

BAHRAIN

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

Political Stalemate

The Amir's bandwagon comes to halt

Now that the political process in the country has come to a halt, the situation has become prone to unlimited number of eventualities. The most unlikely outcome will be the stability of a regime that is intent of continuing its flagrant violation of its own emergency laws let alone international norms and conventions.

After more than a year since he assumed the role of the ruler of Bahrain following the demise of his father, Sheikh Hamads programme has been shown to be void of real initiatives to deal with the chronic political problems.

His uncle, the prime minister has clearly outmanoeuvred him in a spectacular move early in his career. Apparently, the new Amir has agreed to leave the management of the internal situation in the hands of his uncle, while keeping to himself foreign and defence affairs. The prime minister, assisted by people like Ian Henderson and a handful of anti-reform hard-liners went ahead with their iron-fist policies against the inhabitants of the island. They have ruled out any compromise and chosen to go all the way in their quest to crush the opposition.

The Amir shrugged off all suggestions that he moved against the evil intentions of his uncle. It is said that there is a handful of those who have political agenda but are too weak to face the veteran prime minister.

One year on and the situation remains as bleak as ever. The Amir has undertaken several initiatives in the opposite directions. He has instituted a more severe form of "Khalifanisation" of the country and installed several members of the ruling family in key posts. It is now agreed amongst the members of the Al Khalifa that the Ambassadors in important capitals all come from the Al Khalifa family. Only the ruling family must be made aware of what goes on between the embassies in these capitals and the officials of that country.

Matters relating to property ownership, arms transfers and diplomatic initiatives must be confined to the ranks of the Al Khalifa. The appointment of women in

important portfolios was confined to members of the Al Khalifa including the one who was appointed Ambassador to France. To the outside world the propaganda machine of the regime presented half the truth; that women have gained high posts, not mentioning that the lucky ones were all from the ruling family.

The regime went further. The country has been divided into four districts and members from the ruling family have been appointed governors. So far Muharraq, Manama and the Northern district have been allocated a governor, all the three from the Al Khalifa and all are security officers. The Amir also appointed one of his cousins, Khalid bin Mohammed bin Salman Al Khalifa a deputy minister of the interior for security affairs. He had earlier been appointed to share the position Ian Henderson but it now seems that the appointment has been reversed, and Henderson is back as the chief of SIS.

In these circumstances it is difficult to imagine how the situation could progress from here. The security forces have been on the rampage for the past five years and no efforts are made to curtail their activities. They receive their orders from the prime minister who has given them a free hand to deal with the disturbances. Although the government has signed the Convention Against Torture (CAT) they have not lived up to their obligation in line with this treaty. Not a single person from the rank and file of the security forces has ever been brought to justice or made to account for his crimes against the Bahraini detainees. The human rights committee which was called for by the Amir has proved to be a mouth piece for the government and has failed to offer any assistance to the victims of torture and arbitrary arrests. In fact its members were ordered to go to Geneva and work as agents for the government.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic follies of the regime has been the rearrest on 17 March of Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain one hour after releasing him following a

court case that found nothing tangible against him. Last month the 47 years-old political activist who had been in jail for more than four years was temporarily released after a successful appeal against his continued detention.

The judge of the State Security Court ordered his release since the authorities had given no reason for his arrest for more than 4 years. It is believed that Mr. Hussain may be held for another three years in accordance with the draconian State Security Law. The UN Human Rights Commission which is holding its annual session in Geneva listened to interventions about the case of Bahrain with regards to violation of human rights under various categories.

The government has dispatched the biggest team to defend it in Geneva several members of the security service some of whom are notorious torturers. In doing so, the government is banking on the support of representatives of friendly countries. It had earlier hosted a member of the UN Sub Commission for Human Rights and afforded her the treatment of heads of state. The aim is to win the support of as many individuals as possible especially those with financial needs.

The opposition has however succeeded in presenting a more balanced picture of the situation in the country and has been targeted by members of the official delegation for abuse and hostile propaganda.

It is now crystal clear that a new phase of struggle is about to begin. The government has lost golden opportunities that have been available to it ever since the last Amir died. It is clear that there is no interest within the political hierarchy in pursuing the path of dialogue and political reform. It is doing so at its perils.

The people of Bahrain are clear in their demands and are unlikely to compromise them. The onus is thus on the government to undertake a serious initiative to pre-empt political explosion on the scale that it witnessed five years ago. Is there anyone out there to bring the message home to Al Khalifa?

Bahrain case at the UN

The UN Commission on Human Rights, 56th session, listened to an intervention delivered on 29 March by Dr. Charles Grave of Interfaith International.

