

Voice of

BAHIRATON

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

The opposition called for turning a new chapter

Sheikh Hamad's Golden Opportunity

The death of Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa on 6 March of a heart attack has ended an era in Bahrain and provided new opportunities for change. Whether the new regime headed by the relatively-young emir will be able to adapt to the requirements of a 21st century environment remains to be seen. What is certain is that Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has inherited a legacy that is in need for a drastic change. If he is to enjoy his reign over a peaceful country, he must introduce serious political reforms immediately. Any further delay will only result in confirming the grip of the old guards who enjoy no good reputation either inside or outside the country. For quarter of a century, the country has been plagued by instability and protests resulting in the death of scores of young men, women and children in the torture chambers of the "ancient regime". The prime minister became aware of the hands-off approach of his brother's (the late Amir), and exploited it to the limit. The deceased emir became detached from day-to-day affairs and surrendered to Sheikh Khalifa who employed his lackeys in the cabinet, which remained virtually unchanged throughout the bleak period. Together with Ian Henderson, the prime minister succeeded in creating a police state sending thousands of citizens to torture chambers, exiles or gallows. Within a few years after independence, Bahrain became one of the countries with the least openness, and piled for itself a black record in terms of human rights. The prime minister managed to survive the upheavals of the past 25 years with the aid offered by the United States and Britain who effectively sheltered his regime.

Sheikh Isa reigned over a regime bogged by power struggle. Gradually, the prime minister ruled the country through the extensive use of sheer terror. Ian Henderson, whose recruitment by the British in 1966 employed his skill in terror tactics against dissidents acquired through his experience in Kenya, used all methods of torture to subordinate those calling for their democratic rights. It became a familiar pattern in local politics that he would "uncover" a plot "to overthrow the regime by force" every December, and, consequently, would send

hundreds of Bahrainis to the torture cells.

Once inside, those interns would have not been able to escape signing false confessions on papers prepared by interrogators. As long as the Western support for these inhumane practices continued, Khalifa and Henderson felt free to inflict the maximum pain and suffering on the people of Bahrain. The opposition has, over the past few years, adopted peaceful means in its endeavour to effect a meaningful political change in the country. The Khalifa-Henderson camp felt threatened by the peaceful campaign and introduced new tactics to intimidate the people. International Human Rights organisations reacted by issuing statements and publishing reports condemning the regime of terror being employed by Henderson's staff.

None of these reports managed to convince policy makers in the West to take active steps to retain a degree of civility in Bahrain. The deceased emir played into the hands of his brother and even went as far as putting his signature on the death sentence ordered by the prime minister.

The opposition has acted responsibly when it called for calming down the situation in the aftermath of Sheikh Isa's demise. This stand has been praised worldwide. It is hoped that this move would be reciprocated by a courageous decision by the new Amir to release all political prisoners, allow the unconditional return of exiles, repeal the State Security Law, and reinstate the country's constitution. The forces of death commanded by the prime minister and Henderson, reacted angrily to this political initiative, and undertook to continue their policies of terror and intimidation.

Many men and children were arrested in the first few days after the demise of Sheikh Isa, the people were banned from using microphone systems in mosques, and mercenaries were dispatched to residential areas in a show of strength.

The people realised how desperate the forces of terror were and continued in their wait-and-see policy. Political observers agree that those forces stand to lose greatly if the opposition is to succeed in retaining the initiative. Without the torture chambers

their services will no longer be needed, an eventuality they detest. They were also annoyed by the worldwide coverage of the opposition's call for calm, at a time when the regime was embarrassed by the inundating calls from international human rights organisations to be allowed into Bahrain to monitor the show trial of Sheikh Al Jamri.

The opposition has extended a sincere hand to the new Amir, hoping he would reciprocate with the same. The hope is that the friends of the Al Khalifa will take the initiative to advise Sheikh Hamad to start his reign with a clean note and distance himself from the excesses of his uncle. It must be pointed out that it is in the interest of himself and that of ruling family to start a new chapter based on reconciliation and dialogue.

