

# BAHRAIN

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

The first official visit to the UK

## Time to Awaken the Amir

The stagnation of the Gulf Cooperation Council is a worrying fact that is increasingly becoming more irritating even to the policy makers themselves. It is now almost two decades since the inception of the Gulf alliance that had been dictated at the time by regional developments and the desire of some rulers to protect their thrones. If their aim was to form a formidable alliance in political, economic and military terms, then none of these aims has been fulfilled.

Today the GCC has become an almost empty shell save for the annual summits of its heads of state and periodical ministerial meetings. The political divergence among the member states have occasionally surfaced, sometimes on trivial and perhaps insignificant issues.

The latest in this episode has been the barrage of accusations in the local media between Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The crisis erupted to the open after Kuwaiti coastal guards detained a ship with a cargo of children powder milk destined to Iraq. The Kuwaitis insisted that the cargo was being exported from Iraq, and that was, according to the Kuwaiti version, a solid proof that Saddam's regime was engineering the shortage of children food and medicine and then blaming them on the sanctions.

The Emirates have since insisted that the ship was not registered in Dubai and that the cargo was which was, according to them, destined to Iraq was in fact owned by a Kuwaiti company. Such a trivial matter became focal to the dispute between the two countries with regards to the relations with Iraq, an issue that is becoming a divisive factor among the GCC member states. Earlier in the year insults were exchanged between the Saudi defence minister, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, and the UAE foreign minister of state for foreign affairs, Rashid bin Abdulla. Again, the contentious issue was the relations with Iran.

While the border issues have remained a source of occasional tension among the GCC member states, the alliance has failed to agree on the relations with regional powers, most notably, Iraq, Iran and Yemen. It is now clear that each country in the alli-

ance has adopted its own form of relations with each of these countries. For example, Qatar, the UAE and Oman have strengthened their relations with Iraq while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are still too sensitive to such relations. The first three countries also enjoy relatively warm relations with Yemen while the Saudis and Kuwaitis have unresolved issues with Yemen. The Saudis have deep-rooted resentment towards the Yemenis and the Kuwaitis have not forgiven Sanaa for its policies towards Iraq.

Bahrain's relations with neighbouring Qatar have never been good, and are now made even worse as the attitudes of the governments to their internal policies are becoming almost contradictory.

Bahrain has a more acute internal problem than other states. Its government refused to adapt internal policies to the realities inside its borders.

The events of the past five years have not changed the attitudes of the Al Khalifa ruling family towards issues of democracy, human rights and constitutional rule. Furthermore, the new Amir has disappointed not only the citizens of Bahrain but also other Gulf rulers.

The Saudis are not happy about the Bahraini government which failed to take an acceptable stand, from the Saudi viewpoint, during the crisis in relations with the UAE. Almost all Gulf rulers look at the Bahraini government with disdain for its lack of vision with regards to its internal policies.

The nomadic style of rulership has remained stagnant with an adamant refusal from to adapt to the new realities. Basic issues which are usually taken for granted in the civilised countries such as democratic practices, human rights, pluralism, and the rule of law have remained uncultivated, and any open discussion on them is not allowed. With an economy that is almost solely dependent on oil revenues, the government will eventually come face to face with the prospects of major political upheavals as soon as oil prices show signs of weakness.

The educated elites which are generally alienated from the political process have, so far, remained on the sidelines of

the political process, but will gradually find themselves sucked into it. As prohibited information becomes more readily available through the Internet the outdated regime will realise that a major line of defence has been breached and that the censors can no more do their jobs as quickly and effectively as they used to.

It is absurd to assume that the people can remain enslaved forever. And when the Amir of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa starts his proposed state visit to London this month it is hoped that he will hear serious advice from his hosts that it is futile to continue in resisting the calls for political reforms in the country.

There is a widespread feeling that he has failed to make use of the golden opportunity presented by the opposition to him upon his rise to power after his father's death. A sense of anger is gradually developing that he has been dwarfed by his uncle soon after he assumed power, and that his lack of decision has contributed to marginalise his power base.

