last year was more than 1400 and that this year they reached 1500-1800, the interior minister said "This is a false accusation.... Barely a few hundred people were involved and even at the peak of disturbances a little over 1,000 were held". He failed to mention that Bahrain has been living under a state of emergency since 1957, and that this state of emergency was further institutionalized in 1965 *(through the Public Security Order), informally lifted for about 2 years during the National assembly in 1973-75 and re-imposed through the draconian "State Security Law". Interior minister instead said "Bahrain is unique in that it never declared a state of emergency or created a military court for terrorists during the crisis".

He failed to say that members of his family are presiding over State Security Courts that do not allow for appeal and that base all their evidence on confessions extracted from detainees under torture. He failed to recognize the fact that his ruling family has stepped its legitimacy limit by violating the Constitution of Bahrain. However, he did not forget to thank his mercenary "security forces" who "have managed successfully to uproot terrorism". He failed to define terrorism and seemed to be unaware that the people of Bahrain have been the most civilized nation to counter the most atrocious foreign mercenaries who lack affiliation to the land.

The interior minister reaffirmed that his ruling family will continue the militarisation of Bahrain through the consolidation of newly created unconstitutional state-structure that will be headed by torturers who belong to his ruling family. He said, "the Interior Ministry's policy is stable. Its practices during the crisis were carried out strictly in accordance with the law". He failed to say that this law is the unconstitutional State Security Law that caused the dissolution of the parliament.

In the third part of his interview (19 May 1998) with Akhbar Al-Khalij (a government-controlled newspaper), the interior minister confirmed all the allegations made by the opposition about the repressive and backward nature of the regime. He said that the pro-democracy leaders would stay in detention as long as he desired. The Bahraini leaders "will remain in detention as long as the Supreme Court of Appeal sees necessary". The "Supreme Court" is the "State Security Court" that is presided by members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family and staffed by foreign judges imported into Bahrain for abusing the constitutional rights of citizens. The interior minister unashamedly said that all these detentions are made in accordance with the State Security Law that caused the dissolution of the parliament. In the present circumstances, the ruling family has declared its intentions towards Bahrain and the future and the nation. Regardless of all the repressive measures, the Bahraini people will never relinquish their rights to freedom and to living honourably on their land. And for all these holy aims, the civil resistance will continue.

May 1998: Institutionalising an alien culture

1 May: A new prison will shortly be added to the achievements of the Al-Khalifa. This will be named Jaw 4 with a capacity of 1200 people.

1 May: Jane's Intelligence Review of May 1998, published a length article entitled "Slow pace of reform allows Gulf discontent to simmer". About Bahrain, the specialized magazine said, "In Bahrain, the emphasis has been on repression rather than political reform. This is in keeping with the island's state's political culture in which a religious and culturally distinct minority conquered the majority two centuries ago and has ruled since. This policy has, however made life difficult for its friends in the GCC and the West...."

4 May: Government's newspapers said that the torturer "Governor of Manama" Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa will be inaugurating the mechanisms for governing the capital. The torturer will institutionalize repression and will make sure that all functions of civil society are smothered. The newspaper said that the Capital region (containing several surroundtowns and villages) would be divided into 15 areas with an appointed council and appointed "mukhtars". The "mukhtars" (15 individuals appointed by the torturer) will be told to report the names of persons opposing the dictatorship and will be used to smother any public function.

5 May: Sheikh Al-Jamri who had been transferred to the military hospital, is now back in detention. The nation is furious at the authorities that are torturing the pro-democracy leader. "International Pen", Writers in Prison Committee, sent a letter to the Bahraini Prime Minister on 5 May saying that Sheikh Al-Jamri "has now been held for more than two years. Reports indicate that he has recently, despite poor health, been subjected to a series of length interrogations in which he and members of his family were threatened". "His continuing imprisonment ad poor treatment, especially in light of his failing health, is a matter for general dismay and we urge you to order his immediate and unconditional release".

5 May: Fifteen people who had barred last March are believed to have been tortured and brought before an investigating judge. These are Haji Nasser, 50, Asghar Asad Allah, Mustafa Hassan, Hussain Ali, Hassan Berdistani, Abdul Rahem Asiri, Redha Abul Hassan, Mahmoud Ali Al Halwachi, Mahmoud Abdullah Al-Halwachi, Jawad Al-Qatari, Ali Omran, A. Ridha Hameed Al-Mahoozi, Ammar Abdul A'al, Sayed Jaffar Sayed Martadha, Abbas Fraikh.

They were forced to appear before the investigating judge on 5 May. When one of them refused to sign the "confession" he was taken from the room back into the interior ministry's transportation bus to be tortured in front of the rest of the accused by a spanner obtained from the "spare-wheel" tools.

