

# BAHRAIN

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

**Bahraini opposition is unwavering in its campaign for civil rights**

## New Year with New Vision

As the world celebrated the coming of a new year, the people of the Gulf had their own worries which were exacerbated by several factors. The crisis in Iraq continued to be a matter of grave concern especially as the latest attacks by the American and British forces unfolded. The 19th summit of the Gulf rulers which was held in Abu Dhabi did nothing to dispel the fears of the people as they faced a bleak future. The dwindling oil revenues added salt to the already grave wounds and the coming of a new year was viewed with gloom and despair. More serious is the gradual diminishing of civil liberties and the ascendance of the police state in the region, the most obvious example is the situation in Bahrain.

Some quarters in the region may have felt indifferent to the bombardment of Iraq at the onset of the holy month of Ramadhan, but the majority was not so easy about the ongoing saga. The scenes of devastation covering the TV screens as events unfolded inside Iraq could not have come at a worse moment of history. Saddam Hussain is, undoubtedly, a villain, but other regimes in the region are only marginally less barbaric in their attitude to the value of the human souls. The campaign to attack Iraq is feared by the people in the region as it could be preparing the ground for a future action against other states in the Middle East, thus heralding a new phase in politics. The people also view the double standards when dealing with, say, Israel, while attacking other states that are not on good terms with the US.

It could be said with a degree of confidence that the absence of a modern political regime in the countries of the region is an important factor in the ongoing crisis. Despite the western call for human rights and democracy, the general feeling is that the US, in particular, prefers to deal with dictatorship. It is only when these dictators threaten the US vital interests that attitude changes, but by then things are usually too difficult to change.

The GCC summit in Abu Dhabi was convened at a time of heightened tension in the region, and the oil crisis forced the rulers to concede, for the first time, that the rentier state may have gone forever. It is the oil money that has hitherto enabled dictatorships to flourish and led to a unique situation unparalleled in any other place of the world. They talked about a unified tariff and gave a promise that within a year it should

be adopted. But the rulers of the six GCC countries proved incapable of sorting out the mess created by the huge glut in the oil market. Most of them were reluctant to cut their level of production and the oil prices continued to fall after the summit. They have also failed to address the most sensitive of issues relating to the internal political situation. Despite the movement of the world towards more democracy, pluralism and respect of human rights, the Gulf rulers have never acknowledged that their system of government is obsolete. On the contrary, most of them still maintain that notions of democracy are alien to their culture and are therefore unwelcome.

The political activists in the region, dispute this, fundamentally argue that political openness is the way towards a more prosperous and stable situation. The Bahraini opposition had hoped that the continuing crisis in the country would be addressed seriously. In fact, it has written letters to the leaders of the countries that participated in the summit urging them to take up the issue seriously, and pleaded with them to take an active role in containing the situation. It must be said that their response was not encouraging. They may have reprimanded the Bahraini officials in the bilateral meetings, for their stubbornness and lack of understanding of the grievances of people, but none of them was courageous enough to come forward and take up the challenge of the Bahraini crisis.

However, the Bahraini people and opposition have never relied on anyone else to do the job of changing the situation for them. They are determined to pursue a peaceful approach in their struggle through their campaign of civil resistance. They have received encouraging support from freedom-loving people including international human rights bodies and media institutions. Members of British Parliament and the European Parliament have also lent their support to the people of Bahrain. They have remained faithful to their principles and are held in high esteem.

The Bahraini opposition will always seek ways for alleviating the situation, whenever the opportunity arises for a serious dialogue. In the past two months, the government has been sending twisted and vague messages. The interior ministry is believed to be behind an anonymous statement issued on 13 October 1998 that spoke about an "initiative" by the justice minister to "invite" Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi Shams-ul-Din, the head of the Shia Islamic Council in Lebanon, to visit Bahrain. Again, the same message was reported in Al-Hayat newspaper on 13 November, whose reporter in Bahrain confirmed that the justice minister has invited Sheikh Shams-ul-Din to visit Bahrain. Several detainees who had been held without charges were released in December, while at the same time

several others had been interned.