The GCC alliance needs courageous decisions by its leaders in order to maintain stability and continuity. Instead of avoiding the issue of democratisation, they need to address the real political needs of their people and start a healing process with their political opponents. Stereotyping the opposition has never been an effective tool to stop positive change. Debate, dialogue and mutual recognition must become the order of the day especially when it comes to internal politics.

The Bahraini opposition has succeeded in presenting a real case and will continue its endeavour to create a civil society based on mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. When in London, Sheikh Hamad ought to be told, in no uncertain terms, that he and his ruling family are set to lose most if they persist in their passive attitude to the democratic movement in Bahrain.

Reinstating the Constitution is a reasonable start to the lengthy healing process needed for the long term stability and prosperity of the country. Other initial steps go without saying: the Bahraini government must halt torture, arbitrary detention, forcible exile and intimidation of citizens.

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## Kuwaiti authorities harass dispossessed Bahrainis

The Kuwaiti authorities have stepped up their oppressive measures against the dispossessed Bahraini community in Kuwait. The Al-Khalifa ruling family demands the implementation of inhuman measures against Bahrainis as part of its bargain with the Kuwaiti royal family. On 22 October, the Kuwaiti security forces stormed a petrol station and detained Fadhil Al-Ujaimi, 23, a Bahraini citizen who has been striving for a decent living in Kuwait. Fadhil was taken to the Kuwaiti intelligence headquarters in Salmeyya. There he was interrogated and ill-treated by intelligence officers who included a Bahraini officer. He was freed on 25 October and told that other Bahraini citizens will be subjected to rounding-up, interrogation, intimidation and threat of deportation to Bahraini jails.

Last September Kuwait handed over a Bahraini citizen, Abbas Darwish, to the Bahraini authorities. The latter was released in Bahrain as there was nothing that could be proved against him. Mr. Abbas has a Kuwaiti wife and when he returned to Kuwait on 19 October, he was stopped at the border, ill-treated and returned to Bahrain. This inhuman treatment by the Kuwaitis contrasts the way the Bahraini people treated the Kuwaiti people during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Not only the Bahraini citizens are presently being treated as cheap labour, but are also being subjected to a terrorising campaign. The opposition calls on human rights organisations to intervene in this matter and to urge the Kuwaiti authorities to stop victimising the Bahraini dispossessed community.

## Forcible Exile

A young Bahraini citizen was forcibly deported to Qatar on 24 October. Ali Hasan Mazza'al, 21, had suffered harassment and detention for the past four years. He was detained for one year in 1996. After his release in 1997, he was prevented from continuing his secondary school education. As a result of this prevention he travelled to Qatar and completed his secondary school. He returned to Bahrain only to be detained in the airport and forcibly deported to Qatar.

There are scores of young people in Bahrain who had been denied their right to complete their secondary education. Also, the government of Bahrain is only "national" government in the world that forcibly deports the natives while at the same time it imports mercenaries from the Syrian deserts and grants them full citizenship.

## Banning prayers & mosques

Continuing its policy of muscle-ship and intimidation, the interior ministry besieged the grand mosque of Al-Sadiq (Qafuol, Manama) on 22 October and banned citizens from praying. The person

leading the prayers, Seyyed Hussain Al-Hayki, was summoned by the intelligence department and threatened of grave consequences if he does not stop leading prayers.

The security authorities imposed a widespread ban on all religious activities around the country. The interior ministry officers summoned Sheikh Mohammed Turki and threatened him of grave consequences if he is to continue leading prayers in mosques.

The security forces besieged Seyyed Hashim Mosque in Tobli and banned a routine religious programme on 22/23 October. Similarly, the security forces banned the residents of Bani Jamra from holding any programme. Bani Jamra is under a 24-hour surveillance and the house of Sheikh Al-Jamri continues to be under siege. Similarly, the torturer Ferooq Al-Ma'awdah summoned the elders of Karramah mosques and community centre (Matam) and informed them of his decision to ban their activities on 22 Friday. He ordered them to take prior permission before holding any prayer or function and that all the names of leading participants must be handed to him beforehand.

