

BAHRAIN

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

Mounting pressure on the third anniversary of the arrest of Sheikh Al Jamri

Scoring own goal

The failure of the Bahraini government to allow international human rights organisations into the country has become one of the major complaints expressed by friendly governments against the dictatorship in that country. Over the past years many promises were given by the Al Khalifa and their PR agents to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others to allow their representatives into the country, but none has managed to make his/her way into Bahrain.

It is unlikely that any will be able to do so in the near future, especially as the popular uprising (Intifada) continues. With it continues the policies of repression, especially arbitrary arrests, torture, collective punishment and forcible exile. When three families attempted to return to their country in December and January they were turned back. Rarely, if any, such cases happen anywhere in the world. But with the unique tribal system of government in place, the government's decision to deport its own citizens is not totally out of the picture. Whether this policy will succeed in containing the unrest is unclear. What is clear, however, is the fact that with the passage of time, the dictatorial regime becomes more throttled, and its persistent refusal to listened calls for reform will eventually lead to its collapse.

One of the basic demands of the opposition is the repeal of the notorious State Security Law (SSL) and the State Security Court (SSC). Both have become symbols of the country's tools of repression which have sent thousands of innocent citizens into torture chambers with a large loss of life. But these two terror tools are themselves violated by officials of the regime on a wide scale. Many people sentenced by the SSC were jailed for longer periods, and those who were acquitted by this unjust court were often kept behind bars without explanation.

The authorities have failed to heed international calls for the overhaul of the SSC, and are adamant to pursue the Bahraini population by their weapons of repression exploiting the SSC to the most. At the same time the SSL has also been violated in the past. Prisoners were often held for periods exceeding the three-years limit stipulated by the 1974 SSL which empowers the minister of the interior to order the administrative detention of political suspects for up to three years without charge or trial. This draconian law has been condemned by every human rights organisations and is considered one of the most barbaric legislation in the world. Sheikh Al Jamri, the former judge and Member of Parliament, has been in detention since 21st January 1996, and has finished

his three year period without being either charged or released. Human rights organisations have issued strong statements condemning the Al Khalifa government for failing to honour their own repressive laws. The prime minister has, however, remained defiant and insensitive to world's opinion.

Under such regime it is difficult to see how stability and security of the country may be achieved. The notion of security seems a far-fetched commodity that is not readily available when the rule of law is not upheld. The opposition has remained faithful to its causes and committed to the ideals of the people of Bahrain. It is well aware of the challenges posed by the attempts of the Al Khalifa to distort the facts and images relating to the popular uprising. But the wisdom has led it to ignore such malpractices and raise the level of awareness and activities. The government has failed to disrupt the activities of the opposition despite its attempts to infiltrate its ranks with informers and agents. The peaceful civil resistance of the people has opened wide scopes of activities and the government has remained vulnerable to international condemnations. Media coverage of the affairs of Bahrain has indicated a steady state of anti-regime activities despite its new laws aimed at more severe crackdowns against the opposition.

Over the next few weeks both the government and the opposition will become locked in battles to reach the hearts and minds of the international experts on human rights in order to secure their support. The opposition succeeded in bringing about international condemnation of the barbaric acts by the Al Khalifa. During last summer's session of the UN Sub-Commission on human rights the Al Khalifa offered an undertaking to allow a delegation from the working group on arbitrary detention to visit the country and see for itself what is going on. So far the visit has not taken place, whilst the regime continued arbitrary arrests and torture on a wide scale. Surely this is a flagrant misdemeanour on the part of the ruling tribe and is likely to cause a harsh reaction from human rights activists in Geneva.

Political observers are aware of the fact that the regime is playing with time in its gamble to crush the opposition. However, there is a consensus amongst them that such tactics can be two-edged sword. The most likelihood is that they will infuriate the international observers and human rights experts and lead them to take a stronger position vis-a-vis the ruling tribe. Meanwhile the opposition has exhibited a good degree of resilience in dealing with the international factor and has become respected worldwide.

There is international respect to the Bahraini opposition for its restraint in the face of all-out aggression by a regime bent on crushing the opposition. They have achieved a great deal to their cause whilst the Al Khalifa have become a liability not only to Bahrain but also to the region as a whole. The next few months will

be crucial to the situation especially as more and more of the atrocious acts of the Al Khalifa are uncovered and made public. Whilst more pressure from friendly quarters may convince the Al Khalifa of the futility of their barbaric acts, the opposition has made it well known that nothing less than restoration of civil and political rights to citizens is acceptable. Time alone will make this possible.

