

Voice of

# BAHRAIN

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

## Domestic affairs and the regional agenda

As the leaders of the Gulf countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) prepared for their "consultation" summit in the Omani capital, Muscat things seemed to be moving in an unexpected direction. Whether by design or coincidence, the issue of political reforms appeared on the stage, albeit often in disguise. The minister of information of the host country, Oman, announced that the members of the next Shura council would be elected, and none would be appointed. This is a significant step in the right direction. Sultan Qaboos has been known for his daring policies, and has been one of the few leaders in the Gulf to introduce political reforms before being forced to by his citizens. He has maintained a steady pace in a region notorious for its political stagnation. Perhaps, this characteristic is one of the most important factors that made the Gulf a belligerent area. The lack of political will among the leaders has rendered the Gulf powerless and susceptible to volatility. When Abdul Aziz Al Rawwas, the Omani minister, announced the move, it wasn't totally unexpected. The Sultan has always left the door open for development ever since he assumed his post following a bloodless coup against his father in 1970. However, he retains one of the most ruthless security apparatus in the region. He used it against alleged "would be" saboteurs five years ago.

Oman's foreign minister, known for his calm and quiet nature, also became extrovert. He spoke openly to the press about the various problems facing his country and the Gulf in general in more open language. Whether this means anything as far as the cause of democracy and human rights are concerned is not yet clear. It may mean that those leaders have suddenly become aware of the dangers to their reputation if they continued their centuries-old policies of inaction and intolerance. It may also imply that the recent concern shown by certain international human rights organisations in the affairs of the region is being taken seriously. Of particular interest here is the recent report by Amnesty International about the human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia. The report caught leaders of

the vast desert kingdom unawares. Although the first official reaction was dismissive of the report and its findings, the Crown Prince, Abdulla bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, adopted a different approach. He asked for investigations into the allegations of the report, a step that has, hitherto, remained unthinkable.

The Gulf rulers have often dismissed any critique of their systems as foreign-inspired and baseless. It now seems that a different attitude may become the order of the day. The Saudi Government went further this time. Two human rights committees were to be formed, an official and an independent. This is certainly a divergence from the ancient policies of the kingdom and the rest of the GCC countries. Whether these committees were meant to be a genuine expression of concern on the part of the authorities or merely a tactical move to prevent further accusations is not clear. Whatever the case, the new approach to the issues of human rights and democracy is significant. Bahrain, however, has opted to remain defiant.

The Al Khalifa government has refused to heed the calls for political reforms and insisted on the use of force to quell the popular movement calling for the reinstatement of the Constitution. In Geneva, the United Nations Human Rights Commission during its 56th session became a battleground between human rights activists, both international and Bahraini, and its delegations. Unfortunately to the government, the head of the official Bahraini delegation was discovered to be a member of the torture committee that was formed in the days after the eruption of the popular uprising in 1994. A daily Swiss newspaper (i.e. *Courier* - 15 April) carried an article carrying his picture in one of the sessions and questioned the legality of the presence of a torturer in a meeting whose main purpose is to stop human rights abuses. More personnel of the torture machine are likely to be exposed in line with Henderson and Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa.

The interest expressed by human rights activists in the Gulf is beginning to make the point. Indeed, the endemic refusal to

accept the rule of law, democracy and human rights continues to be the main obstacle to reforms. And as the GCC leaders were preparing for their Muscat summit the stakes were running high as the issues of democracy and human rights were being bypassed.

Over the past fifty years the wealth of the Gulf region has made it almost impossible for any concerned body to call for a serious change in the political system. Today, however, the possibility of attracting attention to the plight of the Gulf people seems less remote. The challenge to the Gulf rulers is to discuss the form of government they like to see in their countries. They have to decide which form of government is more appropriate for long term stability and development. When the domestic policies become part of the regional concern, the day will have come for improvement of the political environment. To many, this will represent a breakthrough in the search for a more pluralistic government and abandonment of ancient policies that has made the Gulf one of the unstable places in the world.