Several factors are influencing the situation. Between 1 to 19 March 1999, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination will be discussing Bahrain's compliance with the treaty (which Bahrain signed in 1990). The government of Bahrain is pursuing flagrant racist policies that are implemented in all walks of life in Bahrain. These policies and practices are now being investigated. Between March and April 1999, the UN Commission on Human Rights will meet and, though Bahrain may not be tabled for discussion as part of the UN agenda, statements by NGOs will be presented reminding the international community of its duties towards the state of human rights in Bahrain. Also, it is expected that in the spring of 1999, experts from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention will visit Bahrain as demanded by the UN Sub-commission in August 1998 and promised by the Bahrain government. The visit will investigate the cases of political detention in Bahrain and will be seeking to identify areas of injustice. In August 99, the UN Human Right Sub-Commission's experts will examine whether the government of Bahrain has delivered on its promises to allow the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to visit the country and to drop the reservations on Article 20 of Convention Against Torture (ratified in February 1998).

The Bahraini opposition welcomes any improvement in the political situation. The pro-democracy movement is endeavouring to achieve several objectives leading to the reinstatement of civil liberties as specified in the Bahraini Constitution. It has been encouraged by the recent announcement by the Amir of Qatar that he would form a permanent constitution with articles stipulating the formation of an elected parliament in which men and women will take part.

The opposition will press the government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It will push for repeated visits to Bahrain by the UN working groups and other human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. It will continue to campaign for the release of all political detainees and prisoners, the abrogation of the unconstitutional State Security Law and Court and will spare no effort in exposing the atrocities of the security forces. The people of Bahrain are increasing their experiences for resisting tyranny, and the blood of their martyrs will not go in vain.

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# December 1998: Fourth Anniversary of the uprising ...

1 December: The beginning of December 1998 brought with it news of the mismanagement of the country's resources. The Bahraini Finance and National Economy Minister, Ibrahim Abdulkarim announced on 1 December that the budget for the years 1999 and 2000 would be around BD1.45 Million (\$3.9bn) which amounts to \$1.9 bn a year. According to the official figures issued by the Ministry of Finance and National Economy for the 1998 budget, the total recurrent expenditure was around \$1.5bn. That is about 80% of the annual budget. The combined expenditure of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior amounts to 35% (19% and 16% respectively) of the recurrent expenditure. However, the total expenditure on Education, Health and Power amounted to 30% (14%, 10% and 6% respectively) of the recurrent expenditure. These astonishing figures clearly outlines the policy of the Al Khalifa regime of utilising the country's resources to suppress the Bahraini society.

1 December: Several British lobbyists and MPs who had visited Bahrain recently were hosted at Café Royale, Piccadilly Central London. The former head of Bahrain Society, Sir Harold Walker, was given an expensive "gift" from the crown prince of Bahrain. Michael Rice has been appointed to head the society, whose patron is Abdul Aziz Al-Khalifa. Members of the society were made to listen to a talk by Ali Matar who had been employed by the Bahraini prime minister to work in the Shura Council.

2 December: Bahrain's interior minister, Mohammed bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa made a one-day visit to Saudi Arabia. Radio Riyadh said that the purpose of the visit is related to "security matters" and that the delegation accompanying the interior minister met with the head of Saudi intelligence Saleh Al-Khuseifan. It is important to note that the Saudis were annoyed by the way their soccer fans had been badly beaten on 8 November. It is believed that the Bahraini delegation will be apologising formally for beating the fans. Sky Sports, DSF, Dubai and other TV channels have managed to secure a copy of a film that documents the savage beating inflicted on the Saudis.

An important point was stated when mentioning the name of Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, who the government of Bahrain stated that he was to replace Ian Henderson last February. Radio Riyadh referred to him as "Deputy of the Intelligence Director, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa". This confirms what the opposition has been saying that Ian Henderson and his long-time executive deputy, Thomas Bryan, are the ones running the show in Bahrain.

3 December: The security forces ransacked a number of houses in Bilad Al Qadim Village and arrested scores of youths, including: Aqeel Al Muredi, 30, Kamil Mirza Abdul Hussain, 20, Jameel Hassan Abdul Hussain, 19, Mohammed Ahmed Al Sa'r, 19.

3 December: The aggressors ransacked the house of Dhiya Al Ghurbal in their attempt to arrest him. The house was brought to ruin and his family were terrified. Although he was not present during the raid, members of his family were threatened and abused. The raiders told them that the security forces would attack the

house the following day and that Mr Al Ghurbal "better be there or you will all get punished".