Delaying UN delegation

The Geneva-based "Human Rights Monitor", (Dec 1998), Issue No. 43, revealed the details of the deal made between the government of Bahrain and the UN human rights experts by summarising what happened during the 50th Session of the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission held in August 1998.

The newsletter stated "Following the adoption last year of a resolution on Bahrain, Mr. Joinet recalled that, in the absence of co-operation by the authorities, it remained necessary to pursue international supervision. Other experts and NGOs supported this position and deplored the absence of transparency by the authorities of this country." "Just as the Sub-Commission was prepared to proceed with the examination of this draft resolution (on Bahrain, Ms. Hampson asked that the delegation from the country be given the floor before beginning debate on the resolution. In its statement, the Bahraini delegation solemnly reaffirmed the commitment of his Government to respect its international human rights obligations and to retract the policy pursued by his Government, highlighting its co-operation with United Nations mechanisms.

The Bahraini delegate announced that the Government of Bahrain was studying its reservation regarding article 20 of the Convention Against Torture, promising to withdraw this reservation within one year. He also formally invited the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the Commission on Human Rights for a preparatory visit to Bahrain. In light of these developments, he asked that the resolution be withdrawn.

Following this statement, Ms. Hampson proposed the withdrawal of this draft resolution, which was then done. Mr. Alfonso Martinez asked that it be made clear that it was the co-authors, and not the Sub-Commission, who decided to withdraw this text".

The Government of Bahrain may now allow a one-person delegation to visit Bahrain next May and will certainly attempt to delay any detailed examination for as long as possible, thus avoiding its publicly stated obligations in front of the UN human rights experts. Such a move will undoubtedly infuriate human rights experts.

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January 99: Sheikh Al-Jamri must be released

1 January: Mr. Abdul Majid Al-Asfoor (together with his wife and five children) arrived in Bahrain on 27 December from Denmark. He was detained for three days, interrogated and then forcibly deported back to Denmark. Massoma (Om-Mas'ab) and her children returned to Bahrain from Sweden. She was detained for 14 hours and deported back to Sweden. Another person returned to Bahrain in the first week of January and was forced out of his homeland together with his family. Mr. Abdul Hussain Al-Setri, was forcibly deported to Iran.

3 January: A draconian draft law was discussed by the cabinet concerning "the installation and use of loudspeakers" in mosques and assembly halls. The government is aiming to silence nation in every possible way. The draft law was referred to "the Ministerial Committee for Legal Affairs for study".

4 January: The government-controlled press said that "The Cabinet yesterday agreed on the amendment of the draft law by decree concerning explosives, weapons and ammunition. The Cabinet which met yesterday under the chairmanship of the Crown Prince and Acting Prime Minister, Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, approved the law by decree No 16 for 1976".

5 January: Several rounds of gunfire were heard around Karbabad. Riot police were seen firing inside two farms in the area.

7 January: The Bahraini journalist, Mr. Abdulla Al-Abbasi, wrote an article in the Qatari newspaper Al-Raya, commenting of the difficulties of overcoming the problems in the Gulf. He pointed out that one of the major problems is the tribal and racist mentality that has even been passed to some of the younger generations of the ruling families. The tribal elements are attempting to marginalise 80% of the total population who do not belong to Bedouin tradition.

7 and 8 January: the security forces established check-points in front of Muqsha'a and Duraz. People in Duraz went out in a demonstration demanding an end to the oppression imposed on them (8 Jan). Thousands of citizens poured into Manama, the capital, to participate in traditional processions, raising slogans condemning the government's repression and atrocities. The citizens demanded the release of Sheikh Al-Jamri, who will be completing his third year in detention on 21 January. They declared "We are not saboteurs, We demand the return of the parliament"; "With our blood and souls, we defend Al-Jamri"; "God is Greater than the Oppressors", and various other slogans. The walls of main streets in the capital were painted with pro-democracy slogans and pictures of the detained leaders.