The UN Commission debated the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the world by hearing statements by representatives of States and non-governmental organisations. Speakers decried human rights violations in many countries and urged the Commission to continue to adopt resolutions on countries, which violated fundamental freedoms. Dr. Grave stated that "The human rights situation in Bahrain was worrying, including long and administrative detentions." His intervention included the following text:

"Mr. Chairman, the situation in Bahrain continues to preoccupy our organisation. The latest information received indicates that on 25 March this year the Ministry of the Interior released 24 citizens held in custody, including Mr. Omran Hussain Omran, Sheikh Mohammed al-Rayyash and Mr. Ibrahim Hassan Jassim, all of whom had been held in administrative detention for more than four years.

The case of Mr. Jassim illustrates the sad situation of violation of human rights in Bahrain. He was detained in December 1994 and then held for three years without charges. At the completion of his first batch of three years he was released for one night only, then taken back into prison for under two and a half years detention.

Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rayyash was detained in December 1995 and was subjected to various forms of torture. His only crime seems to have been leading prayers in a mosque which the Ministry of Interior wished to control because of certain persons who prayed inside it. Sheikh spoke against the governments action against places of worship, and as a result he ended up in administrative detention for more than four years.

According to information received at the international Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) another detainee in Bahrain the pro-democracy leader Abdul Wahab Hussain, was released from prison in Bahrain, on 17 March this year, having spent already three years in detention for his activities. On 14 March a High Court judge ordered his release, but only a few hours after being release, he was again imprisoned apparently for another period of three years, in accordance with the 1974 State Security Law which allows for maximum administrative detention of three years according to information received by OMCT, Mr. Hussain was pressured by the security officers to sign a statement apologising for his actions and to promise not to undertake any further act calling for political reforms.

Mr. Chairman, we note that the visit to Bahrain of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention which was to have taken place in October last year has again been delayed, upon the request of the

Bahrain authorities, until 2001. On the other hand Mr. Chairman, irregular detentions continue to exist in Bahrain, and our organisation supports a speedy and thorough visit of the Working Group to Bahrain as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Chairman."

No rights for workers

A court ruled last Saturday that more than 200 Bahraini employees of Gulf Air have no rights for compensation. The employees were dismissed in an arbitrary manner without prior consultation or representation. Bahrainis are denied their right for trade unions and have no protection under the unconstitutional law imposed on the country. The same court had earlier banned local press from publishing anything about the case. Ali Saleh, a columnist in the daily Akhbar al-Khaleej enquired why had such a ban been imposed.

The right to unionise has been confiscated by the Al-Khalifa government since the late 1950s. When Bahraini demanded to have their elected trade unions in the early 1970s, they were crushed mercilessly. The government created a powerless committee as a window-dressing. However, even this committee was subjected to restriction and repression. Late last year, the offices of the committee were raided by the security forces and many of its files and equipment were taken away for investigation.

No participation

The General Committee of Bahraini Workers stated that it is not prepared to participate in the High Council for Vocational Training. The move came as a protest against the intervention of the Labour Ministry in the affairs of the Committee. The Committee is denied any proper capability because the government bans labour unions. The aim of the government has always been to use the Committee as a rubber stamp and as a fictitious showcase outside Bahrain. Members of the Committee are refusing the degrading treatment they are receiving from the tribal dictatorship.

Pseudo-names exposed

Pursuing its new approach for misinformation, the intelligence department recruited several Arab people in the press community in London. These (Egyptians, Iraqis and Palestinians amongst others) have been paid to write letters and articles with pseudo-names to support the dictatorial government. One such pseudo-name that appeared regularly is "Hussain Shaaban Abdul Hussain".

This pseudo-name is similar to that of Dr. Abdul Hussain Shaaban, the head of the Arab Human Rights Organisation in London. Dr. Shaaban published a statement clarifying that the pseudo-name is not

related to him and enquired about the true identity of this person. The case of the Bahraini people is so strong that mercenaries of all types have failed in their endeavours.

Racism probed

The Geneva-based UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination questioned the torturer Abdulaziz Attiat Allah Al-Khalifa about his family's discrimination against the people of Bahrain. The UN Committee considered the submission of the Al-Khalifa government, which is 8 years behind schedule, as lacking any evidence of implementation. The Al-Khalifa delegation composed of informers working for the interior ministry, such as Salman Al-Zayyani.

Bahrain ratified the anti-discrimination treaty in 1990 but the Al-Khalifa government never submitted any report before this year. Abdulaziz Al-Khalifa said his government lacked human resources to produce the reports. He was questioned why are top positions in Bahrain are reserved for the Al-Khalifa family. He failed to answer this and other questions relating to his family's discrimination against several sections of Bahrain's society, and the lack of any evidence that discrimination does not exist in Bahrain. He was told to bring evidence to show how the clauses of the treaty are implemented in Bahrain.