4 December: Security forces broke again into Mr. Al Ghurbal's house and snatched his elderly father, 55, and pointed a gun to his head at the entrance of the house. The raiders told the father that "if you do not tell us the whereabouts of your son, your head is going to be blown off". He told them that he had no knowledge of the whereabouts of his son. The father was then taken hostage in one of the torture centres and was subjected to brutal torture and intimidation. He was then released later on the same day. The father was told that his wife and daughter would be next if he did not hand in his son.

4 December: The Prime Minister issued a decree to silence loud-speakers in mosques and assembly halls while people perform their daily rituals. The alibi given for the aggressive order was "peoples' comfort" through the forced stoppage of loud speakers people use during worship periods.

7 December: Another early morning attack on Daih was conducted by the security forces, attacking a number of houses in the area, bringing to ruin its contents, intimidating and arresting their inhabitants. One of the attacked houses was of Saleh Ibrahim Al Sheikh. Mr Al Sheikh whose brother (Saeed) already in detention, was arrested and subjected to torture in one of the torture centres. His brother was brought and tortured before him to force Mr. Al Sheikh to sign false confessions of "inciting his brother against the government". He declined to succumb and was released few days later.

7 December: One of the Bahraini lawyers, Mr. Abdulla Hashim, appeared on Al-Jazeera Satellite TV to present his views as part of a panel discussing the GCC Summit. Upon his return, the security forces never stopped harassing him.

8 December: Abdulla Al-Abbasi (Bahraini journalist) wrote an article in Al-Raya of Qatar. He praised the Qatari initiative of introducing more democratic reforms in the State of Qatar. He also criticised a statement usually repeated by some people who attempt to argue that the Arab people are not capable of practising democracy. Mr. Al Abbasi said that the parliament is the conscience of the people and affirmed that the majority of the people wanted to speak out and express their views rather than to overthrow the government (as claimed by the ruling Al-Khalifa family of Bahrain).

9 December: Security forces attacked Samahij in a dawn raid. They intruded houses, destroyed their contents, intimidated, beaten and arrested their residents. Some of those arrested included: Hassan Safwan, 20 (He was detained before for one year and a half without trial), Sadiq Abdul Majeed, 19 (His second arrest), Ali Al Zaini, 23. After hours of torture, the youths were brought back to the town and video taped in front of the pro-democracy slogans on the neighborhood walls.

9 December: Security forces broke into, besieged and set checkpoints at the entrance of the Bahrain Training Institute. It was reported that the reason for the attack on the Institute had been the discovery of the some pamphlets calling for reforms and democracy.

10 December: The arrest and torture of people continued to take place as the UN Secretary General visits the region. The following persons were arrested recently: from Dair Rida Al Walid, 29, Abdula Al Walid, 27, Jassim Al Walid, 19, Hussain Al Walid, 18, Abdula Jaffar Jassim, 20, Mohammed Jaffar Jassim, 19 (was arrested once before). Four of the arrested were released after savage sessions of torture. The other 2 persons: Jassim and Mohammed are still suffering in detention.

11 December: Dr. Majeed Alawi of the Bahrain Freedom Movement participated in a programme broadcast by the Al Jazeera satellite channel, where he discussed the implications of the indictment of the Chilean dictator Mr. Pinochet in London for crimes involving human rights abuses. Mr Ian Henderson and Mr Thomas Bryan are amongst several British officers implicated in human rights in Bahrain. Human rights organisations are calling for the bringing to justice of these torturers.

12 December: Three mosques in Duraz were vandalised by the security forces. The mosques were Al Sadiq Grand Mosque, Al Ghufuran Mosque and Sheikh Hassan Mosques.

12 December: Security forces attacked three mosques in Bilad al-Qadim and ransacked their contents. Copies of Quran, books and other items were smashed in Al-Ammar Mosuqe, Al-Ramlah Mosque and Seyed Yousif Mosque. The attacking of mosques is a routine exercise conducted by the regime as part of its collective punishment and racial discrimination policies adopted.

12 December: The unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced four youths to prison for periods up to 5 years after a summary trial that was held in camera. The sentenced persons were all from Samahij: Shawqi Yousif Ahmed Kharfush, 19 years old, 5 years imprisonment; Haytham Abdula Khalil Ibrahim, 18 years old, 3 years imprisonment; Maitham Yousif Ali Ibrahim, 17 years old, 3 years imprisonment, Hussain Mohammed Ismail Al Hadad, 17 years old, 3 years imprisonment; Ali Hassan Kharfush, 19 years old, 3 years imprisonment.