Hundreds of security forces armed with live ammunition and rubber bullets encircled the processions in Makharga and Ras-Romman districts of Manama. However the great number of citizens participating in the events defied the mercenaries who were led by the officers Muqbil (a Yemeni torturer), Khalifa Al-Sha'er and Yousif Al-Arabi. Around the country, the mercenary forces interfered with scores of traditional Quran-reading circles that proliferate in Ramadan. The security forces entered the respected houses and mosques and demanded the halting of Quran-reading. Such a move has never been known in Bahraini history of the past 1400 years. Even the Portuguese had never attempted to halt Quran-reading circles dur-

ing their occupation of Bahrain in the sixteenth century.

9 January: The security forces attacked a house in Tobli last week and terrorised an entire family. After ransacking the house two brothers were taken away for torturing: Mohammed Hassan, 19, and Zuhair Hassan, 18.

Tobli had been subjected to several waves of dawn raids and many youths (several are brothers) were taken away to be tortured in the first week of January. Those arrested include: Redha Abdul Hussain Nasser, 20, Khalil Ibrahim Mukhtar, 19, Mohammed Ali Ahmed, 19, Haider Hasan Ali, 19, Seyyed Jawad Hashim Baqir, 19, Yonis Ahmad Nasser, 19, Aqil Ali Hassan, 20, Seyyed Jawad Abdulla Shawq, 19, Hani Ali Jaffer, 20, Seyyed Hasan Sharaf, 20, Abdul Qadir Ali Radhi, 18, Seyyed Jaffer Sharaf, 16, Mohammed Hassan Nasser, 20, Zuhair Hassan Nasser, 19, Mohammed Abdulla Mohsin, 18, Jalal Mahmood Sharaf, 16. Citizens in Muharraq have complained about the behaviour of the mercenaries who had been imported from the deserts of Syria and Jordan. The ruling family imported thousands of mercenaries for changing the demography of the country and for using these newly imported people in the defence and security forces. The anti-social behaviour of these imports has caused many problems for the citizens who are suffering from the irresponsible and hate-based policies of the regime.

9 January: An international investment company stated this week that the Lebanese businessman Najib Al-Khuri will be suing the brother of the Amir of Bahrain, Sheikh Mohammed bin Salman Al-Khalifa. The businessman said that in April 1997, a case was brought to the attention of courts in California, USA, concerning an agreement between the two parties. The Lebanese businessman was commissioned by the brother of the Amir to sell an antique sword, known as Al-Ajrab, and claimed to be one of the swords of Prophet Mohammed. The businessman is claiming compensation for the expenses he suffered before the abrogation of the agreement to sell the sword. The Los Angeles Times of 15 May 1997 covered part of the news about this case.

12 January: The Geneva-based International Organisation Against Torture, OMCT, stated its concern "for the physical and psychological integrity of at least 33 minors between the ages of 13 and 17, allegedly arrested in further waves of arrests and house raids in several places of Bahrain during the last two months. Some of the detainees are feared to have been subjected to torture. These arrests are part of an ongoing campaign of intimidation including arbitrary detention and torture."

13 January: The security forces closed down one of the principal community centres, encircling the premises and sealing-off the area around Matam Salloom in the heart of the capital, Manama. They chained the gate of the assembly hall before departing the scene. A few days ago, thousands of people participated in the processions that were organised by Matam Salloom. The participants demanded the immediate release of the detained pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Al-Jamri, who was about to complete his third year in detention on 21 January. For the past four years, more than fifty mosques and community centres had been attacked and ransacked by the security forces.

13 January: A group of youth who had spent

two years in detention were dragged out of their detention by security officers (led by the notorious torturer Adel Flaifel) to be filmed in public places around Nuweidrat. Shaker Bati, 26, Monir Hussain, 21, Ismail Ibrahim Ismail, 24, (all from Nuweidrat) and Redha Al-Sheikh, 24, from Sitra, were ill-treated and tortured severely for the past two years. There are several groups that will be brought before the State Security Courts in the coming weeks. Ali Al-Khabbaz, 26, Abbas Hassan, 26, Abdul Hadi Jaffer, 24, all from Abo-Saiba'a are also expected to be brought before the summary justice after two years in detention.

14 January: The local press stated that the Amir has signed another unconstitutional decree for increasing the jail sentences against the citizens who are arrested, tortured and then sentenced by all types of mercenaries imported from outside Bahrain.

18 January: The sadness of the people made it difficult to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr to mark the end of Ramadan in Bahrain. People visited the families of martyrs and prisoners to offer their support and to declare their steadfastness. Martyrs' graves were sites for the people to gather, to read prayers and to raise pro-democracy slogans. Wall-writing around the country proliferated and the security forces were unable to wipe-out the slogans due to their intensity. Around Karbabad, the main highway traffic was jammed following protest by youths that resulted in the burning of tyres. Several loud gas cylinder explosions were heard in several areas.