Attempting to cover-up his failure, the torturer ordered one of his accompanying informers to write an article in Al-Ayyam of 23 March claiming that the Al-Khalifa were given a clean bill of health by the UN committee.

Unlimited greed

Meanwhile, in Bahrain, the Al-Khalifas were continuing their onslaught on public properties and country's wealth. Bulldozers in Duraz started removing tonnes of sand that are transported to Jeddah Island which had been confiscated by the prime minister over a decade ago. Most Bahrain's islands are confiscated by senior members of Al-Khalifa family for selfish exploitation. The bulldozers are supposedly constructing headquarters for Abdul Rahman bin Sagher Al-Khalifa (a security officer) who was appointed as a "governor" of the Northern region.

Moreover, local papers said that a house that was occupied by Isa bin Ali Al-Khalifa (who ruthlessly ruled Bahrain between 1869 - 1923) will be converted into a palace and the surrounding people and properties will be removed to make way for this useless project.

The aim is to create an extra palace in memory of a person who had oppressed the nation. The people of Bahrain are wondering about the reason behind the recent upsurge in greediness and abuse of wealth and power that can not be rationally explained.

Feudalism in the 3rd Millennium

The clock was further turned back in Bahrain with the announcement that another member of the Al-Khalifa ruling family (who is also a security officer) had been appointed a "governor" for the Northern region. The Al-Khalifa family divided the country into four regions in 1996 and up until today they appointed three of their number as "governors". The three Al-Khalifas are all security officers who had been responsible for oppression and repression.

Abdul Rahman bin Sagher Al-Khalifa was appointed as a "governor" for the Northern region, and at the same time bulldozers were put in action for constructing a governor's headquarters in Duraz.

Before 1923, members of the Al-Khalifa family distributed Bahrain amongst themselves in the form of "estates". Each Al-Khalifa member used to subjugate the people in his own way as he wished. Bahrainis had hoped that the 21st century would have a reforming effect on the Al-Khalifa family, but all indications are not yet positive.

Another career development was announced for Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, who in 1998 was made an acting head of the intelligence department. The title of "acting head" was embarrassing for Al-Khalifa when visiting another country and hence another title was given to him on 22 March "Assistant Under-secretary of the Interior Ministry for Security". Ian Henderson and Thomas Bryan remain in charge of the day-to-day operations of the oppressive security and intelligence service (SIS).

The government's newspapers stated on 23 March that the "Amir, who together with Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, was visiting the Special Security Unit at Safra, praised Public Security efforts to safeguard the lives and property of citizens and residents in Bahrain." The Amir said "Bahrain is a country where the rule of law is paramount and national security is a top priority." The Amir also praised the role of the Premier and Interior Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Khalifa in directing security efforts." Papers went on to say: "On arrival at the ceremony, the Amir and Premier were received by the Interior Minister, Ministry Under-Secretary Major General Shaikh Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Under-Secretary for Immigration and Passports Shaikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Under-Secretary for Security Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed bin Salman Al Khalifa and other top officials. Also present were senior Ruling Family members, the Shura Council chairman and members, civil and military officials and guests."

Bahrain in the 3rd Millennium has therefore been turned back to feudalism with total disregard to aspirations of Bahrainis

and in a way that contradicts all notions of human development and modernity.

OMCT on Bahrain

Date: 22/03/2000

RE: Case BHR 060300.1 - Release and re-arrest

Case BHR 060300.1

Follow-up to Case BHR 060300

Geneva, 22nd March 2000

The International Secretariat of OMCT requests your URGENT intervention in the following situation in Bahrain.

Brief description of the situation

The International Secretariat of OMCT has received new information from BHRO stating that Abdul-Wahab Hussain was arrested on 17th March 2000 after spending an hour at home after his release earlier that evening at 9:30pm, following an order from the High Court of Appeal to release him on 14th March 2000. According to his brother, Ibrahim Hussain, "He spent around one hour at home before police took him back. They said they wanted to complete arrangements for his release." He further added that the police promised to release Abdul-Wahab after the Moslem Eid al-Adha feast, which officially ends on Sunday.

According to the information received, Abdul Wahab Hussain remains in detention and the SIS is threatening his family with the detention of Abdul Wahab for another three years in accordance with the 1974 State Security Law, which allows for a maximum administrative detention of three years, a law which in itself falls short of International standards for a fair trial.