The events of the past few years have shown beyond any doubt that the GCC rulers cannot live in seclusion. Their newly-forged cordial relations with Iran is a stabilising factor, but it has removed one of the fundamental justifications for the lack of democracy. They have presented alleged threats from Iran as the main obstacles to political openness. Now that this perceived threat has subsided, the time has now come for serious reappraisal of the situation.

The GCC rulers have so far refrained from addressing their domestic problems in a systematic way, and when they decide to make domestic policy a regional concern, the road will have opened for a more stable region. It is unreasonable for a political alliance to continue with different domestic agenda, as is the situation in the Gulf. It is therefore necessary for the GCC rulers to discuss ways of implementing international norms and conventions with a view to adapting them within their domestic laws. Political participation can lead to a less polarised society.

## Distributing honours on British intelligence officers

While the activities at the UN Human Rights Commission continued, the ruling Al-Khalifa family had its own agenda. It despatched one of its number, the torturer Abdul Aziz Attiat-Allah Al-Khalifa and at the same time the Amir presented the British officers controlling the intelligence services and interior ministry with the highest tribal honours. Several names were honoured by the Al-Khalifa including (names are re-translated from Arabic and hence may have different spelling): Ian Henderson, Raymond Michael Mather Lou, N. C. Raffle, J. Stone, Fernon Barry Wamsley, A. B. McInt, Donald Bryan, Samuel B. Ishaq, James Windsor, and David Darby. The honouring of these intelligence and interior ministry officers by the Al-Khalifa shows that they are intent on continuing to repress the citizens of Bahrain.

An article written by Mr. Ahmed Al-Thawadi on 10 April in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* said that the honours showered by the ruling family on the British officers defines how distant this family is from the people of Bahrain.

## Acquitted, not released

The case of seven citizens from Shakhora confirm the arbitrariness of the interior ministry and the extent of its violation of human rights. Ali Mulla Mohammed Al-Madhi, Osama Saeed, Abdul Jalil Mohammed Kadhim, Aqil Ali, Seyyed Mohammed Jaffer, Abbas Salman, Seyyed Yasir Marhoon, have spent more than two years in administrative detention. They were brought before the State Security Court 14 times. During these fourteen times, the interior ministry accused them with three different charges/cases. The court acquitted them on all charges during all the sessions. However, the interior ministry refused to release them.

## Feudalism smothers politics

The State of Bahrain under the present Al-Khalifa leadership continues to politically march backward. The year 2000 has been marked with reversals in the political process on several fronts. It is now twenty-five years since the late Amir had decided to abolish the parliament and suspend key articles of the constitution that specifies the functioning of a political system with political rights for citizens, independent judiciary and freedom of conscience. The Al-Khalifa rulers have respected non of these provisions and nothing seems to be changing.

The Amir issued a decree re-organising the Ministry of Justice, and in this decree he dashed all hopes for legal reforms. The judges were firmly brought under the control of the justice minister. It is expected that the same Al-Khalifa and short-term judges recruited from Egypt on 2-year con-

tracts will staff the forthcoming Supreme Council of Judiciary. These are the same individuals who arbitrarily sentenced the citizens of Bahrain to long terms of imprisonment without a just due process. The State Security Court and the State Security Law continue to smother the political life of Bahrain and there is no intention to repeal these unconstitutional instruments.

The prime minister is more concerned with enlarging his unfair trading practices and in competing with the Amir and crown prince. Because he Amir visited the island of Muharraq, the prime minister paid a visit (accompanied by his son the transport minister) on 26 April to woo the residents of Muharraq. The competition to win Muharraq has been increasing, following announcement of the Amir that he decided to demolish an old quarter in the city and to build a palace for his son, the crown prince, to receive visitors of the residents of Muharraq.