The atrocities of the security forces increased in the past few days coinciding with the visit by Sheikh Mohammed Shams Al-Din (President of the Lebanese Shia Islamic Council) to Bahrain. The message being sent by the government is that it does not care or respect any attempt by anybody for alleviating the situation.

The pro-democracy leader, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Al-Sabah, wrote an article in the Lebanese newspaper Al-Safeer (16 October) welcoming Sheikh Shams Al-Din and drawing his attention to the gross violations committed by the government of Bahrain. Mr. Sabah referred to the country's constitution and explained the roots of the crisis by indicating the government's disrespect to the articles of the constitution.

International human rights organisations and observers are continually condemning the Bahraini government. The noble Lord Avebury said on 15 October during the debate on "Religions and International Order" in the British Parliament: in Bahrain, mosques have been desecrated and closed down, Imams silenced or exiled and leading clerics held in prison without trial by the ruling family. The ruler of Bahrain is also coming to this country in the near future. I hope that something will be said to him on those matters."

The US-based organisation "Freedom House" rated Bahrain as "Not Free" country in its recently issued report. It said, "Freedom of speech and the press are sharply restricted. Privately owned newspapers refrain from criticising the regime, while radio and television are government-owned and offer only official propaganda."

## Corruption uncovered

Top officials in the Labour Ministry have been accused of stealing BD 900,000 (\$2.4 million) and importing 9000 illegal

cheap workers from the Indian Subcontinent to work in Bahrain as "free visa". "Free visa" workers are imported into the country and dumped in the market in return for a monthly commission paid to the importer. It was revealed that some of the top officials issued 9000 importation permits, each worth BD 100. None of the money has ever been credited to the ministry's account. The journalist Ali Saleh raised the issue in the local newspaper "Alkhabr Al-Khaleej", but no official investigation has ever taken place to retrieve the money or to check who imported the 9,000 illegal workers.

## Inaugurating a "human rights committee"

The Amir issued an order on 10 October for setting up a human rights committee made up of six members from the Shura Council. The latter is an unconstitutional body that has no legislative or monitoring powers and is subject to governmental control in terms of its agenda and issues that can be debated. The committee's responsibility includes "studying laws and rules currently practised in Bahrain and proposing amendments in order to protect human rights."

A spokesperson for the BFM stated that the government appointed individuals from the powerless Shura Council following its failure to form such a committee through lawyers. Bahraini lawyers understood that the aim of the government was to whitewash its tarnished image following a series of international condemnations by human rights organisations.

The UN Human Rights Sub-Commission was scheduled to send a delegation to Bahrain to investigate cases of arbitrary detention this month. However, the government requested that this visit be delayed for one year to enable the authorities to prepare the grounds.

The opposition believes that the government wants to use the name of such a committee as part of its PR exercise, while at the same time there is no indication that any real changes would take place in relation to stopping abuses of human rights. Torture and arbitrary detention have increased in the past three months.

The government was also preparing for the visit by Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi Shams Al-Din, the president of the Shia Islamic Council in Lebanon. Shams Al-Din (16 October) and the meeting of the Arab Lawyers Union (on 25 October). The government prepared its appointed human rights committee to meet with the lawyers in the name of human rights. The appointed individuals have been instructed to whitewash the image of the government.

Local press announced on 13 October that human rights courses "will become compulsory for all Bahrain University students studying for their law degrees." The Law section director is a member of the

ruling family and the opposition hopes that this will be an opportunity to spread the education of human rights. The University of Bahrain is one of the worst places where ethnic cleansing is exercised in day light without a shame. The opposition calls for an end to the racist and autocratic policies of military junta controlling the university.

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## PM Relaxation

The prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa Al-Khalifa, left Bahrain again and this time he headed to Thailand. He is also expected to visit the USA and is likely to make a private trip to Europe, which may include Britain. The new Amir is preparing for a visit to Britain that is likely to take place in the second half of November. This will be the first visit to the UK since he assumed power last March. An envoy from Tony Blair, the British PM, has met the Amir on 13 October to finalise details of the visit.