Previously, on 29th February 2000, Abdul Wahab Hussain had appeared before the State Security Court in a hearing to consider a complaint filed by his defence lawyer. The complaint was based on the fact that Mr. Hussain has been in detention for more than three years (since 22nd January 1996) which is the maximum period of administrative detention affirmed in the 1974 State Security Act.

The hearing was postponed until 14th March 2000. Furthermore, according to the information received, earlier, Mr. Hussain was put under pressure by three SIS officers, Adel Flaifel and two British officers, to sign a statement apologizing for his actions and undertaking not to carry out acts calling for political reform, or incite others to do so, and not to partake in any public speaking, including religious sermons. If this was signed he would be pardoned by the Amir. However, Mr. Abdul-Wahab Hussain refused to sign the pre-prepared statement.

The International Secretariat of OMCT is gravely concerned by the prolonged detention of Abdul-Wahab Hussain. OMCT is preoccupied by the fact that there is no guarantee to a fair and impartial trial from the State Security Court. Also, that his detention is in direct contradiction with

Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

Requested Action

Please write to the Bahrain authorities urging that they :

i. order the immediate release of Abdul-Wahab Hussain;

ii. carry out a full and impartial investigation into this alleged arbitrary detentions, ill-treatment and alleged threats to Abdul-Wahab Hussain and his family, in order to identify those responsible, bring them to trial and apply the penal, civil and/or administrative sanctions provided by law; iii. put an immediate end to the use of arbitrary detention of people by the police and abrogate 1974 State Security Law and all national laws which are not in compliance with international human rights standards.

iv. guarantee the respect of human rights and the fundamental freedoms throughout the country in accordance with national laws and international human rights standards.

Addresses: His Highness Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifa, Office of His Highness the Amir, P.O. Box 555, The Amiri Court, Rifa'a Palace, Bahrain. Fax: +973 668884. Telex : 8666 Qasar BN; 8500 Qasar BN

His Excellency Al-Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister,

P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain. Telex : 9336 PROM BN or 7889 PMPO BN. FAX: + 973 533033.

His Excellency Al-Shaikh Mohammed Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa,

Minister of Interior, P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain.

Fax : + 973 276765 or 290526 or 754303. Telex : 9572 PSMKT BN OR 8333 ALAMAN BN

Geneva, 22nd March 2000

Abdul Wahab Hussain back in detention

The re-detention of the pro-democracy figure Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain one hour after his release (on 17 March) from more than four years in detention stunned political observers who thought that the Al-Khalifa regime was reforming itself. The interior ministry claimed at first that they had not "completed the arrangements for his release". Such a statement was aimed at deflecting attention and confusing the situation. Indeed, the deputy of the information ministry (a member of the ruling family) was quoted by a foreign journalist (who had enquired about Mr. Hussain) saying "we do not and do not care who Mr. Hussain is".

This inhuman attitude towards the people of Bahrain is nothing but a manifestation of a backward mentality that has failed to understand the political world of today. Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain was detained in January 1996 under the provisions of the

unconstitutional State Security Court. This law allows the Al-Khalifa family to detain Bahrainis for three years without charges or trial. Mr. Hussain and his colleagues have been in detention for more than four years. A source in the interior ministry stated to the relatives of Mr. Hussein on 20 March that the "highest State authorities decided that Abdul Wahab will be re-detained under a renewed order as per the state Security Court." Such a statement contradicts what the ministry had informed the family of Mr. Hussain last Friday upon his re-detention.

The Al-Khalifa family is busy these days inviting some individuals who might be used as part the PR campaign for glorifying their dictatorship. One of the experts of the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission, Ms. Halima Embarak Warzazi (a Moroccan) was invited to visit Bahrain for this purpose. Ms. Warzazi was accused in August 1997 of colliding with the regime for lobbying against the passing of the historic resolution condemning the atrocities and human rights abuses committed in Bahrain.

Stereotype excuses

Stagnation in Bahrain's life is far reaching. Political and economically, Bahrain is smothered by a mentality that does not identify with today's world. The Crown Prince who visited London earlier this month was quoted by a personality who met with him that there are Bahrainis who want to establish "an Islamic republic" and this is why his family is slow on reforms.

The Al-Khalifa family has used this pretext to win support from Western powers, especially the UK and US. The people of Bahrain demand their human rights and call for the restoration of their constitution. The Committee for Popular Petition (CPP) is made up of representatives of all sections and trends in Bahrain society and has been denied any opportunity to present the case of Bahrain to the Amir. Instead, the Al-Khalifa family plundered the nation's wealth on importing thousands of mercenaries; constructing extra jails (more than hospitals in Bahrain); conducting a racist campaign against a section of Bahrain society in a bid to satisfy its hate-based policies; and by all this hoping to kill the aspirations of Bahrainis for a better future. No sound politician with a grasp of the basics of Bahrain society could buy the story of the Al-Khalifa anymore.

