

Voice of Bahrain

ZK.9.b.14441

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" for Prom

Al Khalifa's rallies:

Cheap practices for a politically-bankrupt system

It would be naive to suggest that inter-Gulf relations could be enhanced to the level of enabling whoever is concerned to declare unity between any two states. There are many impediments to such suggestion that render such a proposal a hollow one. When some members of the Al Khalifa ruling family of Bahrain proposed a unified entity with Qatar, it was treated more as a joke than a serious business. How could a unity between two states be achieved when one of them adopts a policy of mobilizing the masses against the other?

The only interpretation of such proposal is the desire to promote a certain political image at a time of increased internal tension and a tainted international image. But when the political game is reduced to point-scoring the whole political engagement becomes meaningless.

The Bahraini-Qatari relations may not be a representative case, but the relations between the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia or those between Kuwait and Qatar or the collective attitudes among the GCC states are not too cordial. It is therefore unrealistic to suggest any form of unity in the Gulf as long as the present structure of political leadership is in power.

Unity is a result of people's will, and as such, it cannot be imposed from above. It cannot be realized by a sudden official announcement to this effect. Neither can it come about with a royal decree, however strong it may be. Feelings of fraternity and togetherness have to be identified first.

For this to happen, people must be in a position to decide for themselves. This entails a degree of democratic process through which the people can exercise their political power and participate in running their own affairs. Democracy to many of the ruling establishment in the Gulf is an alien culture that must be resisted by all means. Those calling for it are often labelled saboteurs, plotters and even terrorists. The status quo to them is the best that can be hoped for. It is often the internal political isolation that leads a government to seek an outside engagement of one kind or another.

For the Government of Bahrain to adopt two irreconcilable strategies indicate the degree of alienation it feels at home. On the one hand, the Amir has called for the unity with Qatar, even after freezing the Joint High Committee comprising the Crown Princes from the two countries. On the other hand, the government has, for the past two months, been engaged in mobilizing the people against Qatar. Rallies have been organized by the government to obtain "allegiance" from the people for the ruling family through intimidation and threats. Government employees have been asked to sign pledges of "allegiance" and support for the ruling family against Qatar. Anyone who refuses to do so risks harsh reprisals.

It is ironic to hear, in these circumstances, talks of unity and togetherness. At a time when the people are denied their basic rights to freedom and democracy, it is unrealistic to expect serious processes of rapprochement. This is especially the case in the Gulf where the ruling families have developed a taste of everlasting power. Any form of unity presupposes readiness to relinquish some of these powers and accept to be ruled by others. This is simply not on the table in a region where each ruling family has deep-rooted feelings that it owns the both the land and the people. None of the rulers is ready to give up any part of his empire regardless of the consequences. If a dispute on a small uninhabited island could cause two neighbouring countries to get ready for every possible eventuality, how could the governments of these countries be expected to agree to a power-sharing formula?

The talking about unity in such atmosphere seems far-fetched and highly unrealistic. The Gulf Cooperation Council has remained largely ineffective due to the reluctance of each country to give an inch for the sake of the common good. It will remain ineffective as long as the mentalities of these governments remains opposed to the concepts of power-sharing, democracy and political participation.

The GCC has retained a symbolic presence which is often threatened by feuds and factional politics. Even Bahrain has threatened to withdraw from the alliance if the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rules against it in the case of Hawar islands. Previously, Oman and the UAE threatened the same due to their disputes with Saudi Arabia. In these circumstances, unity seems to be unrealistic and unlikely even to be contemplated seriously even by its proponents. Countries which had achieved closer relationships are usually governed by democratic systems, and the people are encouraged to take part in debates relating to their welfare. In the case of the European Union (EU) the member countries have democratic governments and the people are consulted in deciding on the alliance. Referenda are often carried out to determine the tendency of the people, and the wishes determine the course of action to be taken by the government of the day.

The whole GCC countries put together cannot form a strong political entity. They depend on US-led forces to secure their stability. They largely depend on foreign workforce to run the economy. They have one single source of income that produces up to 90 per cent of the revenue. The population of all GCC countries put together does not exceed 20 millions. All these factors render the Gulf countries ineffective especially if they remain fragmented.

It would be great to see unity realised in the Gulf. But no one believes the government of Bahrain when it talks about unity with Qatar. It is a cynical call aimed at creating a political atmosphere for deflecting the aspiration if the people of Bahrain. Already the Al Khalifa family has staged rallies of "loyalties" and preparedness to fight against Qatar. Even the Indian community in Bahrain was not spared. Some 2000 signatures from the Indian community in Bahrain were collected "pledging" loyalty to the Al Khalifa. These cheap practices are to be expected from a politically-bankrupt system that has nothing to share with the people of Bahrain.