## Attacking Al-Jazeera

Mohammed Al-Motawwa (information minister) failed in his attempt to gag Al-Jazeera Satellite TV. On 29 Sep, GCC information ministers met in Abu Dhabi and refused to discuss the complaints submitted by the Bahraini government against the TV channel. The Bahraini government announced last June that it was going to submit a complaint following the broadcasting of a short interview with a Bahraini opposition figure. On 2 October, Al-Motawwa met with local journalists and ordered them to start attacking Al-Jazeera channel and blame it for destabilising the state security.

The government-controlled media resumed attacks on Al-Jazeera Satellite TV Channel for its coverage of the Amir decree for setting up a human rights committee via the all-appointed Shura Council. Al-Jazeera referred to the views expressed by the opposition on the appointment of this

powerless committee. International media organisations including the BBC Arabic Service, Monte Carlo, AFP and others have commented on the formation of this window-dressing committee.

## Security Court in Action

The State Security Court, headed by a member of the Al-Khalifa ruling family, dragged a group of ten citizen for a second hearing on 13 October. The group includes seven teenagers (16 and 17 years old) and all have been in detention for about two years. No information was yet available on the outcome of the session. It was also reported that a 5-year child (daughter of the detained Omran Hussain Omran) is awaiting a court hearing following the arrest of the entire family last month. The child was accused of throwing a small stone on a police jeep.

On 6 October, the following citizens (who are from Nuaim, mostly children and have been in detention for about two years) were dragged to the court for a short session. The session was adjourned until 13 October.

1. Riyadh Abdul Aziz Al-Madhi, 16.
2. Maher Hassan Yehya Rahmah, 17.
3. Mohammed Baqir Saleh, 17.
4. Mahmood Abdulla Al-Afoo, 16.
5. Mahmood Al-Nooh, 16.
6. Hussain Al-Nakhlawi, 16.
7. Mahmood Abdul Al-Sheikh, 16.
8. Sheikh Nadhim, 32
9. Monir Makki Al-Sheikh, 17
10. Mohammed Abdul Karim Al-Nasheet, 16.

Alongside the above ten people, the Court dragged two others who had already been sentenced to three years jail: Yousif Al-Karob, and Hani Khamis.

The gloomy political atmosphere intensified following the failure of the new Amir to mention anything positive in his speech in front of the unconstitutional Shura Council. The situation is getting worse with violations of human rights on the increase.

## Dictator cornered by citizens

On the evening of 4 October, the torturer Abdul Aziz Atteyat Allah Al-Khalifa was cornered by the citizens during a live programme broadcast on TV for "explaining" the new regime of "mukhtars". A citizen asked, "How have you selected the 18 mukhtars?" He said "mukhtars have been selected by people not by us. The people elected them, and then we sent their names to PM who approved them!!!!".

A caller by the name Um Abdulla asked: "I live in Adleya and I only knew about our mukhtar from local press, so how could you say that we elected them?". Reply: "No.. you go see your mukhtar, he is very open, your mukhtar is Khalid". The same lady rang later saying this name was not the mukhtar selected for her area!!!!.

Another caller, Abu Ummar: "You said

that mukhtars were elected by people. I am from Moharaq and I know that people in Manama didn't elect them". Reply: "mukhtars were elected by people..!!!".

Another caller by the name Abu Fahd: "I am from Sanabis and was kept for 6 months in prison after being acquitted by the (security) court. I have been searching for a job but everywhere I go they say bring your finger-print clearance from ministry of interior.. but you know every time the answer from the ministry (we don't recommend this person for this job)...where should I go???" The torturer replied "you follow this issue with the relevant ministries...".