6 May: he President of the "Law Society" in the United Kingdom, Mr. Phillip Sycamore, sent urgent letters to the Bahraini prime minister, interior minister and justice minister stating "The Law Society is deeply concerned by reports concerning Shaikh al-Jamri, the former judge and member of the National Assembly who, with seven others, has been detained without charge or trial since 22 January 1996.... It is reported that he is being denied medicine in

order to coerce him to sign an undertaking that he will not engage in any political activity against the government if released.... We urge that he be released from detention immediately and unconditionally".

7 May: Haj Abdul Hussain Al-Sayegh, 66 years old, was arrested from the main street in Jed Ali and taken to the torture chambers. The family of the elderly person took the medicine for heart conditions to the detention centre, by the torturers refused to allow any medication. The eldest son of Haj Abdul Hussain Al-Sayegh, Yaser (30), had been deported from Bahrain to the UK last year. Following queries from MPSS and human rights organizations about the case of Mr. Yaser Al-Sayegh, the authorities responded by arresting the elderly father.

8 May: Al-Quds said on 8 May that the Bahraini information ministry has banned Mr. Hafedh Al-Shaiekh from writing in the government-controlled newspapers for the past six weeks. This was in response to an article he wrote in an Arab newspaper condemning the militarisation of the education sector. This ban is in continuation of the new tough ban on freedom of expression. Dr. Ali Fakhro (Bahrain's ambasain France) was banned from delivering a lecture in Oruba Club this month. Mr. Mohammed Jalal, the well-known businessman, was also banned last month from sponsoring a "prize" for innovative people in Bahrain. The Bar Society was dissolved last March following the hosting of a lecture last January. The Bar Society filed a case in the court, and the government responded by allocating one of the most unjust judges (Khalifa bin Rashid Al-Khalifa, a member of the ruling family) to preside over the case. The case will be in the courtroom on 13 May.

8 May: More than fifteen thousands people gathered in Daih on 8 May to commemorate the end of Ashora (martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed) amid tight security. The foreign security forces blocked entries and exists to the main towns of Jedhafs, Sanabis and Daih, but the people poured in from all directions forcing their way into the area, raising placards calling for the immediate release of Sheikh Al-Jamri, and vowing never to succumb to the "iron-fist" dictatorship being imposed on the nation. All avenues and streets were also packed by more thousands of on-lookers who came from many parts of the country to raise their voice in a unified and solid block declaring that Bahrain will not enter the 21st century marching backward into medieval absolute misrule. Large balloons carrying the pictures of the detained leaders were released in the air with slogans glorifying the struggle for liberty and human rights. Representatives of towns and villages across the country carried banners signed in the name of their areas declaring their preparedness to defend the nation in the face of dictatorship and vowing for revenge if anything happens to Sheikh Al-Jamri.

9 May: The trial of the ten people (out of the group of 16) was held again on 9 May. The group includes two additional persons who were being tried in absentia. The ten are: Seyyed Mohammed Redha Mortadha, Ali Darwish Ali, Mohammed Abd Ali, Ali Abul Qassim, Ali Salman Isa, Seyyed Fadhil Adnan Shubbar,

Yousif Habib, Jamil Abdul Hussain, Khalil Darwish, Seyyed Saeed Abdulla. The two persons being tried in absentia: Haji Khalil Darwish (Father of two of the accused in the group of 16), and Abdul Fadhl Ahmad Al-Mosawi.

12 May: The foreign forces attacked the religious assembly hall in Jed-Ali and ransacked it content, including the destruction and confiscation of all equipment used for reading Quran and prayers. This followed the release of Haj Abdul Hussain Al-Sayegh, who was arrested as part of collective punishment.

12 May: Al-Ayam newspaper said on 6 May that the ministers of labour of the GCC will meet on 12 May in Bahrain for an "important meeting to adopt a unified position against the new principles of the International Labour Organization, ILO". The ILO general manager and Dr. Jameel Hujailan (GCC secretary general) will attend the meeting. The ILO is examining complaints from Bahraini workers and employees who are deprived of all their rights and are being persecuted for refusing to succumb to the repressive policies of the labour ministry.

15 May, four persons were arrested, tortured and released after two days. They are from Bilad Al Qadim: Sheikh Nasir, 35, Abdul Shahid, 32, Mustafa Ali Abdul Adim, 29, and from Isa Town: Abdula Al Tublani, 23. Four children were arrested last week at a checking point set up at Sitra causeway. The children were taken to Al Nabih Saleh prison where they were tortured and then released according to the policy of arbitrary intimidation. These children were: Hassan Ahmed Hussain, 13, Hassan Yousif Ali Inssan, 14, Abas Jaffar Abdul Ridah, 15, Jabir Ahmed Ali, 16.