In a rare sign of a changing environment, one of the columnists was allowed to comment on the question of the dissolved parliament on 23 March. Sawzan Al-Shaer stated that the laws that are issued in the absence of the parliament may be considered "constitutional". She stated that the parliament (when convened) has the right to review all laws issued during its absence and to validate them. Although many would disagree with her interpretation of constitutionality, such comments are considered to be positive signs and the opposition hopes that the government would lift the strict censorship imposed on the media, so that all matters of concern to the citizens can be deliberated openly and rationally.

A more serious sign of such a tendency would be demonstrated by the unconditional release of the thousands of prisoners relinquishing in the torture chambers. A decision to reinstate the constitution will add up to this and will ensure that his rulership is also constitutional. It must be mentioned that Article of the Constitution makes it a condition that the new Amir is required to address the elected parliament and to seek its approval. In the absence of this elected council, his rule will remain questionable from a constitutional point of view. It is hoped that being a Sandhurst-educated he will not miss out this time. The new king of Jordan has set a good example by ordering the release of prisoners.

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Al urgent action

1 March: Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action stating "Shaikh Abdul al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri has finally been put on trial, more than three years after his arrest. Bahraini law allows a maximum of three years' detention of person suspected of "endangering state security". "He appeared before the State Security Court on 21 February in Jaw, south-east of the capital al-Manama, on charges including incitement to violence and acts of sabotage. Defendants tried before the State Security Court have no right of appeal."

CERD Meeting

1 March: The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) started its meeting in Geneva. CERD is charged with assessing the countries that signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Bahraini government ratified CERD in 1990 but has never submitted any report in compliance with the requirements of the treaty. The UN Committee started its meeting and Bahrain has been added to the agenda for investigating the allegation of racial discrimination.

According to the official (unwritten) policy, Bahraini citizens are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic origin, religious sect, and tribal affiliation. Bahrain is one of the countries where racism is rigorously implemented in all walks of life.

Baharin Bar Society

3 March: The Bahraini Bar Society emerged the winner following one year of closure by the government. The society was closed down early last years following a seminar held in January 1998 in which the government's polices were criticised. On 16 February, the executive committee appointed by the government published an invitation - through the press - to all lawyers to attend a meeting to elect a new executive committee.

All government's candidates were defeated in the election that took place in the beginning of March. The new executive committee comprises of Ali Al-Ayyobi (president), Salman Sahwan (deputy-president), Fareed Ghazi (cultural affairs), Mohammed Ahmad Amin (professional affairs), Radhi Al-Jabal (social affairs), Mohammed Eid Al-Hussaini (treasurer).

Bar Committee Letter

4 March: The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales wrote to the Amir, the Interior and Justice Ministers saying, "the Committee respectfully requests that it be allowed to send an observer to attend the trial of Judge Al-Jamri. The Committee would be grateful to receive details of the place and date of the trial and the charges that have been brought against Judge Al-Jamri.... We look forward to your early response in order that we can proceed with arranging to send an observer."

Dry Dock Prison Camp

5 March: The Dry-Dock prison camp, where more than 600 young people are detained, is witnessing a siege and campaign of torture by security forces. Many detainees have declared a hunger strike and are entering their second week. The interior ministry holds these hundreds of people without charges and many of them are unaware of the reason for their arrest in the first place.

The Dry-Dock prison camp comprises six corridors A, B, C, D, E, and F. Each corridor contains twelve cells. Most of the detainees are crowded in A, C, D and F. The cells in B are for solitary confinement. The torturers who brutally attacked and injured the detainees are Ali Al-Thani, Fawaz Hassan Isa, Mobarak Howail, Saqr Al-Nuaimi, Khalid Al-Fadallah, Isa Al-Rumeihi, Adel Al-Doseri, Abdul Salam, Ibrahim Bekhit (who plays in West Rifa'a Football Team), Ibrahim Al-Thawadi, Ibrahim Ahmad Isa, Nader Al-Doseri, Walid Al-Dewaisan, Ahmad Al-Huteimi, Khalid Ismail, Mohammed Al-Darraj, Khalifa Al-Doseri, and Salah (from Qalali). These torturers have been responsible for brutally torturing the youths detained in the prison camp. They have been given free and unaccountable authority to inflict pain and suffering on the people handed over to them for detention.