18 January: The Bahrain authorities re-deported Mr. Abdul Majid Al-Asfoor for the second time in one month. Mr. Al-Asfoor had returned from Denmark to his homeland, and was forcibly re-deported to Syria. The government Bahrain is the only "national" government in the world that forcibly strips the citizenship of the natives and at the same time imports mercenaries from the outside and grants them free citizenship.

19 January: The interior ministry released Mahmood Ibrahim Abdulla, 23, Seyed Adnan Saeed Al-Setri, 20, and Abbas Isa Al-Hammar, 26. They were arrested early in 1995 accused of burning a shop in Jeddahs. Last year they were acquitted by the State Security Court, but the interior ministry refused to release them. A year later, the Amir declares an amnesty and these are released as part of such bogus amnesty.

20 January: Members of the Bahraini exiled community in London completed a 24-hour vigil in front of the Bahraini Embassy in Gloucester Road, London. The vigil started on 20 January, at 12.00 pm and continued until 21 January, 12.00 pm. The protestors distributed hundreds of pamphlets and brochures documenting the abuses of human rights in Bahrain. They called for the immediate release of Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues, who on 21 January completed their third year in detention.

21 January: Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues completed three years in detention, and should be released under the unconstitutional State Security Law, where Bahraini citizens are interned for three years without charge or trial. At the end of three years, the detained person must be released. Sheikh Al-Jamri was re-detained on 21 January 1996 following the government's failure to abide by an agreement struck with Sheikh Al-Jamri for calming down the situation. Three years

Debate on Bahrain in the British Parliament

House of Lords Bahrain: Prime Ministers' Meeting, 18 January 1999.

Lord Avebury asked Her Majesty's Government: What was discussed by the Prime Minister at his meeting with the Prime Minister of Bahrain in the Seychelles.

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (UK Government): My Lords, the Prime Minister and the Bahraini Prime Minister met in the Seychelles on Tuesday, 5th January. The meeting focused on recent events in Iraq and the Prime Minister took the opportunity to thank Shaikh Khalifa for Bahrain's continued support.

Lord Avebury: My Lords, did the Prime Minister say anything to his opposite number about the cases of Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and Mr. Abdul Wahad Hussain, who will have been detained for three years without charge or trial this coming Wednesday? Did he also take the opportunity of suggesting to the Bahraini Prime Minister that, rather than locking these people up, he should consult them about the restoration of the 1972 constitution and the 1973 parliament in pursuance of the mission statement of the Foreign Office, under which we promised to spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy that we demand for ourselves?

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: My Lords, both the Prime Minister and Shaikh Khalifa were on private holidays. The Prime Minister simply

took advantage of the opportunity to thank the Bahrainis for their help and support during Operation Desert Fox. It was not an appropriate occasion to raise any individual case in the very complex and sensitive field of human rights. I assure the noble Lord that we have raised the case of Shaikh Al-Jamri and the question of human rights with the Bahraini Government. The case of Shaikh Al-Jamri was raised by Mr. John Shepherd, the Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, with the Bahraini ambassador as recently as 11th January.

Lord Janner of Braunstone: My Lords, is my noble friend aware--

Lord Wright of Richmond: My Lords, perhaps I may-- Lord Janner of Braunstone: My Lords, I thank the noble Lord for giving way. The courtesies of this House are rather different from those of another place.

Is my noble friend aware of the political complexities in Bahrain, as I am after visiting there on behalf of the Maimonides Foundation? In particular, did the Prime Minister have any chance to discuss with the Bahraini Prime Minister the continuing Middle East peace process and the part that the Gulf states might play, not least in the light of the extraordinary meeting last week at the Peres Peace Centre which was attended not only by Gorbachev and seven Nobel peace prize winners but by representatives of Palestine, Egypt, Israel and Jordan? Surely the Gulf states should be

encouraged to come into this process as swiftly and effectively as possible?

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: My Lords, my noble friend makes some interesting points. However, to my knowledge, the Prime Minister did not raise the question of the Middle East peace process with the Bahraini Prime Minister when he met him during his holiday in the Seychelles.

