

Voice of

# BAHRAIN

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## A new era with an ancient regime

### Y2K Non-compliance is disastrous

A new year, a new century and a new millennium, but is it a new era in Bahrain? It has been hoped that the old style of autocracy would end as the people paid farewell to the second millennium, but that hope now seems remote. Although democracies have flourished throughout the world Bahrain has remained as stagnant as ever. Moves towards human rights and democracy have proved to be a far-fetched delicacy that is still considered by the regime to be unsuitable to its taste. Anyone calling for openness, freedom or democracy risks being labelled a provocateur or even a foreign agent.

It now looks extremely unlikely that the current ruling regime can be adapted to the modern world, being overwhelmed by ancient ideas and traditions. This is contradictory to Islam, the dominant religion and culture in the region, whose teachings rule out dictatorships and outlaw despotism. Even at the level of personal faith, Islam requires personal endeavour to embrace the religion of God; there is no compulsion in religion.

However, humankind is not free to chose his/her government, neither is he / she allowed to exercise any political role unless authorised by the ruling hierarchy. In fact, the interior ministry is the most feared institution. Defence and security consume 35% of recurrent expenditure in Bahrain while less than 2% is reserved for human development. Enlightened citizens had hoped that this state of affairs would end and a new era with a degree of freedom would follow. Last month, the Amir decreed that municipality elections would be allowed in the country.

However he conceded that such elections had been practised in the country from the onset of the twentieth century (local elections were started in 1926 and banned in 1956). The question being asked now is whether the people of Bahrain would have to wait for another century for any serious reforms. Since the early twenties the people of Bahrain have been calling for a legislative council, and fifty years later they were allowed to vote for the first such institution. But that experiment did not last long. The prime minister, who was one of

those responsible for the abandonment of the municipality elections in the 1950s acted decisively against the practice of elections. In 1975 the late Amir decreed to suspend the articles of the constitution that safeguarded the limited democratic process. Ever since, the people have pledged to regain their rights, and for this they had paid a high price. Many people were killed by the government, thousands detained or exiled.

The decision by the Amir to reinstate the elections for municipality councils has been welcomed as a positive gesture to the opposition and people of Bahrain. But there is unanimity amongst observers that it has fallen short of the peoples demands. They had hoped that Sheikh Hamad would take a courageous decision to end the dark era imposed on the country by his uncle for decades and would lift the state of emergency embodied in the form of the State Security Law and Court. They also hoped that he would declare general amnesty to the political prisoners and exiles, reinstate the constitution and call for parliamentary elections. To their disappointment he did not do so.

A new century has now started, and while many people in the world had reasons to celebrate the new millennium for their achievement in the fields of human rights, democracy, development and freedom, our people have very little to celebrate. On the eve of this historic advent, children, women and men are enduring the wrath of the torturers in cells that are not suitable for animal habitation. Torture is a common practice, and corruption in the hierarchy of the government has soured to unprecedented levels. The government has failed to honour its commitment to maintain international standards on safety of the citizens. The government has failed to ratify the international conventions on social, cultural, economic, political and civil rights. It has also refused to allow a visit by the working group on arbitrary detention which had been scheduled for October 1999. The visit was delayed for one year. Places of worship are now being targeted by the regime in its efforts to wipe out any opposition to its dictatorship. Last month, many

children were arrested and tortured by the security service. Few hours after the Amir had delivered his annual address to the nation on 16 December, women were attacked and arrested. At least one woman has remained in torture cells for calling for democracy.

The people of Bahrain have relayed their congratulations to the world for the new millennium, and requested their support for the democratic demands which the regime has refused to grant. It is the belief of the Bahraini people that they deserve to live under better conditions where the rule of constitutional law is upheld, and where human rights are respected. They have called for several actions to be taken by those who love freedom and defend human rights in the world.

Firstly, the UN working group on arbitrary detention be allowed to the country soon. Only then would the regime be forced to stop the policy of mass arrests. The special rapporteurs on arbitrary detention and torture must be allowed to visit the country to establish for themselves the reality of the situation and assess the claims and counter claims. Furthermore, international pressures must be exerted on the Government of Bahrain to stop its attacks on religious freedom in the country, reinstate the country's constitution, and call for parliamentary elections.