## Amir has no agenda for political reforms

The pro-democracy Bahraini personality, Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf published an important article in the journal "Civil Society", Volume 9, Issue 100, April 2000, titled "The New Amir of Bahrain: Marching Sideways". Dr. Khalaf analysed the succession of Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa to the throne on 6 March 1999 and how the Amir started his rule by say that Bahrain "is entering an era of change for the better in all areas...". The Amir manifesto solemnly added that "at the top [of my] priorities are national unity and internal security, through the solidarity of all Bahrain citizens, without discrimination, whatever their origin or creed". Dr. Khalaf reviewed some of the Amir's attempts to carry out the tasks he set for himself and his reign. Dr. Khalaf also assessed aspects of the political environment within which the Amir treads. The account confirms that there are some straws in the wind but not enough to indicate that a serious political shift is in the making.

Dr. Khalaf stated "Hamad spent most of his energies on consolidating his reign. To the dismay of his opponents, all his moves have been within the confines of the ancien régime. He has concentrated on mobilizing the same external and internal resources of legitimacy that supported his father's reign. These did not include, at least not since 1975, the constitution and rights and obligations it sets for the ruler and the ruled. During the past year, one can identify the following areas with which the Amir has been preoccupied: .. the ruling family, the tribal and clerical establishment, and human rights issues.

Dr. Khalaf concluded his essay by saying: "Hamad's record during the year seems modest and uninspiring. Mistakenly, probably, he has raised expectations to levels that he could not possibly carry through without confronting his powerful uncle.

He attempted to cover a vast area without securing, among other things, a popular base of support for his moves. To do so he needed to take the bull by its horn, as it were.

Hamad ruled out any meeting with members of the PPC, let alone initiating a meaningful political dialogue, which lead to national reconciliation. Few weeks ago the Amir, following his father's footsteps, refused to receive a letter from the PCC sent to him through one of his newly appointed advisors. Like his father, he has reportedly stated that he, too, does not receive petitions. Ironically, the action of the Amir is within the letter of the constitution. Article 29, specifically states "Any individual can address the public authorities in writing and with his signature. Only duly constituted organizations and corporate bodies shall have the right to address the public authorities collectively". By defining the PPC as not a 'duly constituted organization or a corporate body', the Amir was formally correct, but this is likely to grow into a strategic blunder. The final price of his blunder may be more than just delaying a return to constitutional legitimacy and democracy.

Sheikh Hamad bin Isa has not been idly sitting by during the year. He has concentrated on maintaining the cohesion of his family as well as trying to establish a credible base of authority which can compete, if not completely neutralize, the power base of his uncle, the Prime Minister. The latter, the founder of the modern state according to his official biography, would certainly be happy to turn his nephew into a powerless figurehead of the state. It is too early to judge how viable is the current cohabitation in Bahrain, or to predict its likely outcomes."

## Cheap tricks in Geneva

Samir Rajab, the appointed head of the governmental committee for human rights confirmed that the primary aim of his activities is to defend the government and not the victims of torture and human rights abuse in Bahrain. His confirmation came in a statement he delivered on 19 April before the UN Commission on Human Rights during the 56th annual session being held in Geneva. Mr. Rajab fled the hall directly after delivering the statement and ran away from the non-governmental organisations that wanted to ask him about the nature of the role prescribed for him by the government of Bahrain.

The statement delivered by Mr. Rajab confirmed all what the opposition had said. Opposition's statements revealed last February that this person together with some others, were summoned by the torturer Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa and were ordered to prepare themselves for defending the atrocities of the government before the UN Commission in Geneva.

Bahraini human rights activists in Geneva published the stained records of Mr.

Rajab. The Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Bahrain (CDHRB) stated that "Samir Rajab was used by the government for similar purposes. When the government dissolved the Bahraini Bar Society in 1998, Mr. Rajab was one of those who were appointed by the government to replace the elected executive committee. Because of his services for dictatorship, he was awarded with an appointment in the powerless Shura Council." Samir Rajab was the one who refused to do anything without prior permission from the interior ministry.