Lord Wright of Richmond (Ex-UK Ambassador to Saudi Arabia): My Lords, does the Minister agree that, while it is important that human rights should be preserved and protected in Bahrain, as elsewhere, it is nevertheless of considerable importance to this country that our traditional friendship with Bahrain and the Al-Khalifa family should be preserved and developed? In the present situation in Iraq it is of paramount importance that we continue to protect and preserve our political, economic and military interests in Bahrain and elsewhere in the Gulf.

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: My Lords, I wholeheartedly agree with the points made by the noble Lord. The UK's trade and defence relations with Bahrain are extremely good. There are many recent examples of co-operation, but I shall not take up the time of the House by going into them in detail. On the question of co-operation offered by Bahrain, we have two VC10s in Bahrain providing refuelling in the air for the planes which implement the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. Relations and co-operation with Bahrain are particularly good and it is important that they are maintained.

However, that does not prevent us from also having strong views on the question of human rights. Wherever it is appropriate, we make that point to the Bahrainis.

Lord Avebury: My Lords, is it not the case that our strong friendship with the Al-Khalifa family, our indebtedness to them for the assistance they gave us during the recent crisis over Iraq and the presence of UNSCOM's headquarters in the territory and the American fifth fleet in the area inhibit us from raising human rights matters with the Bahraini Government? Would it not be a good idea if, as happens in other parts of the world, officials at the British Embassy in Bahrain were to visit the prisoners of conscience who have been detained for three years, two of whom I mentioned?

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: My Lords, there is no question but that this Government do raise human rights issues with the Bahrainis whenever that is appropriate. The case of Shaikh Al-Jamri in particular is constantly being raised. The noble Lord has asked about Shaikh Al-Jamri on a number of occasions and he has also asked whether officials at the embassy could visit Shaikh Al-Jamri in prison. As he knows, because the noble Baroness, Lady Symons, told him in a written reply in May last year, there is no legal basis for officials at the British Embassy to request to visit Shaikh Al-Jamri in prison.

We were then, and still are, assured that he is being well treated and has access to medical treatment whenever he needs it. But our good relations with Bahrain are a way of helping us to encourage our friends in the Bahraini Government to implement the movements, which indeed they are making--by, for example, signing in April of last year the convention on torture--towards improving human rights inside their country.

since his re-arrest, and the political crisis lingers on. The Bahraini government refused all attempts to calm down the situation. They even turned down an historic initiative by the President of the UAE in September 1997.

21 January: In Copenhagen, the Bahraini exiled community organised a picket in front of the Danish Parliament (near the Interior and Justice ministries). Hundreds of signatures were collected demanding an end to abuse of human rights and release of Shaikh Al-Jamri. More than 650 people in Copenhagen (Denmark) signed a petition addressed to the Amir of Bahrain, in support of the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain. The petitioners called on the Bahraini government to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to alleviate the political crisis by listening to the moderate demands of the opposition.

22 January: Mohammed Jaber Sabah, member of the dissolved National Assembly and a leading pro-democracy figure in Bahrain, wrote an article in the London-based "Al-Quds". The article entitled "No compromise on constitutional demands" outlined that abandoning the constitution of Bahrain is unconstitutional itself. This is because Article 65 mandates that elections must be held two months following the dissolution of parliament. This means that election should have taken place in October 1975.

In the case that such an election did not take place, the constitution specifies that the National Assembly assumes all its powers as if the dissolution has never taken place. This means that the National Assembly and its members (including the jailed Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri) are immune from detention and persecution. He said that Shaikh Al-Jamri has completed his three-year term according to the unconstitutional State Security Law and must be released. He noted that Shaikh Al-Jamri is being pressured by the authority to be released on conditions that he stops campaigning

for the political rights of citizens. The demands for constitutional rights can not be halted. He also noted that this bargaining falsifies the claim of the government that these jailed personalities are terrorists or support terrorism.

In the same issue of Al-Quds (22 January), the newspaper published an article for Dr. Mansoor Al-Jamri of the BFM on the "Contemporary Currents amongst Islamists". The article pointed out that Islamists have pursued three schools of thought during the past hundred years. One school of thought called for the implementation of "Islamic Sharia" law. Another called for establishing the "Rule of Islam" (Hakemayah or Welayah). The third has adopted a pluralist, rights-based approach to politics. The author called for fostering dialogue amongst, and with, these currents for developing a solid ground for toleration and co-existence.