12 December: Security forces attacked the peaceful residents of Shakhora and committed horrific atrocities. The vicious attack started at midnight, when the security forces smashed their way into the houses and snatched people from their bedrooms. The following people were amongst those attacked, intimidated in front of their families, some of them tortured on the spot, and then taken away to torture centres for further ill-treatment: Abdul Nabi Mahdi Al-Hujairi, 31, Seyed Sharaf Falah Shubbar, 18, Seyed Khalil Majid Shubbar, 19 (a handicapped person), Fadhil Mohammed Salamm, 19, and his brother Reyadh Mohammed Salamm, 18.

13 December: The residents of Markh were attacked in the evening, and the following citizens were taken away for further torturing: Seyed Habib Ali Yousif, 17, Seyed Jalal Abdul Amir, 16, Seyed Ali Ahmad, 16.

13 December: Security forces arrested shop owner in Duraz area and accused him of speaking to "foreign journalists". The person was taken to one of the torture centres for a few hours and then released after brutal tortur

# .. mixed with more attacks on people

Lately, a number of British journalists have visited Bahrain and met ordinary people and toured the areas of uprising where they witnessed the extent of the regime's atrocities on the Bahraini people.

13 December: Karzakan was targeted by these forces and several children were taken away for torturing: Jaffer Hassan Mulla Ali, 13, Ahmad Mulla Hussain Al-Fardan, 13, Ali Mulla Hussain Al-Fardan (brother of the latter), 20, Qassim Mohammed Abdul Karim, 17, Ammar Mohammed, 13 (arrested on 15 December). Aqeel Ali, 17, was detained from his parent's house in Tobli on 20 December.

14 December: Mahdi Saleh Abdul Karim, 24, from Nuaim, was re-detained last week. He had just been released from a 28-month detention. Following his re-detention, he was then taken to the notorious State Security Court, where an Al-Khalifa "judge" sentenced him to 2-year jail sentence on this date, despite the fact that he had spent more than 2 years without any charges or sentences.

19 December: Under an iron curtain, the unconstitutional State Security Courts sentenced several people, one of them to a record long term. Mohammed Redha Al-Sayyed Ali, 27, who on 14 November had been sentenced to life imprisonment, was again brought before the security court and had his sentence increased by another 15 years, thus making it a 40-year combined sentence. Another person, Farhad Khorshid, 30, was sentenced to 10 years in jail. Mohammed Abd Ali Jassim was given 15-year jail sentence adding to an earlier sentence of 10 years, hence a total of 25 years.

Several others were also sentenced. Mohsen Ibrahim Al-Shaikh, Seyed Saeed Al-Majed, a person by the name of Abdulla, and another person, all of whom had spent more than two years in jail and were released a short time ago after paying BD 500 (\$1335) each, were brought before the said court and sentenced to 2 years imprisonment and payment of BD 500 fine (each). However, they were all taken back to jail despite having spent more than the specified term. The court session, held in camera, was processed under a strict news-blackout.

15 December: Prisoners of cell 8 in the Dry-Dock prison went on hunger strike last week. They demanded their immediate release since they had been in detention for over three years without charge. The persons went on strike included: Yahya Al Haiki, 18, Sitra, Mohammed Ahmed Abas, 20, Fadiil Ali Ashur, 22, Muslim Ali Ashur, 17, Jaffer Ali Salim, 18, Ebrahim Ali Hassan, 20.

16 December: Arrest and torture and vandalism of peoples' properties continue while the regime prepares to celebrate the anniversary of the Amir's enthronement day. This day re-named by the Bahraini people as the Martyrs Day in commemoration of the start of shooting of a demonstration in 1994 when the first two people (Hani Khamis and Hani Al Wasti) were shot by the security forces. Amongst those arrested recently were Habib Ali Habib Sarhan, 15, Mohanmed Jaffer Ali Ebrahim, 14, both from Ikir. Hassan Safwan, 20, Sadiq Abdul Majeed, 19, Ali Al Zaini, 23, all from Samahuj.