The Al-Khalifa ruling family has suffered extensively in Geneva this year. The prime minister sent one of his torturers, Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al-Khalifa, to head the mission for whitewashing the atrocities of the regime. The Swiss newspaper "Le courrier" exposed the presence of this torturer on 15 April. The paper quoted international human rights organisations as well as diplomats saying that the presence of this individual is a sham and an insult to human taste and to human rights since he was himself responsible for torturing Bahrainis. Sending such a person to Geneva to represent his family and the tortures of Bahrain has characterised the real situation in Bahrain. A situation that could not be salvaged by cheap resources employed in a Shura Council or in a government-controlled committee that operates under the auspices of the interior ministry.

## EU representative and UN experts slam Al-Khalifa

The Al-Khalifa family was slammed by UN human rights experts during the 56th meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission being held in Geneva. The Al-Khalifa government had despatched the largest delegation to the Geneva meeting. The latter is made up of security officers representing the torturers in the interior ministry as well as some individuals from the foreign ministry.

Judge Louise Joinet, the chairman of the "UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention" informed the UN meeting about the unacceptable manoeuvres of the Al-Khalifa government. He stated "During the fiftieth session of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva declared that his Government "has also agreed to extend an invitation to the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention for a preparatory visit to Bahrain, the date of which will be fixed in consultation with the Chairman of the Working Group" (see document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/SR.25). Consultations were held between the Group and the Bahraini authorities during the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th and 26th meetings of the session. Initially, the visit was planned for the course of 1999, but it could not be

conducted on account of scheduling difficulties of the Bahraini authorities. On 6 July 1999, the Under-secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain addressed a letter to the Vice-Chairman of the Group, requesting a deferral of the Group's visit to the year 2001. Following consultations during the fifty-first session of the Sub-Commission and the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group, the Group addressed a letter to the Bahraini authorities, requesting its visit to be scheduled during the year 2000. On 30 November 1999, the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva informed the Chairman of the Group that his Government was not prepared to accede to the Group's request, and reiterated that the Group's visit should not take place until the year 2001. Noting that the Government's position had already caused the cancellation of one visit by the Group in 1999 and that further deferrals of the visit would jeopardise the credibility of the Group's activities, the Chairman, on the Group's behalf, informed the authorities that the Group would decline to visit Bahrain in those circumstances."

The declaration made by Judge Joinet means that the Bahraini government (controlled by the Al-Khalifa family) has failed to fulfil its obligation made in front of the UN Sub-Commission in August 1998. It was that obligation which stopped the Sub-Commission from another damning resolution during the 1998 session. This means that next August the Sub-Commission will have to respond to the mischievous Al-Khalifas.

It also transpired that the chairman of the UN Rapporteur on Torture had requested to visit Bahrain and investigate allegations of torture and ill treatment and that the Al-Khalifa government refused to allow such a visit to take place. The European Union took an honourable position when its official statement said "the EU regrets the refusal of the Government of Bahrain to receive the Special Rapporteur on Torture". The Swiss representative (although not a member of the UN but wilds an influential position) called for a mandate to ensure that the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention is allowed a visit to Bahrain.

The people of Bahrain have won another battle against dictatorship on the international scene, but all recognise that the path for human rights and democracy will always be a hard and long one especially as the obstacle to freedom is an ancient mentality that refuses to behave in a humane manner.

## Torturers in Geneva

Mr. Ahmed Al-Haddad, the government's ambassador in Geneva, was caught red-handed stealing pamphlets and articles that were displayed by a human rights organisation during the 56th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. He

was caught on 17 April during his illegal and shameless act of stealing all copies of an article published by the Swiss newspaper "Le Courrier" of 15 April". The article describes the situation in Bahrain and speaks about the torturer Abdul-Aziz Atiatallah Al-Khalifa, who was despatched to Geneva to represent the torturers of Bahrain. The Swiss newspapers reported the implications of a torturer heading the Bahraini delegation at the Commission in Geneva.