The widespread arrests of citizens have coincided with the news emerging from the Prison Camp at the Dry Dock in Hidd. Hundreds of detainees, most of them teenagers, are being ill-treated following a hunger strike by detainees demanding their release because either they have not been charged, or have completed their sentences but remain in jail. The detainees sent a letter explaining their ordeal saying: "We went on hunger strike protesting against the atrocities of the torturers such as Ali Mohammed Ali Al-Thani and Fahad Al-Fadallah. They have prevented us from receiving family-visits and have increased the degree of harassment and ill treatment. Some 350 of us have spent more than two years and nine months without charges. The torturer Ali Al-Thani promised to raise our cases to the higher authorities. He never fulfilled any of his promises. We started our hunger strike on 15 February with 28 prisoners. The following day, the number of striker rose to 360 detainees (out of a total of 495 detainees). The torturer Ali Al-Thani ordered an attack against us. He sent his mercenaries to kick us, punch us and threw us in trucks for torturing in the offices. On 20 and 21 February, the strike continued and as a result 25 of us were transferred to the solitary cells in Corridor B. These cells are without electricity and emit a rotten smell. One of the detainees (in the solitary cells), Hussein Al-Sheikh, started singing to pass time, and upon hearing him, the torturer Fahad Al-Fadallah, insulted him and ordered a torture session for him.

Yousif, 18, from Sitra, fell unconscious and was found with blood on him in the toilets. Ali Abdul Hussain from Sitra was force-fed after a sever torture session.

Seminar in Denmark

5 March: The Denmark-based, Mediterranean Network for Human Rights "Lands Thingssalen Christiansborg" organised a seminar in the Danish Parliament about human rights in the Middle East, and Bahrain became the central theme for discussion. The president of the network, Mark Skadholsen, and two journalists, Tariq Zeyadeh and Pmihe Brammung addressed the seminar. The latter said that during her visit to Bahrain in 1996 she discovered how bad the human rights situation in Bahrain is. Mr. Zeyadeh described the deterioration in human rights and referred to the case of Sheikh Al-Jamri as a stark example of the deterioration of the political situation.

Amir Dies

6 March: Amir of Bahrain Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa died today. "We pay our condolences to the current emir for the death of his late father, and we hope the new emir will open a new page to reconcile with the Bahraini opposition," said the Bahrain Freedom Movement.

A joint statement between the Bahrain Freedom Movement, the National Liberation Front and the Popular Front in Bahrain said: "the opposition forces, over the many past years, have indicated that their aim is to achieve development and progress for the country, that their agenda is based on legitimate popular demands, that they refuse any external intervention in the political affairs of the country, that they call for dialogue and that they are eager to contribute in the building of a modern civil society. Unfortunately the security forces have committed a gross mistake by attempting to address the political crises through the use of force. We reaffirm our support for all sincere attempts to open up the political process and to introduce reform through peaceful means."

7 March: The Associate Press reported on from Bani Jamra (the home village of Sheikh Al-Jamri) saying, "the calm atmosphere was brought on by more than just mourning in Bani Jamrah and the nearby villages of Diraz, Sanabis and Karramah. There was a wait-and-see quality, as people wondered what the new emir, Sheik Hamad, would bring. Mansour al-Jamri, one of the leaders of the exiled Bahrain Freedom Movement and the son of an imprisoned dissident, urged the new emir to "open a new page, to reconcile with the Bahraini opposition." Al-Jamri spoke from London but, in his home village of Bani Jamrah, a similar message was literally written on the wall. "We want a change," read freshly sprayed shocking-red graffiti. "Parliament is the solution. Parliament with justice." "Release the prisoners. Return the exiles."