16 December: Continuing their attacks against the population, the foreign-staffed se-

curity forces attacked Malkeyya and Karzakkan and arrested scores of people in random. Amongst the children snatched from their families in Malkeyya were Seyed Hashim Kadhim Al-Alawi, 15, Ahsan Abdul Redha Hassan, 14, Fadhil Mansoor Abbas, 14, Atef Isa, 14 and Abdul Jaiil Abdul Amir Helal, 15. The children were beaten in public before transporting them to one of the torture centres. It is worth noting that the car (Toyota-Super) used by the security forces carried a Kuwaiti registration plate.

Fadhel Abbas, 16 year old, was walking with his father near Karzakkan marketplace on 16 December. A police car stopped by them, pulled the young boy towards their car and started beating him in front of his father. Next, they order him to sweep one of the streets while his father was kept watching. The police in the car were not Bahrainis and are thought to be some of those imported by the Al-Khalifa ruling family from the Syrian desert for committing such atrocities.

16 December: Several areas were attacked in the past few days. The following persons from Ma'amir were detained: Hussain Ahmad Abdulla Slail, 24, Shaker Abdul Hasan, Mohammed al-Abbas, 21, and Hani Hasan Saeed Al-Abbas, 22.

16 December: The Bahraini opposition in London picketed in front of the Dorchester Hotel in London to voice their protest against the human rights violations in Bahrain.

17 December: The uprising areas in Bahrain turned the lights off in a peaceful civil resistance in commemoration of the Martyrs Day in the evening. Four years ago, the security forces started shooting down demonstrators killing citizens extra-judicially. The security forces were seen rushing into the areas and set check points at their entrances.

17 December: The following children were arrested in Daih: Hassan Abdulla Fakhar, 14, Maitham Abdul Shaheed, 14, Hassan Jasim Fakhar, 14, Hussain Abd Ali Hasan, 14, and Maitham, 14. The five children re-appeared from their detention in Al-Khamis police headquarters on 23 December. The five exhausted children were forced to depict acts of arson while several security men were filming them. The five, Hassan Abdullah Fakhar, 14, Maytham Abdul Shaheed, 14, Hassan Jassem Fakhar, 14, and Hussain Abd Ali Hassan, 14, were very exhausted and evidently tortured. One of them kept crying and calling for help.

18 December: The residents of Muharraq attempted to demonstrate against the bombing of Iraq after Friday prayer. However, the security forces encircled the area and prevented the demonstration. Slogans in other mosques were also raised demanding an end to the bombing campaign against Iraq. On Saturday evening, 19 December, one of Bahrain TV news broadcaster wept and cried at the time of reading news about bombing Iraq.

18 December: In Daih, the security forces stormed the house of Jaffer Al-Khal and arrested. The citizen was tortured from 12.30 am to 2.30 am in the morning before his release. Seyed Jawad Abdulla Sharaf, 15, was arrested in a dawn raid on his parent's house at 2.00 am on 20 December. Nothing is known about the child.

18 December: The International Secretariat of OMCT requested intervention regarding the situation in Bahrain and expressed its concern for the physical and psychological integrity of at least 93 minors and 209 others arrested in further waves of arrests during the last five months. OMCT called on the Bahraini regime to take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the children held in detention and order their immediate release.

21 December: Reuters reported that the "U.S. Embassy in Bahrain was briefly evacuated after a hoax bomb threat from an unidentified caller, an embassy spokesman said Monday." "Yes, there was a bomb threat yesterday (Sunday). A secretary ... received a telephone call saying there was a bomb at the embassy," the spokesman told Reuters. "People walked out for about 30 minutes. Someone came in here and checked out the building. Nothing was found."

On the other hand, Al-Hayat newspaper reported on 21 December that a caller with a Gulf-accent telephoned the offices of the newspapers on Sunday to say that American interests in Bahrain will be targeted on Monday mid-day.

21 December: Ali Abdulla Al-Motawwa, 20, from Arad was detained. On the same day, the security forces attacked the house of the following persons in Muqsha'a and detained them: Isa Helal Abdulla, 30, Abdulla Mohammed Ahmad, 38. The latter two were released two months ago after spending more than three years detention.