Human rights activists reported the theft of Mr. Al-Haddad to the UN officials. A human rights activist stated that Mr. Al-Haddad had been warned that he is allowed to pick one copy only, but the ambassador was so frightened of the truth revealed by the Swiss newspaper that he couldn't resist grabbing all copies and removing them from the distribution desk.

Human rights activists in Geneva organised a seminar on Bahrain inside the UN compounds on 25 April. The documentary film produced by Channel 4 on the role played by the British officer Ian Henderson in repressing Bahrainis became the centre-point of discussion held in one of the halls as part of NGOs activities during the 56th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Four international human rights organisation, FIDH, OMCT, Interfaith International and Nord-Sud sponsored the show. It was attended by scores of delegates and Dr. Charles Grave of Interfaith International chaired the meeting. At the end of the show a debate was opened where both Dr. Grave Mr. Abdul-Nabi Al-Ekry of CDHRB, answered the questions raised by the audience.

## Interventions on Bahrain

The 56th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights continued to hear more interventions about the continued violations of human in Bahrain. "Liberation", OMCT and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) called on the international community to probe the Bahraini regime for its continued abuse of human rights.

Special Rapporteur, Radhika Coomaraswamy, on the Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective, focusing on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the trafficking of women, women's migration and violence against women, which was submitted in accordance with Commission resolution 1997/44. Addendum 1 to the report consists of information reviewed by the Special Rapporteur with respect to various countries that included Bahrain.

Various other Rapporteurs covered Bahrain in their reports including Sir Nigel Rodley on Torture, Mr. Dato Cummerswamy on Independence of Judiciary and Mr. Louis Joinet on arbitrary detention.

Under item 11, violations of human rights including torture, disappearance, extrajudicial killing and detention, several

NGOs highlighted Bahrain in their interventions. Liberation asserted that despite that Bahrain had ratified article 20 of The Convention Against Torture (CAT), torture is still rampant in Bahraini prisons and detentions. The new Amir has is not coming up to expectations. OMCT expressed its deep concern on the human rights situation in Bahrain and recorded sustained and systematic violations of human rights. It urged the Government of Bahrain to allow a speedy and thorough visit by The Working Group on Arbitrary detention (WGAD) to Bahrain. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) stated that while the government asserts that the human rights situation is good, it is actually deteriorating and urged the government to allow the visit of the WGAD quickly.

## OMCT on Bahrain

The International Secretariat of the International Organisation Against Torture issued two urgent actions on Bahrain. It said that "OMCT has been informed by the Bahrain Human Rights Organisation (BHRO) a member of the OMCT network, of the arrest and detention of 23 persons and savage attack on one person in various incidences.

According to the information received, On 22nd March 2000, mercenary forces attacked Karzakk an arbitrarily detained six persons, including a child (see Case BHR 110400.CC)... It is all reported that several attacks and arrests were reported in Sanabis."

Another urgent action by the International Secretariat of OMCT focussed on the detention of children in Bahrain. OMCT recalled that Bahrain "is a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37b) which states that

"The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time." Furthermore, that "No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

OMCT urged the authorities in Bahrain to take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the above-mentioned persons; order their immediate release in the absence of valid legal charges or, if such charges exist, bring them before an impartial and competent tribunal and guarantee their procedural rights at all times; 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; guarantee the respect of human rights and the fundamental freedoms throughout the country in accordance with national laws and international standards, in particular those established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Bahrain."

## Dictatorship condemned

The people of Bahrain commemorated the Day of Ashura on 15 April amid tight security environment imposed by the interior ministry. The security forces had been attempting to impose a regime aiming at the stripping of religious rights enjoyed by the people for the past fourteen centuries.

Following on from the appointment last month of an Al-Khalifa security officer (Abdul Rahman bin Sagher Al-Khalifa) as a governor for the Northern region, several citizens were contacted by the interior ministry and asked to work as "mukhtars". The mukhtar is an appointed individual charged with spying on social activities and acting as a guard (natoor) for the ruling Al-Khalifa family. The interior ministry contacted Sayed Kadhum Al Durazi (a known personality in Duraz) and asked him to become a "mukhtar." This appointment will be detrimental to the reputation of the citizen who knows that the people will be boycotting him the day he announces that he will be working as a "social spy" for the ruling family.