Those are our demands," read other graffiti."

Petrol Station on Fire

8 March: Arsonists set a petrol station on fire on Monday. The station is located near the village of Hellah. The Bahrain Freedom Movement condemns all forms of arson and violence and hopes that the new Amir will not be deterred from pursuing a reformist policy.

FT on the Amir

8 March: Robin Allen of Financial Times wrote an article entitled "Sheikh Hamad takes over as Bahrain's ruler". He said that "In recent years Sheikh Isa left many aspects of government to his brother, the Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa, whose repressive policies have been notable since December 1994, when reform, movements swept the island and violent dissent broke out in many villages.

Sheikh Hamad is expected, at the time being at least, to keep Sheikh Khalifa on as Prime Minister, despite a bitter and well-publicized rivalry going back many years. According to senior US analysts, the combination could provoke considerable nervousness among Bahrain's Shia majority community.

It is an unfortunate coincidence, they add, that the government should now be putting on trial, after three years in detention, the Shias' public hero and opposition activist leader Abdul Amir Al-Jimri. It is a trail, which could spark renewed unrest. Bahrainis are not the only people with anxious eye on the next few months."

Down Jones on CPP

9 March: The Dow Jones News agency said that Mr. Ali Qassim Rabi'a (member of the Committee for Popular Petition) hopes that "the accession of Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa after the death of his father Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Saturday, will bring a loosening up of the political situation in Bahrain, including the release of political prisoners and a return to constitutional rule." It said "the opposition will write to the country's new ruler in days, seeking negotiations."

Crown Prince Appointed

9 March: Bahrain's new Amir appointed his son as crown prince on 9 March. The crown prince swore by referring to the constitution of the country and a decree regulating the appointment of heir apparent. The meeting was held in Rifa'a Palace and was attended by the new Amir, Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa and Sheikh Mohammed bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the late Amir's younger brother.

The reappearance of Sheikh Mohammed has been noted as an indication by the new Amir of his intention to balance the powers of the Prime Minister. Sheikh Mohammed was forced out of the ruling establishment in the mid sixties by the Prime Minister.

OMCT on Bahrain

11 March: The International Secretariat of OMCT issued an urgent intervention expressing concern about the physical and psychological integrity of at least 54 people from Bahrain. Among them, 19 minors between the ages of 12 and 17, were allegedly arrested in further waves of arrests and house-raids in several areas of Bahrain during the month of February 1999. It is feared that some of the detainees may have been subjected to torture.

Economist on Bahrain

13 March: The Economist reported from Manama on the death of the late Amir. It said "Sheikh Issa, a cheery man, used to play good cop to the bad cop of his reviled brother, Sheikh Khalifa, the prime minister. Whenever Shia lads burnt tyres or scrawled anti-government graffiti, Sheikh Khalifa would call out riot police to round up-and often beat up-the miscreants, while Sheikh Issa busied himself with charming foreign visitors. Bahraini dissidents hope that the accession of Sheikh Hamad, who was rumoured to have quarrelled with his uncle, will lead to a less hardline policy."

New Amir Speech

Reuters reported that Bahrain's new emir Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa pledged on Saturday in his first speech since taking power to continue his father's policies. "We will, God willing, extend the bonds of friendship, support and cooperation to anyone who wants prosperity for Bahrain at home and abroad," he said in a televised speech a week after his father Sheikh Isa bin Sulman al-Khalifa died. "I want to make it clear to you all, as a son of (Sheikh) Isa and a guardian of his legacy, I will continue his path which does not discriminate between the country's citizens regardless of their origins or their religion," he said. AP also covered the Amir's speech.