More action is needed from human rights groups and friendly governments to stop the policy of forcible exile being practised by the government. Finally, the government must be made aware of the futility of its policy to change the demographic composition of the Bahraini society. It has to stop the import of Syrian bedouins and Baluchi soldiers to the country. It is a crime beyond any proportion to try to play around with the social composition for political aims. The Gulf region is one that supplies the world with up to half of its oil needs. Its stability and security must be maintained. This could only be achieved through the evolution of a civil society based on the rule of law. Martin Indick, the US undersecretary of state encouraged the Gulf rulers to move towards democracy. This needs to be implemented sooner rather than later.

## The opposition presents its case in Manama

The "Bahraini Graduate Club" organised a seminar in the capital Manama on Sunday evening, 25 December 1999, entitled "The Future of Shura in Bahrain". The seminar was addressed by Mr. Jamal Fakhro (first deputy of the all-appointed Shura Council), and Mr. Samir Rajab (second deputy of the Shura Council). The seminar managed to attract a large audience and many pro-democracy figures participated in the discussion.

Mr. Jamal Fakhro said that the "present Shura experiment was suitable for its period and we hope it will be developed further to meet the aspirations of our people." He emphasised that any development is subject to the satisfaction of those who have the capacity to instruct (meaning the Amir & government). He admitted that the Shura Council (which he represents) lacks legislative and monitoring powers and all its activities are confined to the agenda set-out by the Cabinet.

Mr. Samir Rajab confirmed what Mr. Fakhro had said and added that "the present experiment is heading in the right direction and all the experiments of the Arab World had failed because their details were not studied properly".

At the end of the two interventions, the participants started the debate. Dr. Abdul Aziz Ubol questioned the ability of the present Shura Council to develop as it is limited and confined by its framework. The Shura Council is an attachment to the executive power while the constitution specifies the separation of powers. He also questioned the two speakers regarding the possibility of establishing a Constitutional Court to judge whether such development would be in the right way. Both speakers refrained from answering and stated that "all depends on the top leadership of the country and it is up to them to do what they see fit".

Then, the pro-democracy figure, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah intervened and stated:

- The Shura Council was never and would never be accepted by the people and it will never be a replacement for the National Assembly.

- That the members of the Shura Council represent themselves and not the people.

- That the Shura Council is an unconstitutional body.

- That granting women the possibility to enter the Shura Council is a downgrading step for women since the Constitution offers her more than such a thing.

- That there will be no alternative but to resort to the ballot box.

The two speakers could not speak a word while the audience was in full support for Mr. Sabah.

Then, Mr. Farod Ghazi spoke out to denounce the statement uttered by Mr. Rajab that all experiments in the Arab World had failed because it "over-jumped". He called on the speaker not to justify the

failure of the Bahraini experiment by such unwarranted statements.

One of the attendants presented the Petition that was submitted to the Amir in 1992 and said that "your Shura Council was created as a negative response to this pro-democracy petition." Another participant questioned that speakers: "How did the government arrive at the conclusion that the Bahrain people are not mature enough to have an elected parliament?" ... Both speakers failed to answer.

The pro-democracy figure, Mr. Abdulla Hashim intervened said any development to the Shura Council will not be fruitful because the people are not involved in the process. Another participant asked: "Both of you confirmed that you are members of a powerless and non-legislative council, so why do you go outside Bahrain to represent us in parliamentary meetings?" The entire hall shook as a result of clapping and support for this question.

## Lord Avebury on Bahrain:

Bahrain Seminar. Moses Room House of Lords, December 15, 1999.

Welcome to this seminar to mark the Fifth Anniversary of the Popular Uprising in Bahrain. This last year has been one of both hope and disappointment: hope, that following the accession of Sheikh Hamad to the throne in March, there would be substantive changes in the governance of the state in the direction of popular participation in government, and disappointment, that the steps taken by the new Amir appear to be designed with a view to buying off outside criticism, rather than to engage in a dialogue with the true representatives of the Bahraini people on the reforms which are needed to bring Bahrain into the 19th, let alone the 20th or 21st century.