In Muharraq, two religious scholars, Sheikh Talib Shuwaiter and Sheikh Salah Al-Joder, spoke about the wide-spread corruption and bad policies of the government. Sheikh Salah Al-Joder criticised in his Friday sermon (delivered in Othman-bin-Affan Mosque) the recent changes in the judiciary. He slammed the lack of independence of judiciary and how it is controlled by the few for their own interests. A decree issued recently by the Amir distributed all the top positions on members of his family.

On 14 April, the pro-democracy figure, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah wrote an important article in Al-Quds Al-Arabi questioning the logic behind the re-arrest of Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain. He said "this was a mystery to all people who can not understand how the establishment functions and what sort of rationale followed by those who continue to detain pro-democracy leaders." He also questioned why is Sheikh Al-Jamri continues to be under house arrest.

## Books on Bahrain

Graham Fuller and Rend Francke published their important study on the Arab Shia (ISBN 0-312-22178-9). An important chapter on Bahrain revealed the background of the struggle for democracy in Bahrain and how the strategy of the ruling family concentrated on discriminating amongst the Bahraini people for their selfish interests.

Another book was published on Bahrain containing deep historical and socio-political analyses by Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf. The book was titled "Unfinished Business - Contentious Politics and State-Building in Bahrain, ISBN 91-7267-004-5. The focus of the book is the faltering process of nation-building and the role of social forces involved at different phases of the process.

The book illustrates the assertion that

contentious politics in Bahrain have oscillated between two grand strategic options, the ethnic and the national. The unfinished business refers to the role of the Al-Khalifa family, through its domination of the State, in confronting attempts to creating a national identity.

## Falsifying history will backfire on Al-Khalifa

One of Bahrain's religious scholars publicly spoke out against the corruption of the government. Last Friday, Sheikh Talib Shuwaiter of Muharraq criticised (during the Friday prayer sermon) the lavish spending on all types of useless activities that have no value to the struggling people.

It is worth noting that the new Amir has launched major celebrations for Arabian horse-racing. He was quoted last Sunday in Al-Ayyam newspaper saying that "we have preserved the pure breeding of the Arab horse since the creation of the Al-Khalifa Arabian Kingdom in this land three hundred years ago". This erroneous and baseless statement is the first of its kind and indicates that the Al-Khalifa have not yet understood Bahrain or the people of Bahrain. The history of the past 300 years is well-documented and falsification will always fail. In 1982, the Al-Khalifa abandoned a major drive for falsifying the history of Bahrain when it found that historians were about to dig out one of the worst histories of any ruling family in the Gulf.

## More citizens dragged before the SSC

Three Bahraini ladies were dragged before the draconian State Security Court on Saturday 8 April. The ladies are Leeda Ahmed Isa Al-Oreibi, 27-year old from Tobli, Hanan Salman Ahmed Haider, 21-year old from Manama, and Salwa Hassan Ahmed Haider, 35-year old from Daih. The court is presided by a member of the Al-Khalifa family and is staffed by two non-independent Egyptian judges (on 2-year renewable contractual arrangement). The courtroom is located in the militarised village of Jaw where the Al-Khalifa commit most of the human rights abuses under an iron curtain. The three ladies were initially arrested and tortured in 1998 and were then released following a popular uproar regarding the way they were ill-treated and forced to depict acts near the palaces of the Al-Khalifas as part of a show of muscle by the ruling family.

Another group of youths who are in detention are also to be dragged before the unconstitutional court on 8 April. These are Sadiq Qassim, 23, Mohammed Al-Daihi, 22, Qassim Ali Al-Daihi, 23 (both are brothers of the detained personality Sheikh Hussain Al-Daihi), Mohammed Al-Jeser, 33, and Saeed Al-Sheikh, 32. The latter has already appeared before the Al-Khalifa judge in another case.