Business meeting

Attempting to inject some optimism in the economy, the Amir sent invitations to leading business people to attend a meeting with him on 13 March. The agenda of the meeting includes presentations by ministries responsible for major projects. The Housing and Municipalities Ministry will present its plan for developing "Hawar islands" and will invite the businessmen to

inject their money into the project. However this is a political project rather than an economic one. The ruling family continues to import mercenaries from the deserts of Syria, Jordan and Arabia. These mercenaries are granted Bahraini citizenship and the falsified passports state that these were born in "Hawar islands".

Few years ago, the late Amir, Sheikh Isa Al-Khalifa met with the business community to ask them why had they withheld their money. The businessmen responded that many Al-Khalifa individuals owe them money and these are immune from the legal system; that these Al-Khalifas control the fate of business people, such as issuing visas and commercial licences; and that they are asked to venture their money in a hopeless game. The then Amir returned some of the money owed to some of the businessmen and said to them he could not help them any more. The new Amir has had one year in power and for the last year the powers of Al-Khalifas have been extended and all major State appointments are now going to them only. Business is more controlled by those enterprises that have Al Khalifa "sleeping & earning" partners. May be in his next visit the Amir or the Crown Prince will say to British officials that the Bahraini businessmen wanted to "establish an Islamic republic" and that is why the Al-Khalifa were slow to respond to their demands.

Failing to understand basics of modernity

The Crown Prince ended his trip to the UK this week and returned to Bahrain. Before his return to Bahrain he met with officials and some journalists. He failed to answer why had the Amir refused to meet with the delegation from the Committee for Popular Petition. It was also puzzling that the Al-Khalifa family can not yet understand that the people of Bahrain demand their constitutional rights, no less and no more. While Bahraini citizens are denied their basic rights, the Al-Khalifa continue their process for further domination of all aspects of public life. As stated by the BFM, the Al-Khalifa appointed one of their number to be the ambassador in the UAE. Further appointments of Al-Khalifa persons are expected to be announced in the near future. This is part of the new policy for Khalifanising the State administration.

No change of policy

The 6th of March marks the first anniversary for the new Amir, Sheikh Hamad Al-Khalifa. When he assumed power last year he declared that his era would be an "era of change." On 1 March, the crown prince, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa was quoted by Al-Hayat newspaper on 1 March saying: "if they (leaders of the opposition abroad) return to Bahrain, they will be tried like their previous col-

leagues". In a meeting he held with a few people he also repeated similar statements and said that democracy is not on the agenda. These statements confirmed how difficult it is for a backward-tribal mentality to modernise itself. While the world moves on, our people are subjected to an ancient type of governance that existed in Arabia before the era of Islam and modernity.

Torture tour

During the month of February, the torturer Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa organised meetings in Karbabad and Manama clubs to advertise for his role as a governor of the Capital. Since 1996 two members of the ruling family were appointed by their family as governors of Manama and Muharraq. The torturer was questioned by some of those who attended the meeting in Karbabad Club "why are the security forces intimidating the citizens and arresting some of those who attend mosques?" The torturer claimed that this was the first time he heard about such things. In another Manama meeting he stated that his role is primarily concerned with "security". This man has personally tortured citizens when he played his role as head of the Investigation Committee that was formed in 1995 to torture those arrested during the years of the uprising.

US Report on Bahrain

The 1999 Country Report on Human Rights Practices released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the U.S. Department of State on February 25, dismissed any doubts regarding the atrocious human rights situation in Bahrain. In regard to the State Security Law the Report states that "in practice, in matters regarding arrest, detention, or exile, the 1974 State Security Act takes precedence". It goes on to explain "Government security forces used the State Security Act during the year to detain persons deemed to be engaging in antigovernment activities, including persons who attempted to exercise their rights of free speech, assembly, and association, or other rights".

Crown prince visits the UK

The Bahraini crown prince Shaikh Salman Bin Hamad Al Khalifa arrived Saturday, 26 February, on an official visit of several days to the UK. It was announced that the crown prince was accompanied by a senior delegation from the ruling Al-Khalifa family. The delegation will hold talks with senior British government officials and will attend the 10th meeting of the Bahrain-British joint military committee.

The UK's ethical policy has been criticised because regimes like the one in Bahrain continues to receive all kinds of assistance without real improvement in issues relating to human rights and democracy. Military sales to Bahrain ought to be linked to respect of basic rights.