Falah Al-Falahi, 24, had been detained and tortured by the security forces in 1996. Upon his release in late 1997 he went on to earn a living by opening a shop in Iskan-Aali. Early in December, a group of intelligence officers were waiting for him as he opened his shop in the morning. The officers raided his shop and dragged him for a 2-day torture session. He was told that he is not allowed to earn any living and his shop must remain closed.

23 December: The government's attempt to stain the image of the lawyer Abdulla Hassim has failed miserably. Mr. Hashim was detained for 48 hours and had been interrogated by the officer Mohammed Jassim Al-Thawadi. No case could be brought against Mr. Hashim, who on December, appeared on the Al-Jazeera Satellite TV to discuss the GCC summit. On 23 December, about a hundred employees and workers who had been unjustly dismissed from the jobs in Balexco published an advert in Akhb Al-Khalij newspaper expressing their deep respect and appreciation of all Mr. Hashim efforts in defending their rights. The advert reflected the mood in the nation and the disgust felt regarding the behaviour of the regime towards Mr. Hashim.

Bahrain continues to be affected by the policies of the irresponsible government. A result, more businesses are leaving the country. International Financial Services and Dig closed their offices in Bahrain, while Citibank Manhattan Bank (Bahrain Branch) decided to minimise its operation in Bahrain as a first towards the closure of their offices. Part of the plan is to retain a small office as a representative one with no banking transactions.

## Press Conference on Bahrain:

# Choosing between democracy and chaos

A press conference was organised in the British Parliament on 16 December to commemorate the fourth anniversary (start of the 5th year) of Bahrain uprising. The conference was hosted by Lord Avebury, the Vice Chair of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group with participation from the Bahraini opposition. The conference assessed the situation in Bahrain in the light of recent events and the insistence of the Bahraini government on the use of iron-fist policy against the pro-democracy movement.

Lord Avebury said "We are here to talk about the choice confronting the ruling family in Bahrain. The choice between democracy and chaos. We also commemorate the victims of the last four years, since the great petition and the refusal by the authorities to discuss its demands for a return to the 1973 Constitution and the Parliament. Dozens of people have been killed on the streets, or tortured to death in prisons and detention centres over those tragic years, or executed following trials before the infamous State Security Court.

Yet the demands which are resented so implacably by the ruling family are extremely modest and ought to be fully supported by this (British) government, which claims to be promoting the values of human rights and democracy that we demand for ourselves.

For the first time, this year, Derek Fatchett (the Foreign Office Minister), has said that the authorities in Bahrain should enter into discussion with the leaders of the Committee for Popular Petition, and this is a slight advance on their predecessors who talked about "dialogue" but never said who should be involved.

What we need now is for the Foreign Office to be specific in their approach to human rights in Bahrain as they are in relation to other countries. For instance, there should be a request for our embassy to be allowed to visit Sheikh Al-Jamri who will reach the third anniversary of his detention on 20 January without trial or charges. Sheikh Al-Jamri surely qualifies for some moral support, particularly when you consider the despicable way he was ill-treated when he refused to sign a confession. He was intensively interrogated and roughly treated physically for weeks in April as well as recently. He was then brought before an investigating judge who called on him to sign a prepared statement confessing that he ordered arson and sabotage, and acted on behalf of a foreign power. Sheikh Al-Jamri refused to give in. He is now 60, and has continuing medical problem for which it is feared he is not getting proper treatment."

Lord Avebury also covered the cases of the Bahraini Lawyers Society and the torturing-to-death of Nooh Al-Nooh last July. The Lawyers Society was dissolved last February when it organised a seminar during which a pro-democracy figure, Dr. Monira Fakhro, assessed the situation in the country. The banning of the Lawyers Society is indicative of the nature of the regime that can not tolerate any margin for freedom of expression. Lord Avebury also called on the Bahraini authorities to come clean regarding the torturing-to-death of Nooh Al-Nooh and to bring the perpetrators to justice

Mr. Abdul Hadi Al-Khawaja of the Bahrain Human Rights Organisation stated "since the eruption of the unrest in December 1994, thousands of citizens including women and children have been arrested. According to the US department of State Human Rights Country Report of 1995, the number estimated was 2,700 detainees. The International Committee of the Red Cross stated in its annual reports for 1997 that its regional delegation carried out 33 visit to 23 places of detention and saw 2,111 detainees, while the Financial Times of 28 May 1998, said that local businessmen, academics and Lawyers put the figure at more than 5,000. Amnesty International said in its annual report of 1998 that "there were continuing reports of systematic torture and ill-treatment of detainees arrested in connection with the political unrest".