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office assesses the process of change in Bahrain on the basis of its potential future impact on human rights, and leaves the question of democracy on one side. This became apparent when I asked the FCO Minister in the Lords, Patricia Scotland, whether human rights and democracy had been raised with the Amir on his recent visit to the UK, and she answered purely about human rights. She was not even able to tell me whether the question of democracy had been on the agenda at all. Yet the two subjects are closely connected with one another, as the FCO Mission Statement recognises when it promises that we will "spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy which we demand for ourselves".

Democracy is the only political system which can ensure that people get their human rights, and conversely, if they are deprived of the rights of free expression and association, they cannot move towards democracy. But let's see what are the positive steps the Amir has taken towards improving Bahrain's human rights situation", as Minister Peter Hain puts it.

The release of some prisoners and the

return of a few exiles were welcome, but minimal, gestures. It was not possible to check the claim that 320 prisoners had been released because no names were given, but many of the people released had either reached the end of their sentences, or they had never even been charged and were being held in administrative detention. We believe that the true figure was more like 100, and many of those released were re-arrested shortly afterwards. Many further arrests have also taken place since the alleged pardons, and people are still being arrested every week. Only three days ago, five people were arrested from Abu Saib, two of them children under 18. Although Bahrain has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it did so with the reservation that 16 to 18 year-olds are treated as adults, and the authorities regularly detain young people without notifying their parents. In fact, children younger than 16 are detained and beaten up.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, during 1998 they visited 1,327 people detained for security reasons in 13 places of detention, and it should be noted that since the ICRC visits began, the practice has been adopted of detaining and ill-treating people for shorter periods, so that they never appear on the ICRC statistics.

The situation would have become clearer if the promised visit of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which was to have taken place in October 1999, had not been postponed for a year. One particularly dire consequence of this delay is that five of the senior figures, arrested at the same time as Sheikh al-Jamri in January 1996, will have to spend another year behind bars. Yet the Bahrain Government is being given credit for inviting the Working Group to visit the State! The earnest of good behaviour at some indefinite time in the future is being treated as the performance of the obligation not to detain without proper judicial authority today.

Similarly, much is being made of the return of exiles in June. Human Rights Watch says that 12 were allowed back in, but 32 people who tried to re-enter their own country in July were denied readmission. Hundreds of others remain in exile, and the Bahrain Government has not renounced the use of the power to kick people out of their own country if they don't keep to the rules. It is a weapon that hangs over the heads of those who could otherwise speak in favour of reform, and in particular, Sheikh al-Jamri, who was given a pardon after the Government tried to humiliate him by going through the motions of a trial and sentence before the State Security Court. The opposition is supposed to be grateful for the treatment of Sheikh al-Jamri, who is not allowed to speak in public or engage in any other political activity; whose house is constantly guarded by armed men and under surveillance by plainclothes men in unmarked cars, and whose communications with the outside world are bugged.

We shall be looking at the Channel Four programme on Bahrain in a few minutes, highlighting another serious concern which has not been addressed: the prevalence of torture, and, to our shame, the participation of British citizens in those crimes. What the Channel Four programme showed was that Ian Henderson was not only the head of the security apparatus, but that he took part physically in the torture of prisoners, and although Mr Henderson is said to have retired, he is still playing an important role behind the scenes. Now there is a new security man from Britain, one Colonel Thomas Bryan. Was he appointed at the instigation of the British, like Mr Henderson was, as revealed by the papers from the time, now brought to light in the Public Records Office, and shall we have to wait 30 years to find out how Colonel Bryan got the job? How many other British citizens are involved in torturing Bahraini citizens, or in whitewashing these activities in the Ministry of the Interior?

One particularly clear-cut case of torture has been taken up by the British Embassy with the Ministry of the Interior: that of 22-year old Nooh Khalil Abdulla Al-Nooh, who was arrested on July 19, 1998 and whose tortured body was handed to the family two days later. The Ministry promised our Embassy that there would be an inquiry into this atrocity, but there has been no further word about the findings. Mr Nooh is not the only person to have been murdered in custody over the last five years, but in his case, there are photographs of the body showing the horrific injuries he sustained. Those responsible for his death, and the senior persons who command and lead the security apparatus, should be brought to trial for all those crimes, and if any of them should set foot outside Bahrain, they would be liable to arrest under the Torture Convention, in the same way as former General Pinochet has been.