New Zealand MPs support pro-democracy movement

More than 130 political and academic personalities from New Zealand submitted a petition to the Amir of Bahrain on 12 September in support of the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain. The petition was signed by several MPs including the deputy to the Prime Minister, Mr. Jim Anderton. The petition stated:

"On the 25th anniversary of the parliamentary process and the relevant constitutional articles, we urge the Government of Bahrain to:

1- Put into practice the whole body of Constitution including the articles that had been suspended by the Amiri decree of 26 August 1975.

2- Repeal all emergency laws especially the 1974 State Security Law and the State Security Court.

3- Release all political prisoners including Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain, member of the Committee of Popular Petition (CPP).

4- Allow the unconditional return of all exiles.

5- Carry out an impartial investigation into cases in custody and all extra-judicial killings.

We believe this is the way forward for Bahrain." The New Zealand personalities delivered the petition to the Palace of the Amir via registered mail.

Freed after ordeal

The three ladies, Hanan Haider, Salwa Haider and Leeda Al-Oreibi, who had been in jail for the past six months were released on 25 September. Their ordeal was exacerbated by the ill-treatment they received at the hands of a person named Mozah Sultan.

Journalists punished

On 24 September, the journalist Hafidh Al-Sheikh was summoned for interrogation by an interrogation judge. The summoning is related to the criticism made by Mr. Al-Sheikh against the spokesman of the ruling family, Abdul Adhim Al-Baboli.

Mr. Al-Sheikh criticized the way Al-Baboli is staining the image of Bahrain by his irresponsible statements, especially the ones he

made after the Gulf Air crash on 23 August. The move to punish Mr. Al-Sheikh is seen as a further sign that the prime minister is intent on suppressing all signs of freedom of speech.

Following the dismissal of the Editor-in-Chief of Akhbar Al-Khalij, the journalist Ali Saleh is facing intimidation and had been told that his contributions may be decreased. The government wants to discourage him from writing anything that relates to the constitutional rights of Bahrainis.

Ordering citizens to rally

The security officer, Abdul Rahman bin Sager Al-Khalifa, who was appointed by his family as a governor of the northern region distributed the following letter on all owners of shops located alongside the Budaya Highway:

((State of Bahrain, Ministry of the Interior, Northern Province, Office of the Governor.

To all concerned:

We are pleased to inform you that His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, the Amir, May God Protect him, will be visiting the Northern Province on 1 October 2000. And for this occasion, preparations are underway by officials and citizens to receive His Highness for a popular reception at the Abo-Sobh coastal garden.

The motorcade of His Highness will pass through Budaya Highway. Hence we ask you to cooperate and to participate by construction crescent-shaped banners across the highway greeting the esteemed leadership. Your participation will be well received. Thank you.))

All the shops were told that if they fail to abide by the directive, they will only have themselves to blame. These inhuman practices recently adopted by the Al-Khalifa family will make the gap wider between itself and the people of Bahrain, who witness the emergence of a style adopted by rulers like Saddam Hussein of Iraq. It is worth noting that the Iraqi ruler is considered by the ancient prime minister and several senior Al-Khalifa members as an example to emulate.

Rallies condemned

The office of the prime minister

is going ahead with its planned rally to force people to declare loyalty to the ruling family in relation to the conflict with Qatar. The government-controlled press had been publishing daily adverts to ensure that as many employees as possible would attend the rally on the evening of 18 September. The government has instructed the General Committee of Bahraini Workers (GCBW) to join the rally in its name. Political observers are witnessing one of the worst abuses of State power by a ruling family in the modern age.

Similarly, the son of the interior minister and the security officer Abdul Rahman bin Sager Al-Khalifa are going ahead with their plan for another rally to be held in Duraz Beach on 1 October. Mr. Al-Khalifa summoned the elders of Duraz and asked them whether they will declare loyalty to the Amir on that day and whether they will join a war against Qatar.

The elders, whose sons were shot dead by the types of Abdul Rahman bin Sager Al-Khalifa, were left speechless in the face of arrogant abusers of powers. The Al-Khalifa family is using the case of Hawar for political games with the people.

All people in Bahrain know that the ruling family has no concern for people in all normal cases. Indeed, Bahrainis are banned from approaching most of Bahrain's beautiful islands, such as Om-Na'asn, Om Subban, Jeddah and others. All these have been confiscated by senior members of the Al-Khalifa family for their private use. Bahrainis are never allowed to go south of Bahrain, which has also been confiscated for private use. Hawar is part of Bahrain, but the Al-Khalifa consider all Bahrain and all Bahrainis are nothing but private properties and subjects for themselves. Therefore, to use Hawar for rallies of loyalties is nothing but a cynical and irresponsible use of coercive State power. The opposition condemns the abuse of power and the manipulation of national issues for private gain.