Security Court

13 March: The day the new Amir addressed the nation, the State Security Court was convened for trying seven citizens: Seyed Hassan Ibrahim Mohammed, 20 years old, Carpenter; Hassan Mansoor Mohammed Ali, 18, Carpenter; Hassan Salman Mohammed Hassan, 19; Seyed Ibrahim Amin Mohammed, 19, Employee; Mohammed Salman Ibrahim Ali Al-Aali, 19, Labourer; Hussain Kadhern Ali Mohsin Nasser, 20; Faisal Abdul Shahid Habib Abdulla Salman, Student. International human rights and legal organisations have condemned this unconstitutional court.

US Arms for Bahrain

15 March : (Reuters) - The United States said on Monday it had formally offered to sell 26 sophisticated "AMRAAM" air-to-air missiles along with associated equipment and training to Bahrain for \$110 million. The package was offered to Bahrain by Defence Secretary William Cohen

last week during a visit to the Gulf but no specifics were given at the time. The AIM-120B Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) are built by Raytheon Co (RTN.N) and have a range of more than 50 miles 80 km. They can be fired and forgotten by pilots while they seek out approaching aircraft targets. In addition to the AMRAAMs, the package would include 50 missile launch rails for Bahrain's F-16 fighter jets, missile containers, software, maintenance and pilot training.

Jaw Prisoners

22 March: More disturbing news are emerging from the crowded jails. Scores of detainees in Jaw prison have been transferred to solitary confinement and many have been denied family-visits. Amongst the citizens who are being ill-treated in Jaw are Seyyed Qassim Sharaf, and his brother Seyyed Mohammed Sharaf (from Daih), Ali Abdul Wahid, Salman al-Nashabah, Abdul Jalil Al-Nachas, and Seyyed Abdul Samad. Moreover, Dr. Isa Ibrahim Matar has been transferred to a solitary cell since 23 February.

Girls' Schools Attacked

21 March: Security forces attacked two primary girls' schools on 21 March. The security forces that stormed the classes savagely beat the children of both Shahrakkan and Bori schools. No clear reason has been reported. One of the girls in Sharakkan School stated that the young pupils were accused of picketing inside the schools. The parents of the girls were horrified to learn that their children had been subjected to a savage attack by the undisciplined foreign-staffed security forces. It is believed that these forces, which pledge loyalty to the "ancient regime" of the Prime Minister, are worried about losing their status in case the new Amir decides to adopt a reforming agenda. Several fires have also been reported in the past few days.

Disturbances

On 22 March, night-time, a big fire was reported in Tobli, while a car was set on fire in al-Khamis on 21 March. The opposition blames elements working for the security forces that benefit from enflaming the situation. On 24 March, another car was reportedly set on fire in Al-Hoorah.

Forcible Exile

Mr. Abd Ali Al-Sarhan, 35, was prevented from entering his home country on 22 March. Mr. Sarhan works in Kuwait and returned for a vacation to visit his family in Bahrain. Upon his arrival, he was detained in the airport, subjected to ill-treatment and interrogation, before being forcibly-deported to Kuwait. The government of Bahrain is the only "national" government in the world that forcibly exiles its citizens while at the same it imports foreign mercenaries and grants them citizenship.

State vs. civil Society in Bahrain - Part 4

(continued from last Issue.....)

The oil field is located north of Bahrain. In 1958 the Saudi and Bahraini governments signed an agreement for mutual utilisation. In 1965 the revenues were distributed as follows: 25% for Bahrain government, 25% for Saudi government and 50% for Aramco. In 1987, the share of revenue was divided 50% between Bahraini government and Aramco [see Al-Sheroogi (1993)]. In 1996, Saudi Arabia agreed that 100% of the revenues (140 b/d) would be transferred to the Bahraini government. Adding this to a 40 b/d from inshore oil field, the government started to feel comfortable with the cash flow available for major political projects aimed at reversing the situation to the pre-modern stage in terms of political control. Two projects are worthy of noting in this regard.