The Minister who deals with human rights at the FCO, and who is also responsible for or relations with Gulf countries, Mr Peter Hain, says that we want to see continuing progress on human rights in Bahrain, and I hope we shall ask the Bahraini authorities to consider extending an invitation to the UN Rapporteur on Torture, Sir Nigel Rodley, to visit the State. If he were to go at the same time as the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, they could coordinate their activities. It would be more difficult to fob off such as high-powered delegation than it was when Amnesty International visited the country. The Bahrain authorities are being given credit for the Amnesty visit, but Amnesty have complained that they were not allowed to meet or speak to any member of the opposition.

Some of the visitors to Bahrain from Britain of course have no intention of finding out the true political situation there. Unfortunately, the tradition has continued, of Parliamentary delegations to a country that has no Parliament, and the MPs who

go there on freebies organised by Mr Omar al-Hassan swallow everything the authorities feed them. Its sad that Labour Members are turning out to be just as gullible as the Tories were, and that Ken Purchase, the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, is amongst the leading apologists for the régime after a few lavish trips. He sees nothing inconsistent in being the Foreign Secretary's PPS, and at the same time acting as an advocate for an hereditary dictatorship, and apparently the rules of the House have nothing to say on the matter. Perhaps this is a loophole that Lord Neil's Committee on Standards in Public Life should investigate: not the activities of Ken Purchase, but the more general question of whether more precise rules are necessary, to stop PPS's from entering into advocacy on matters affecting the policies of their Departments.

Is there going to be any genuine transition to democracy in Bahrain, as opposed to minor cosmetic improvements in human rights? I understand that the Amir is likely to announce the creation of elected municipal authorities tomorrow, on the occasion of the National Day, restoring the privileges that the people enjoyed from the twenties to the fifties. It isn't clear how these new councils will dovetail with the appointed Mukhtars who now hold power over certain local decisions, but even supposing that the councils replace the Mukhtars, they could be given only a qualified welcome. Like the other steps which have been trumpeted as signs of a new approach, this is at the pleasure of the Amir, and not something done within the constitutional framework that operates in almost every country in the world. There is still no sign of the dialogue between the ruling family and the opposition, represented by the Committee for Popular Petition, which must be the prelude to government by the people themselves. Concessions by the ruler, granted at his whim, remind us of the fates of other absolute monarchies which have tried to buy off real democracy by favours at the last minute.

## MENA 2000

In its annual regional surveys of the world, the forty-sixth edition of the Middle East and North Africa 2000 (ISBN 1857430611), MENA discussed a comprehensive historical and current accounts of the struggle for democracy and human rights in Bahrain. Commenting on the current situation in Bahrain, it said "On March 6, 1999 Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, hitherto Crown Prince of Bahrain, was appointed Amir following the death of his father. His appointment encouraged expectations of political change among the opposition, which welcomed the change of leadership as an opportunity to renew negotiations with the government and urged temporary cessation of popular protest in respect for the deceased Amir. It went on to say "Mansoor Al Jamri, urged the pursuit of a political, rather than military, solution

to civil unrest. Although diplomatic sources in Bahrain predicted that the new Amir would adopt a more conciliatory position with regard to security issues, Sheikh Hamad's first official address to the nation in mid-March was emphatic in its high regard for the armed forces and the guardians of both internal security and regional stability. At the end of May Sheikh Hamad effected a cabinet reorganisation in which Sheikh Khalifa Bin Salman remained Prime Minister, despite a long-standing power struggle with the new Amir". MENA also mentioned the failed attempts by the Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak, to pressure the British government to expel the Bahraini opposition from the United Kingdom.

## The Amir glorifies his family: A 20-old girl arrested

On 16 December, just as the Amir was reading his first national day statement, glorifying his family and granting them super-human attributes, a team of torturers were conducting one of their vicious hate-driven attacks against Sitra. The torturers attacked the house of Haji Hassan Sdeif (Kharjeyah-Sitra) and then dragged out the 20-year old daughter, Halima. Halima was pulled from her hair in front of her family and beaten by the brutal mercenaries imported by the ruling Al-Khalifa family for the sole purpose of repressing the nation. Reports confirmed that Halima is now detained at Isa Town Detention Centre in a condition described as "miserable". She has been subjected to vicious physical and mental abuse. Moreover, two other girls were known to have been detained and tortured on 20 December. They were grotesquely insulted and abused before their release. The two were Fatima Salman Maki Salman and Asia Abdul Aziz Ismael, both aged 20.