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the question of torture stated in his report of 1997 that he "had continue to receive information indicating that most persons arrested for political reasons in Bahrain were held incommunicado, a condition of detention conducive to torture." He outlined that there were 46 persons who "lost their lives in the last four years in connection with the going unrest". He continued that "since the beginning of 1995, more than 400 detainees were tried before the State Security Court and received sentences varied between few months to life imprisonment and death penalty."

As stated in the 1998 Freedom in the World report issued by the US based Freedom House: Bahrainis cannot change their government democratically. Political parties are prohibited, and all opposition leaders are currently imprisoned or exiled. The Interior Ministry maintains control over most activities through pervasive informant networks. The Bahraini government should guarantee a long term stability and peace, by restoring democracy and the rule of law, by amending all the laws and measures that violate fundamental rights, by halting all practices violating human rights, and by redressing all the victims of human rights violations, and identify those responsible and bring them to justice."

Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri of the Bahrain Freedom Movement reflected on the recent budgetary figures announced by the Bahraini government. "Government expenditure reserves 35% for defence and security, while only 30% for health, education and electricity. This is a government that plunders national wealth on importing tens of thousands of Bedouins from Syria and Jordan, on nepotism and on sleaze. The government has recently imported more Egyptian judges for increasing the capacity of the State Security Court and has announced harsher arbitrary laws against the population.

It has been repeatedly said that one of the reasons for the continuation of dictatorship in our region is the fact that the great power of the day has allied itself to certain types of regimes for guaranteeing free passage to India (in the case of Great Britain in the past), or for guaranteeing free flow of oil (in the case of the present US-led hegemonic presence). What goes inside the boundaries of the states has not been an important point for the dominating powers. It is

this type of alliance which is fostering dictatorship in the region.

In the case of Bahrain, the ruling family had conceded to popular demands between 1971-75 because of the various external factors in those days. As soon as those factors relaxed, the ruling family returned the country to the type of rule that existed in Bahrain prior to 1923. The State of Bahrain is considered by the ruling family as a private "Estate of Bahrain", and hence any mention of democracy or accountability threatens this conception.

The dwindling oil resources and the instability of the region might bring some changes in the future. However, a gloomy outlook prevails. This is driven by the nature and attitude of the regime which has yet to recognise the presence of citizens with full political rights in their homeland.

Recently, Al-Hayat newspaper published a back-door governmental announcement about an invitation for Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi Shams Al-Din (the President of the Shia Islamic Council in Lebanon) to visit Bahrain. Two days ago, a person from the Shia community was summoned by the Ministry of Interior and then asked to visit Sheikh Shams Al-Din with a twisted message. The opposition welcomes any attempt to open up serious dialogue for a peaceful political solution. However, the opposition remains skeptical, as the talk of the government remains to be concentrated on how to continue running Bahrain unconstitutionally and by depending on the use of sheer force to repress the nation."

## Press Reports on Bahrain

An important article was published on 13 December in the London-based newspaper, The Sunday Times. The article (on page 10) revealed intimate details on the sleaze the Bahraini regime has embarked upon to uphold and bolster its rapidly crumbling image in the British Parliament. The endeavors of the regime in the House of Commons were said to be mentored and by MP Ken Purchase, Parliamentary Private Secretary (PPS) to the British Foreign Secretary. The newspaper said that many in the All Party Bahrain Group were "surprised to receive the gift of a watch, said to be £2,000." It outlined how Mr. Purchase happily accepted the "gift" he received from the Amir of Bahrain whereas three other MPs have either returned the gifts or given them to charity.

Labour MP Claire Ward has returned hers to the British Foreign Office. "Purchase apparently had no such qualms. Handing out the watches at the House of Commons two months ago, he told MP's not to worry. It was the Emir's way of showing his thanks.

Similarly, "The Independent" newspaper published two articles on 7 December 98. The first article titled "Gulf lobbyist and Cook aide runs MP's group" was on the front page of the Independent. The second article titled "Britain's cosy relations with torture state" was on Page 9. Both revealed more information.

**Note: The 2nd part of "State and Civil Society in Bahrain" will be published in future issues.**