A number of houses in Bilad Al Qadim have been ransacked in the past two weeks in a series of dawn raids by the security forces. Among the intruded houses were: Haj Ali Khalaf's house where his three sons (Mahdi, Saeed and Hussain) had been arrested long before the raid and Haj Salman Al Safar's house where his son Ali, 24, was arrested. Also six persons have been rounded up from the village. They are: Majeed Ali Abdula Al Tashani, 24, Isa Al Mudafa, 24, Hassan Abdula Ali Al Madani, 24, where they had been brutally tortured for five days.

16 May: The following people had been freed in mid-May after spending more than three years in detention. These have been found innocent by the courts, but the interior ministry kept them in detention in accordance with the State Security Law. They are Seyyed Adnan Majid Hussain, 30, Saeed Isa Al-Hammar, 26, Abbas Isa Al-Hammar, 30, Mahmood Ibrahim Al-Jamal, 18, Seyyed Hussain Ali Mosa, 20, Abdul Amir Al-Gas, 23, Mohammed Abdulla Al-Haddad, Abbas Al-Ulaiwat, Seyyed Adnan Saeed Al-Setri, 20, Seyyed Aqeel Yehya Al-Qallaf, 23, and Adel Sengais, 30. The latter had been outside the country fearing arrest (while found innocent).

18 May: The citizens in Sanabis, went out on and blocked the main Budaya highway declaring their disgust at the inhumanity of the regime. This is the regime that declares it will continue jailing Bahrainis and will continue to

FT: Bahrain economy suffers as dissent simmers

The Financial Times, 28 May 1998:

The Gulf State (Bahrain) has failed private sector investment as repression and recession feed off each other, writes Robin Allen.

Photo caption: "A Bahraini girl in front of graffiti saying 'parliament' in Arabic"

*((An eerie silence descends on the centre of Bahrain's capital Manama after the sun goes down and office workers leave to go home. Drivers continue to clog the peripheral highways late into the night, but few Bahrainis and a fewer expatriates are in the city's shops.

Two new shopping malls are almost lifeless. In the near-deserted hotels Filipino singers go through the motions of crooning to a handful of businessmen and sailors in civilian clothes from the US naval base.

Away from lights and superficial suburban gentility of Manama, the tension is palpable in the poorer Shia villages.

The occasional presence of police Land Rovers and black-uniformed security forces are reminders of the social unrest in which 40 people, including five police, have died over the past four years.

In the two years since the minority Sunni-dominated government carried out its first execution of a member of the Shia Muslim majority for "terrorist" activities, Bahrain's state security court, set up by the ruling Al-Khalifa family, continue to crack down on the slightest sign of dissent.

Last month the court, whose rulings are not subject to appeal, issued a three-month suspended jail term against five women accused of nothing more than "chanting slogans against the existing political system".

Bahrain is the smallest and least wealthy of the six Gulf monarchies, which own nearly 45 per cent of global oil reserves of natural gas. It is also the most crowded. The southern half of the island 600 square kilometres is a restricted zone. Some 2,000 people per square

kilometre live in the rest, a population density exceeded else where only by Singapore.

Bahrain service-based economy depends on gifts from oil and cash from Saudi Arabia. Bahrain has built up a financial services sector, hosting 180 different financial institutions including 46 offshore banking units (OBUs), which sell or market some 360 mutual funds, as well as oil and gas-based industries. But it has failed, according to businessmen, to entice private sector investment or to diversify beyond oil and aluminium. annual per capita income, according to the World Bank and semi-official Bahraini resources, has fallen from \$10,000 in 1995 to less than \$7,500 (4,491) in 1996, lower than Latvia.

Public dissent, particularly among the Shia majority, has a long history. Bahrain's Al-Khalifa family holds all the important cabinet posts and its nominees head the bureaucracy. But the Shia make up 70 per cent of the island's 350,000 national population, half of whom are under 15.

Advised by Ian Henderson, a reclusive 70b year old former colonial intelligence officer in Kenya, widely thought to have retired but still apparently the eminence grise behind the ruler Sheikh Isa Bin Salman, the state security forces have "slammed the lid down" on physical displays of unrest. According to senior western diplomats, between 1,000 and 2,000 are in jail. Businessmen, academics and lawyers put the figure at more than 5,000.

The crackdown has for the time being pushed the unrest off the streets. But the government's failure to tackle unemployment, more than 30 per cent among the Shia, to curb state corruption, to get the economy moving, or to give more meaningful role to the so called "consultative council" has resulted in spreading disaffection, including Sunni Lawyers and academics as well as businessmen, who continue to push for economic and social reform.