25 January: Amnesty International called for an end to the administrative detention of Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur Al-Jamri, Shaikh Hassan Sultan, Shaikh Ali Ashur, Shaikh Ali bin Ahmad al-Jedhafi, Shaikh Hussain al-Deihi, Hassan Meshma'a, Sayyed Ibrahim Adnan al-Alawi, Abd al-Wahab Hussain, al prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders, who were arrested on 21 and 22 January 1996 for their non-violent political and religious activities "These men have been held without charges or trial for three years--the maximum time allowed by law in the country. Their prolonged detention is in breach of the already oppressive Bahrain laws," the organization continued.

Al-Shaikh Al-Jamri, a well-known 62-year-old scholar and writer who was elected member of the dissolved National Assembly, had previously been detained without charge or trial for around five months in April 1995. His arrest then was also connected to widespread protest by demonstrators who called for the National Assembly to be restored and for the provisions of the country's 1973 Constitution to be respected.

State vs. civil Society in Bahrain - Part 2

(..Continued from December 98 issue..)

The internal security system, for example, continued to be controlled by British personnel and staffed by people specifically imported from other countries. The ruling family adopted a strict ranking for the different Bahraini social groups. This ranking is an informal one, but continued to be effectively and strictly deployed.

In parallel to the concentration of power and forcible stratification of social groups, the ruling family controlled most of the land in Bahrain. Land registry was established in the 1920s with the initiation of modern administration. However, all unregistered plots of land were then transferred to the control of the ruler. Distribution of land has since been a key feature of control. This practice supplements the centrality of sovereignty in the hands of the ruling family.

The State fund allocated to the ruling family has remained at a very high proportion. Herb (1998) reported the percentage allocated in 1970 to the Al-Khalifa family as 29.3% of total government's expenditure. This percentage excludes other sources of income that are generated from active, and usually unfair, involvement of members of the ruling family in commerce in competition with ordinary citizens. The structure of the "State of Bahrain" has therefore developed as an exclusionist one that is characterised by total subservience to a patrimonial tribal rule. Such an arrangement poses a contradiction between the requirements of a

modern state and the conditions needed for tribal control. Sahlin (1968) reminds that "in a tribe, there are not so much different institutions as they are different functions of the same institution: different things a lineage, for instance, may do". This means that the institutions of the State tend to be transformed into functions for serving the tribe. "The tribal conditions", he says, "is transcended the moment a state apparatus is differentiated from and imposed upon society at large".

4. State versus Civil Society

Data from the Central Statistic Organisation (CSO) showed Bahrain's population expanded to 620,378 by June 1997 from 598,625 a year earlier. Foreigners, mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippine, make up almost 39 percent of the population. The figures showed the number of foreigners grew 4.8 percent to 240,423 and the number of nationals rose 2.9 percent to 379,955 in the year to June 30, 1997. Foreign workers, mainly low-paid and unskilled from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines, hold around 60% out of a total workforce of 239,000. "Business Middle East" newsletter (1998) reported that official figure from the Bahraini Labour Minister says unemployment is 1.87% (less than 2%). That's 5318 Bahrainis unemployed. The Labour Minister also said that 8349 persons found jobs in 1997. However, the newsletter said that foreign estimate put unem-

ployment rate at 15-18%. Fakhroo [see Sick and Porter (1997)] reported that unemployment likely exceeds 30%. This is worsened by the influx of "free visa" workers, where estimates put them in excess of 30,000. Under the "free visa" programme "each foreign individual pays his sponsor around 1,250 annually for his work and residence permit. This system is run and controlled by some senior bureaucrats and the elite who amass large fortune from it".

The Financial Times of 31 May 1983 says in its survey on Bahrain "Bahrain is a polyglot state, both religiously and racially. Leaving aside the temporary immigrants of the past 10 years, there are at least eight or nine communities on the island". Fakhroo [see Sick and Potter (1997)] describes the ethnic origins of today's Bahrain society as Sunni tribal origins, Sunni non-tribal, Sunni Howala who emigrated from the Persian coast, Sunni of African descent, Shia Arabs (Bahraini), and Shia of Persian origin. There are also tiny Christian, Jewish and other groups. The Shia make up at least two-third of the population. Modern educational establishment and the emergence (since the 1930s) of industrial corporations, such as the Bahrain Petroleum Company, contributed to the formation of social interaction amongst the various communities.