The mercenaries also assaulted several families in Sitra- Markoban and abducted the following citizens: Ibrahim Abdul Nabi Habib, Habib Ali Habib, Mohammed Mansoor Abd Ali Al-Khadhran Abd Naser Ali Al-Anserah.

On the 16 December, the Amir of Bahrain announced in his first coronation speech since he ascended to the throne last March, the revival of the Municipal Councils and Municipal elections, a right that had been confiscated from Bahrainis. Earlier this century, in 1926, the British-controlled administration allowed Bahrainis (men and women who owned property) to elect their municipality. It was hoped that a more serious approach towards resolving the political situation would have been offered by the Amir. The Amir glorified his family and placed them above humans before stating that he has decided to return to what was happening in the beginning of the century. This is bad as it sets a backward and reactionary precedence. It means, God forbids, that Bahrainis in the year 2000 would be told that they would only get what was offered in 1999.



## Bahrain Human Rights Review - Part 4

(...Continued from last issue)

Freedom of expression and association are severely curtailed in Bahrain. There are two daily newspapers and both are controlled by the ministry of information. Correspondents of foreign media are not allowed to function freely. The correspondent of the German DPA was expelled from the country in 1997, the local correspondent of the BBC was also banned from transmitting any news. The correspondent of Reuter was put in jail for a day in the same period.

When a new Amir (ruler) assumed office on 6 March 1999 there was an optimism that things might change. However, the prevention of Al-Oroba Club from hosting a seminar that was supposed to have taken place on the evening of 9 June 1999 cast doubts about the seriousness of the government for opening up the political environment. Dr. Sabeeka Al-Najjar was invited to speak on "Women and political participation". Shortly before it started, the club was ordered to cancel the meeting by Mohammed Al Bin-Ali, who works in the office of the Interior Minister.

At present, the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry recognises 138 NGOs (4 for women, 12 social purposes, 2 charity, 3 religious (Sunni), 21 professional, 51 Clubs and expatriate societies, 41 local charity funds (Sandook Khayri). There are other types of traditional organisations, which attract non-governmental activities. These are mosques (both Sunni and Shia) and Shia community centres/assembly halls or "Matams". There are about 300 Sunni mosques and more than 1000 Shia mosques and assembly halls.

The charity funds (Sandok Khayri) represent one of the excellent examples of NGOs in Bahrain. The government failed to support poorer sections of the society due to the lack of a welfare system. The affected sections of society turned to each other for solidarity and support. Their number rose from 6 in 1993 to 41 at the end of 1994. The mushrooming of their number reflects the strength of social solidarity amongst the people and their speedy response to the failure of the State. The government allowed their growth to release itself from the burden of supporting the poorer sections, but in 1998 it moved to tighten control and their activities. The government is expected to further interfere in the activities of these NGOs and may even attempt a crackdown.

These social centres are not free from governmental control. The Labour and Social Affairs Minister is empowered by Law No. 21/1989 to dissolve any club or society, to attend any meeting, to demand permission for any function performed by the association and punish any person objecting orders.

In February 1984, the Labour Minister ordered the closure of the (Shia) Islamic Enlightenment Society and its three schools. Within a year of this closure, at least three other libraries (with teaching services) were closed down by the authorities. This followed the arrest of members of the Society by the security forces. Closing down the Islamic Enlightenment Society has further alienated the Shia population who feels they

are severely targeted by the State. Virtually all NGOs are controlled by the State through various means. However, The Bahraini Lawyers Society, Al-Oroba Club and a few others retained their semi-autonomy and as a result have suffered from intervention by the government.