## New recruits for Henderson

Reports from inside Bahrain revealed that the British master-torturer, Ian Henderson, has undertaken a new recruitment strategy. Several security officers from the same colonial background had recently been added to his senior staff. Some of these were recruited by him in Singapore. Similarly, it was revealed that one of the torturers traveled to London several months ago and used the compound of the Bahraini Embassy in London for recruiting some corrupt individuals to work as informers.

## Violating 23 Articles

The pro-democracy figure and member of the dissolved parliament, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah, wrote an article, which appeared in Al-Quds on 24 September on the issue of the recent formation of a "Citizens Complaints Committee". The latter was formed by the prime minister last month. Mr. Sabah explained that articles 74 and 74 of Bahrain's Constitution require that such a committee be the responsibility of an elected parliament for monitoring the executive power. To have this committee as part of the government means that it will have no independent powers and will be part of the PR exercise of those in authority. Mr. Sabah said that the government is violating no less than 23 Articles of the Constitution.

## Building Hawar

The minister of housing stated to the local press that his ministry is initiating a plan for constructing several schemes for tourism in Hawar islands. He said that a US consultancy firm has been appointed for the planning of projects such as a Golf playground, a hotel and chalets. The International Court of Justice is examining the case of Hawar whose sovereignty is disputed by the neighbouring State of Qatar.

## Delaying the UN team

The government of Bahrain has been encouraged to continue its violations following its success to delay the intended UN team visit by one year. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention will now visit Bahrain next October (year 2000).

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Furthermore, the government restructured the administration in 1996 by dividing the country into four provinces or estates. Each estate is to be under a member of the ruling family with a council of handicapped individuals responsible for monitoring the security situation and responding swiftly to crush any protest.

The political situation in Bahrain continued to deteriorate since 1994 and many human rights and international bodies voiced their concern. In February 1995, the European Parliament condemned the State Security Law and the British chief of Bahrain security, Mr. Ian Henderson (Resolution rule 47, ref B4-208/95/RC, B4-276/95/RC). The resolution said that parliament was "shocked that the Bahrain Government has resorted to the ruthless use of force by the security forces resulting in several deaths, many injuries, the detention of hundreds of persons and the deportation of prominent personalities," and "that the security forces in Bahrain are to a large extent directed by a British officer, Ian Henderson, ". Another European Parliament resolution was issued in September 1997 reiterating the earlier for an to human rights abuses.

In September 1995, Amnesty International issued a major 50-page report titled "Human Rights Crisis in Bahrain" calling on the authorities to stop torture, arbitrary detention, unfair trials and various other abuses.

In March 1996, the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group issued 14-page report (ISBN 0 9510238 5 3) detailing further abuses in Bahrain and called on the Bahraini authorities to heed calls for reforms and stop violations of human rights.

Towards the end of 1996, and under pressure from the United Kingdom and other international bodies, the government of Bahrain signed an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit the jails. The ICRC started visiting the jails in Bahrain on the condition that it does not make its report public and all findings (except for mentioning the visit and the number of detainees) are to be kept secret between the two parties.

In July 1997, the US-based Human Rights Watch issued a major 107-page report on Bahrain (ISBN 1-56432-218-1) titled "Routine Abuse, Routine Denial: Civil Rights and the Political Crisis in Bahrain".

On 21 August 1997, the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission issued an historic resolution on Bahrain relating to "Questions of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including policies of racial discrimination". The UN Sub-Commission expressed its "deep concern about the alleged gross and systematic violations of human rights in Bahrain"; and urged "the Government of Bahrain to comply with applicable international human rights standards and to ratify the International Covenants on Human Rights and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment".

In August 1998, the UN Sub-Commission threatened the Bahraini government of tougher action unless it agreed to allowing a UN team to visit Bahrain and investigate cases of arbitrary detention and that Bahrain ratifies all clauses of the Convention Against Torture. On 4 August 1999, the Bahraini government agreed to the two conditions (ratifying Article 20 of CAT and allowing the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to visit Bahrain). A UN team, headed by Judge Louis Joinet is expected to visit Bahrain by the end of 1999 or early 2000.