In a US embassy handout three paragraphs

same day.

On 24 May, the residents of Dair protested by blocking the entrance to their area.

On 29 May, at around 8.00 pm, the people of Sanabis joined their fellow citizens in Dair and Jadhafs marching through the streets and on the main Budaya Highway denouncing the atrocities of the security forces and defying the dictators who had stated in government's press that the popular movement is over.

The citizens chanted their constitutional slogans and vowed to continue their legitimate struggle until the attainment of their basic rights for freedom and liberty. Loud sounds of exploding gas-cylinders were heard across many parts of the country. In Sitra, loud explosions were heard and two districts were plunged into darkness on 29 May.

29 May: The people of Sanabis were commemorating the first anniversary of the martyrdom of Abdul Zahra Ibrahim Abdulla, 27 years old, who had been beaten by the security forces that attacked the residents of Sanabis on 1 June 1997. Mr. Abdulla died on 6 June 1997. Posters carrying pictures of the martyr with banners carrying constitutional slogans were displayed on the main electricity poles alongside the main highways.

are devoted to warning investors of "corruption, bribery and lack of transparency".

One US analysis, a regular investor, remarked that in Bahrain substantial revenues from oil sales were unaccounted for. In Bahrain's 1998 budget there are no references to revenue estimates from any of the country principle state-owned industries. Officials refuse to comment on these and other criticisms. Local publications are censored.

Repression has its price. Many in the private sector business community say the economy is flat and repression has made it worse. Repression and recession feed off each other.

For more than two years since the last outbreak of violence in December 1994, the government blamed Iran for fermenting unrest. More recently it has blamed the European Union, and Britain in particular, for allowing the opposition to operate from London and for leading international criticism of the government abuse of human rights. One member of the Bahrain Bar Association said: "we want the recall of the parliament (dissolved in 1975), a limit to state corruption, release of detainees and the right of exiles to return home."

Critics of the government say one sinister development is the building by the ruling family of a cordon sanitaire around itself by giving nationality to between 8,000 and 10,000 Sunni families from Jordan, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen, whose men, working in the security services, would be loyal to the Al-Khalifa family should unrest break out again on a scale which can no longer be contained.

"This is a war of attrition," said one lawyer. "The government can continue to own the main sector of economic activity and clamping down on unrest, but unless it creates jobs and gets the economy moving, pressures from a rising population, from the lack of self-sustaining private sector investment, and increased unemployment will force their own changes".)

May 1998: Institutionalising ...

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build prisons instead of hospitals.

On 19 May, around 6.00 am, an explosion shocked the Hawar Islands, where military garrisons are on full alert amid growing concern that the dispute with Qatar might be escalated. It is thought that the explosion might have caused the destruction of some ammunition and weapons depot.

On 20 and 21 May, four people were arrested in dawn raids against Kharijiya (Sitra). They were Seyed Majeed Seyed Hassan Seyed Majid, 29, Hani Hassan Awal (a University Student), Mohammed Abas Hubail (University Student), Ali Abas Habail. It is worth mentioning that the father of Mohammed and Ali is himself in detention. On 25 May, the following were arrested: Nasir Al Sari, 21, from Wadian (Sitra), Abdulla Isa Ali, 27, from Al Jazira, Seyed Falah Seyed Hashim, 22, from Iskan Aa'li (was brutally tortured before his release on the same day).

On 23 May, a 16-year-old, Ridha Abdulla Al Ashiri (brother of the Martyr Hussain Al Ashiri) was arrested at 1.00 am (after midnight) from his house in Dair. Another teenager, Hussain Ahmed Al Walad, 19, was also arrested on the

Influencing change in Bahrain

Of all those who have interests in this troubled island, three powers will always influence change in Bahrain. These are the neighbouring state (Saudi Arabia), a former controlling power (United Kingdom) and a strategic ally (the United States).

Over the past three years these three powers have approached Bahrain with discretion and apprehension keeping a microscopic eye on the constitutional upheaval that swept across the island. Silence has loomed in the air and a pause for thought was necessary. What would be the reaction to such an uprising? Should it be crushed? Should it be put down? How about supporting the regime financially and with experts or when necessary armed intervention?

The demands are simple and constitutional. And what's more is that the international human rights organisations have stepped in with their full weight on the side of the island's people. The influential powers have been left with one thing to account for: Whether or not they should support the legitimate demands of the people?

The US and the UK support human rights. But not in Bahrain, they seem to dither and are unwilling to sacrifice a small part of their economic interests. This is unethical