On 1 February 1998, the President of Bahrain Lawyers Society, Dr. Abbas Helal was interrogated by Interior Ministry officials about a seminar organised by the Society on 14 January 1998, during which the pro-democracy figure Dr. Monira Fakhroo mildly criticised the government. On 4 March 1998, the government replaced the elected board of the society with a new board headed by a member of the ruling family. Following external pressure, the government retreated a year later and allowed an elected executive committee to run the Lawyers' Society. On 2 April 1998, the government prevented its own ambassador to France, and ex-minister, Dr. Ali Fakhroo, from delivering giving a lecture at Al-Oroba Club (scheduled for 20 May 1998) in Manama about the responsibilities of citizenship.

On 14 September 1997, An-Nahda Women Association was holding a meeting to discuss details of the commemoration of the late national figure Ms Aziza Al-Bassam, when security officers stormed the Association and brought the meeting to a halt. The participants were also summoned for interrogation the next day. On the next day, executive members were threatened that if any activity takes place, the interior ministry will hold them responsible. They were also banned from publishing anything in press or in booklets.

Since 1994, mosques and community centres had been ransacked and desecrated. At least 50 Shia mosques and community centres had suffered extensive damages and several of them were, and remained, shut down since 1994.

Few days before the death of the late Amir, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, he issued a decree banning the use of loud-speakers in mosques and community centres without prior permission. On 6 March 1999, the Amir died and the law was by-passed by the government, since banning the loud-speaker would have meant the banning of ceremonies to be organised for commemorating the death of the Amir. However, it is expected that the government would enforce the ban at a later stage.

Collective punishment: Between 1994 and 1999, at least a dozen of villages were subjected to collective punishment. In March 1995, the village of Nuweidrate was encircled, all people were prevented from leaving the area and a house-by-house search was conducted and each family was intimidated. The contents of the houses were smashed many valuables were taken away by the security forces. The same practice was repeated in Sanabis (several times), Daih, Karranah, Jannosan, Bilad al-Qadim, Sitra, Duraz, and several other areas. After the release of the pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Al-Jamri, on 8 July 1999, the entire village of Bani Jamra was put under siege and contin-

ues to be so until the writing of this report.

Epilogue: The death of the late Amir on 6 March 1999 and the accession of his eldest son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa was hoped to be an opportunity for a new page in Bahrain's troubled history. Indeed, the new Amir did state his mind in which most of the people assumed that a "new era" was about to start. He stated several times that he does not intend to discriminate amongst citizens and that reforms were underway. The people waited for three months (the mourning period) to see what types of changes are forthcoming. To the disappointment of all, the same cabinet and prime minister were retained, the security forces were re-deployed in the residential areas, and the same iron-fist policies were left in place.

During this period, at least 32 people were forcibly exiled. Several women (Karimah Hasan Al-Mosawi, Ramlah Mohammed Hassan, Layla Khalil Dasht) who attempted to hand in a petition to the Amir were detained for one day, beaten-up and threatened of grave consequences if they attempted to come near the Amir Palace again. On 14 June 1999, the group of women then attempted to hire a coach from a Al-Nussir Agency in an attempt to drive their way to the Amiri Court to submit their petition. The security forces attacked the Al-Nussir agency, closed it down for a month and arrested its owner.

On 9 June, Dr. Sabeeka Al-Najjar was prevented from delivering a lecture in the Al-Oroba Club and on 8 August, the security forces attacked the offices of the General Committee of Bahraini Workers damaging many of their contents and confiscating some of the documents and folders. The offices of all members of the executive committee were also broken into and their papers were scattered around. The personal computers were played with and all rooms and halls witnessed the savageness of the mercenary forces. The attack on the Adleya-based offices was considered to be a warning to the executive committee, which had been calling for the establishment of a trade union.

The pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Al-Jamri was taken to the State Security court and after four sessions, all of which lasted less than two hours, he was sentenced on 7 July to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of \$15m. A day later, he was forced to appear on TV to read a statement of apology in front of senior members of the ruling family. He was then placed under virtual house arrest and the entire area of Bani Jamra has been put under siege since then. Sheikh Al-Jamri is suffering from extreme pain in his left ear as a result of the torture he received in his solitary confinement of more than three year, but has been prevented from receiving medical treatment.

Since the middle of July 1999, there has been marked increase in the detentions of teenagers from many parts of the country. Torture has not been reduced despite the fact that on 4 August 1999 the government announced its decision to withdraw its reservation on Article 20 of the Convention Against Torture (CAT)./END/