Failure

The failure of the Al-Khalifa family to win the hearts of the people of Bahrain has been reflected by an increase in the number of

arrests and dawn raids conducted by the security forces and other organs of the interior ministry against the peaceful citizens of Bahrain.

The rally organized by the office of the prime minister on 18 September (in the name of Bahraini workers) failed miserably. The hall reserved for the function remained empty for the first part of the programme. Most of the elected representatives of the Bahraini workers committee did not participate. Those who attended in the name of the workers, Abdul Ghaffar Abdul Hussain and Saeed Al-Sammak, quarreled with each other loudly causing further upset to the meeting.

Intimidating citizens

The ruling family has stepped up its threats and intimidations to the residents of the northern region ahead of the rally being organized (by the ruling family) on Duraz Beach at the beginning of October. It has transpired that the ruling family will be transporting thousands of Bedouins who had been imported into Bahrain and registered as citizens to Duraz Beach.

Also, the Dowsari tribesmen in Saudi Arabia who had been given a second citizenship (Bahraini passports) were asked to travel to Bahrain and to dance in front of the ruling family on Duraz Beach. The parents of all pupils in the northern regions were given papers to sign pledging that they will make sure that their sons will participate in the rally "to vow loyalty to the Amir and to declare support against Qatar".

All schools in the northern and western regions were ordered to send their pupils for greeting the Amir on his way to Duraz Beach. The elders representing 124 community centers (Matams) and 20 charity funds were ordered to attend the function on 1 October and to thank the Amir. Many of these elders have their sons inside the jails for demanding political reforms. The function itself is held near Duraz Cemetery where several martyrs are buried.

The forcing of residents of the northern and western regions (whose sons and daughters were killed and tortured to death by the security forces) has taken an ugly

shape. The owners of shops along the Budaya Highway, leading to Duraz Beach, were ordered to pay between BD 300 – 3000 (\$ 800-8000) to finance the hanging of greeting displays (the higher payment is for the crescent-shaped greeting display across the highway). Those who do not pay-up may have their names recorded for future revenge by the ruling family.

Suffering in jail

Sheikh Hamid Habib Ashor, in detention for more than four years, has been denied his right to receive treatment for his eyes. He has been losing the ability to see following the ill-treatment and torturing he had undergone during his detention. The family of Mr. Ashor requested the authorities to allow their son to receive proper treatment, but it is understood that the interior ministry wants him to sign pre-prepared confession and pledges that he will not be participating in public life anymore before allowing him to receive a treatment.

Dawn raids

On 18 September, dawn raiders conducted another attack against Karranah and arrested Abdul Amir Al-Basri, 28, and Hassan Ali Ahmed Aman, 32. The attackers ransacked the houses of both citizens.

Also on 18 September, several detained teenagers were dragged out by the security forces and were forced to act as if they were burning tyres (with balaclavas put on for the act) while being filmed by an interior ministry crew.

Training for Al-Baboli

The fiasco created by Abdul Adhim Al-Baboli, the Egyptian mercenary who ruined the image of Bahrain following the Gulf Air crash last August. On citizens who attempted to lodge a complaint against him was summoned for interrogation before submitting the complaint.

Al-Baboli's main responsibility is to issue the official statements to internal and external media organisations, specifically with regards to attacking the opposition that is demanding a return to constitutional

rule. Following all his failures, Al-Baboli is organising a training course for one month (starting 17 September) with the aim of developing 35 government officials for handling the media. Instructors from the UK, the USA, Jordan and Egypt will be training the media officials for this purpose.

Human rights violated

More violations of human rights were reported in the past week. Security officers raided several houses in Daih and arrested Hussein Fakher, 16, Mohammed Ya'aquob, 22, Mohammed Mushaima'a, 19 and Mahmood Al-Khair, 17. These had recently been released following an earlier detention and are now back in jail.

Similarly, several arrests were made in Arad and the following citizens were taken away for torturing: Ayman Jasim Radhi Hussein, 17, Hasan Ali Al-Folath, Mohammed Abdul Hussain Mohammed Sadiq, Jasim Ahmed Abdulla Al-Daroghah, Abbas Ahmed Abdul Hussain, Abdul Monem Ahmed Al-Najjar, Ahmed Ali Hassan Abbas and Mohammed Ali Hassan Abbas.

Families of political detainees and prisoners are facing hostile treatment from the prison authorities. For example, the family of Yousif Abdul Baqi (one of three people on a death row since 1997) are denied access to their son and every now and then are turned away after waiting for hours to meet their beloved son. Similarly, the family (from Sitra) of Jalal Ibrahim, 22, who had been in detention for more than 4 years has been prevented from visiting their son.