The first relates to the importation of Bedouins, predominantly from the Syrian area of Deir-Zor, or affecting demographic changes. The Financial Times of 28 May 1998 reported "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 of course a very large number of families which implies 40,000-50,000 additional population, or about 13% of the native population. There is no doubt that many Syrian Bedouins can be seen in Bahrain now and most of them are working for the security forces, but no one can be absolutely sure of their exact number.

Statistics of this type will always remain a confidential matter of State. The Financial Times of 28 May 1998 stated "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". Experts estimate the percentage of government expenditure on defence 18%, and on security 10-16%, as compared to 2% on development.

Before 1920s, the ruling Al-Khalifa family deployed groups of "fedawayah" for imposing their will on the society. More than 75 years later, similar groups of people are being importing for the same purpose.

The second project relates to the dividing of Bahrain to four provinces, or fiefs. Al-Hayat of 29 May 1996, reported that the new decree is underway for establishing a "system of four provinces". Governors, appointed by the Interior Minister will control each province, and each Governor will appoint 30 persons, or "mukhtar". In 1919,

Bahrainis moved away from appointed bodies and elected their representatives for a municipality. In 1973, Bahrainis elected a National Assembly that was dissolved in 1975. But in 1996, Bahrain is forcibly returned to a situation below the level enjoyed by Bahrainis 75 years earlier.

Al-Hayat (29 May 1996) said that there are five objectives for this "new" system. The most important of these objectives are those stated in the third and fourth points. The third point states the objective of "preserving security and public order", while the fourth point states the objective of ensuring "loyalty" of the public.

On 2 May 1997, a member of the ruling family, Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa, was appointed the Governor of the Capital. On 21 February 1998 another member of the ruling family, Isabin Ahmed Mohammed Al-Khalifa, was appointed as the Governor of Muharraq. Both persons had played senior roles in the Interior Ministry as investigating officers.

6. Conclusions

Clash of concepts: Today's Bahrain is a cosmopolitan society with an active population aspiring for greater participation in society and politics. The various ethnic and religious groups have tended to come together for the furtherance of common causes. This was manifested in the type and construction of leading movements since 1938. However, this tendency clashes directly with the tribally-controlled ruling establishment.

The underlying conceptions of "state" and "popular participation" are viewed differently. The rulers float the idea of an appointed consultative council as the most appropriate and compatible form of popular participation. This form of participation has no capability to stand against the excesses of the State.

Countering this concept is the view that reiterates the need for popular participation as the only long-term and viable alternative for meeting the challenges of the modern age. The pro-democracy movement in Bahrain has based its views on the modern concepts stated in Bahrain's 1973 constitution, effectively suspended since 1975. Political rights are specified in Article 1e of the constitution: "The citizens shall have the rights to participate in the public affairs of the State and enjoy political rights, beginning with the right to vote".

Disregarding Bahrain's Constitution: The Bahrain government disregards all articles specifying public rights and freedoms. Article 18 states "People are equal in human dignity, and citizens shall be equal in public rights and duties before the law, without discrimination as to race, origin, language, religion or belief". Article 22 states "Freedom of conscience is absolute. The State shall guarantee the inviolability of places of worship and the freedom to perform religious rites and to hold religious

processions and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country". Article 27 states "Freedom to form associations and trade unions on a national basis and for lawful objectives and by peaceful means shall be guaranteed". None of these or other articles are respected by the government.

Neo-fiefdom rule: Since the dissolution of the parliament in 1975, the ruling family has incrementally returned back to the state of affairs that existed before 1923. This return has been camouflaged by a modern "symbology" of State. All organs of powers are dominated and controlled by members of the ruling family. Lands of Bahrain are controlled as private estates and a new structure for the State of Bahrain was initiated in 1996 to divide these estates and to rule them through "governors" appointed from tribal-security ranks. Even the education sector has been subjected to paramilitary control, thus preventing interaction of university and society. Foreign-staffed security forces and recently imported groups of people are deployed to coerce the society into submission. This is a "neo-fiefdom" rule.

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