Mouzelis [see Hall (1996)] defines civil society as "all social groups and institutions which lie between primordial kinship groups or institutions on the one hand, and state groups and institutions on the other". Civil society involves a large-scale mobilisation of the population and its autonomous inclusion into the national, economic, political and cultural arenas. A strong civil society entails the existence of rule-of-law conditions that protect citizens from state arbitrariness, the existence of strongly organised non-governmental interest groups capable of checking eventual abuses of power, and the existence of a balanced pluralism so that no group can establish absolute dominance.

(To be continued....)

Bahrain: Whitewash

The Economist of 23 January 1999

Manama: Anti-government graffiti calling for "freedom" remain visible beneath a fresh coat of whitewash. The local lads of Sanabis, a dusty suburb of the capital, Manama, scrawl fresh slogans faster than the authorities can paint them over, denouncing Bahrain's autocratic royal family and celebrating "martyrs". But the royal family is unwilling to cede power to its citizens, sending in foreign workers to erase the graffiti, and foreign policemen to round up - or beat up - the reporters.

Bahrain was fleetingly a democracy. Soon after independence in 1971, the emir, Sheikh Issa al-Khalifa, signed a constitution providing for a largely elected parliament. But barely two years later, rattled by labour unrest and parliamentary opposition, he suspended the constitution and began ruling by decree.

In the 1980s, the Shia Muslim revolution in nearby Iran, which once laid claim to the Bahrain archipelago, made the Sunni Muslim regime more fearful of its largely Shia citizens - and hence more repressive.

Demands for the restoration of democracy, both from Sunni professionals and from Shia villagers, have resulted only in crackdowns. In 1994, the most prominent dissidents were either arrested or expelled. Since then, young men in the villages have played a tit-for-tat game with the police, burning tyres and blowing up fuel tanks in exchange for arrests and beatings.

The opposition claims that the government systematically uses torture to deter dissent. Since 1994, they say, 36 people have been killed in prison or died after their release as a result of beatings. The government denies everything: some victims died of heart attacks, it claims, some from unrelated causes after being set free, while others are simple

figments of human-rights groups' imaginings. Certainly, many of the opposition's charges seem far-fetched - such as the assertion that the government is giving its victims cancer - but so are officials' explanations that involve parents beating the corpses of their children to make it look as if they were pummeled to death by the police.

Even if the police stick to the book, Bahrain has a repressive enough legal system to squash most dissent. Anyone can be detained for up to three years without charge, merely if suspected of subversive activity. Sheikh Abdel-Amir al-Jamri, an opposition figure from the dissolved parliament, has been in prison since January 1996 without explanation. The toothless advisory body that the emir created in place of parliament has done nothing to reign on the security forces. Dissidents claim that they are turned away from the emir's much-publicised public audiences.

The government might get away with heavy-handedness if the economy were booming. But Bahrain is suffering from low oil prices and, though it has less than its neighbours, it relies on oil for 50% of government revenue. If the doldrums persist, banks and service industries will be hit. As it is, jobs cannot be found for around 15% of the workforce.

The government says it is trying to attract investment and create jobs. But, not trusting the Shias, it imports Pakistanis and Syrians to serve in the army and police. Locals' resentment of Asian guest-workers has boiled over into arson attacks on foreign stores and restaurants.

Mr. Al-Jamri's three-year detention period was due to expire on January 21st. Few expected Bahrain's autocrats to release him. But the future looks testing for them. They cannot paint over the cracks in society indefinitely.

No freedom in Bahrain

The 1998 Freedom House Survey rated Bahrain as one the worst countries that lack freedom. The article published by the Journal of Democracy 10.1 (1999), pp 112-125 "The Decline of Illiberal Democracy" explained that the survey "is an evaluation of political rights and civil liberties in the world... The Survey assesses a country's freedom by examining its record in these two areas: A country grants its citizens political rights when it permits them to form political parties that represent a significant range of voter choice and whose leaders can openly compete for and be elected to positions of power in government. A country upholds its citizens' civil liberties when it respects and protects their religious, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and other rights, including gender and family rights, personal freedoms, and freedoms of the press, belief, and association. The Survey rates each country on a seven-point scale for both political rights and civil liberties (1 representing the most free and 7 the least free) and then divides the world into three broad categories: "Free" (countries whose ratings average 1-3); "Partly Free" (countries whose ratings average 3-5.5); and "Not Free" (countries whose ratings average 5.5-7). Bahrain received the same shameful rating as that given to Rwanda and Burundi.