### Security agencies

The interior ministry is the biggest organization in the country. It has around 10,000 paramilitary personnel (which is roughly equal to the army in Bahrain) as well as a complex structure of many thousands of officers, staff and informers networks. Political detentions are handled by several departments depending on the seriousness of issue. The General Directorate for State Security Investigations (intelligence department) handles the top cases. This is run by British officers such as Ian Henderson and Thomas Bryan.

The Central Investigation Directorate (CID) handles political and criminal investigation. Then there are the Police Headquarters of the different areas. These are empowered to detain, interrogate and ill-treat detainees suspected of carrying out routine opposition activities, such as writing a slogan on the wall or gathering in a mosque.

The work of these departments has been decentralised and this explains why one agency might raid a house to detain a person, only to find out that he is already detained in another place. This decentralisation helps the government to conceal the actual number of political detainees, as a central register does not exist. It is for this reason that the International Committee of the Red Cross stated in 1998 that there are 2111 political detainees and prisoners in Bahrain, while the interior minister insists that there are less than a thousand.

All these agencies have plain-clothed police as well as the back up of uniformed police, anti-riot squad, special forces, and in some cases, military personnel. Plain-clothed and uniformed personnel are imported from Baluchistan (Pakistani mountainous people), Syrian and Jordanian deserts, southern parts of Yemen, and other places.

The security agencies are given free hand to deploy any of their methods for extracting confessions from detainees. Detainees are given the options of accepting to sign confessions (most of the time fabricated by the security officers themselves), otherwise they remain in detention for three years without trial or charges under the provisions of the State security Law. Many detainees remain more than three years without charges as the three-year period get renewed.

### Court system

Once a person sings the confession, he or she is taken before an "investigating judge" to re-state the confessions and re-sign them.

If a detainee refuses, he or she is taken back for another round of ill-treatment. Following on from this stage, the detainee is taken before the "State Security Court".

This unconstitutional court is presided by a member of the ruling Al-Khalifa family who is accompanied by two Egyptian judges. These Egyptian judges are employed by the Ministry of Justice on a 2-year period and this period is only renewed if the judge satisfies the implicit pre-requisite. This relates to the preparedness of the judge to sentence political detainees according to the political decisions of the government. This partly explains why these judges have sentenced person accused of minor political activities to very terms of jail and large sums of fines, while others accused of much bigger activities received lighter sentence as compared to the previous ones. The political environment directly influences the outcome of each trial conducted by the State Security Court.

The citizens of Bahrain are suffering from the violation of "due process" rights. The number of people affected by this violation is on the increase. The State Security Law of 1974, the State Security Court Decree of 1976 and the subsequent expansion and enlargements of the jurisdiction of these measure in 1996, provide the security agencies and the biased legal system with a free hand to conduct dawn raids on a daily basis, detaining citizens for prolonged periods and then summarily sentencing them without any rights for appeal or for proper defence.

The US-based Human Rights Watch issued a 107-page report in 1997 detailing the abuses of the government of Bahrain that has refused to abide by the Country's constitution and international standards. Human Rights Watch recommended to the Bahrain government that it should "amend the State Security Measures Law of 1974, the penal Code of 1976 and all other laws and decrees to eliminate those provisions that violate rights protected by Bahrain's constitution." The Bahraini government refused to listen to any of these recommendations.

Amnesty International stated on 16 April 1998 that the "procedures followed by Bahrain's Supreme Civil Court of Appeal, in its capacity as a State Security Court, have resulted in manifestly unfair trials. This special court routinely violates provisions of Article 14 of the ICCPR, as well as provisions of Bahrain's Constitution."

Amnesty International went on to say "When facing trial before the State Security Court, detainees are denied access to legal counsel from the moment of arrest until they are brought to court. This means that although defendants may appoint lawyers of their own choosing, the first contact can only happen on the first day of trial, just moments before the opening session. This violates Principles 15 and 18 of the UN Body of Principles. Clearly, inadequate time is given for the preparation of the defence.

(Continued next issue...)