The wife of Mohammed Redha Al-Sayyed Ali, 29, who was sentenced in December 1998 to 40 years imprisonment (the longest ever sentence passed by the unconstitutional State Security Court) receives a harsh treatment whenever she asks for an interview.

The foreign security forces attacked Karranah on 5 September and arrested Mohammed Hassan Ali Al-Ajami, Fadhil Isa Nasser, Hussain Salman Saeed and Hussain Haji Kadhern Saleh. All are under 20 years old.

The security forces attacked several houses and arrested some citizens. In Bilad al-Qadim, they

arrested Saeed Ali Hassan Khalaf, 22 and Hussain Ali Al-Arnoot, 19. From Daih, they arrested Seyed Alawi Sharaf Alawi, 19. From Barbar, they arrested Mohammed Saeed Al-Maqabi, 32. The latter was suspended upside-down and was left for a prolonged period until he went into coma. He was then transferred to hospital for one week and then released.

Amir to France

On 11 September, the Amir issued an order deputizing the Crown Prince and acting Prime Minister Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa to stand in during his absence while visiting the ailing premier in France. The Amir headed for Paris on Monday and is expected to meet with the French President Jacques Chirac. The Bahraini government has been focusing on relation with France for political maneuvering and as a means of deflecting EU criticism of human rights violations. The Bahraini government hosted Radio Monte Carlo six months ago to counter the BBC Arabic Service (which has a strengthening station in Qatar). Radio Monte Carlo, which is owned by Radio France International signed a pact with the Bahraini government in May 1999.

Gongo created

The Minister of Cabinet Affairs and Information, Mohammed Al-Mutawa, announced on 30 August the creation of a new "professional" association, "The Bahrain Society of Journalists". He said that he had registered the new association under the cultural and art societies and clubs supervised by his ministry. The society, according to Al-Mutawa will aim at upgrading the journalists' vocational and cultural standards. Mohammed Al-Mutawa, who personally threatened the organisers of seminars on democracy last month, said that the new society has other objectives that include "protecting the rights of journalists, defending their interests and guaranteeing the freedom needed to perform their duties."

The minister had angrily responded to one of the journalists who wrote an article in Al-Quds Al-Arabi on 10 May describing the

limitations and objections raised about the society.

Hafedh Al-Sheikh explained last May that the draft constitution of the society was dictated by the minister's office and that all journalists were ordered to shape themselves up within a regime that aimed at providing the minister with the means to divide and control the journalists and ensures their ineffectiveness.

He pointed out that the new society will also have foreign journalists as members and these journalists are only permitted to function in Bahrain within an official permit that could be withdrawn whenever the minister wished. Hence, their presence means nothing other than an extension of the minister inside the society. He also pointed out that all Bahraini journalists who are officially employed by the ministry are bound by the official policies of the ministry and hence they can not function as independent members. He further pointed out that the control of the ministry meant that the new association will be a place for conflicts based on clash of personalities, tribalism and partisan politics rather than functioning as an independent professional association.

The creation of the new association is part of the government programme to create GONGOS (government-organised non-governmental organisations). These GONGOS are used in the PR campaign conducted by the government in its attempt to fool the outside that things are moving in the positive direction, which clearly they are not.

GCBW elections adjourned

Confirming what the BFM had stated in earlier press releases, the government's newspapers announced that the General Committee of Bahrain Workers (GCBW) is adjourning arrangements for the next joint labour committee elections which will now be held in January 2001, and not in November this year, as was initially planned by the GCBW. The Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) are among the core bodies representing companies within the GCBW which was established in

1981 as part of the government's attempt to avoid recognising trade unions. The GCBW has now some 20,000 members.

The JLC elections will be held in four days at different times covering the 18 companies presently affiliated with the GCBW. The government's papers did not reveal that the prime minister ordered the adjournment and did not divulge that he refused all the demands of the GCBW for transforming themselves into a trade union, and their refusal to accept candidates list prepared by the interior ministry.

Nineteen companies have a JLC composed of 10 members, five workers and five representatives from company management.

This year however, 18 JLCs are officially on the list following the Bapco-Banoco merger, which subsequently will merge its respective JLCs. Other companies which have JLCs are Alba, Asry, Bahrain Danish Dairy, Bahrain Flour, Bahrain Airport Services, Banagas, Bahrain Aviation Fuelling, Balenco, Bahrain Duty Free, Batelco, Delmon Poultry, GARMCO, Gulf Hotel, Gulf Industrial Investment, GPIC, Gulf Air, Midal Cables.

Powerless Council

MANAMA, Sept 27 (Reuters) - Bahrain on Wednesday appointed (five) women and a Jewish man to its consultative Shura council for the first time, the Gulf News Agency reported. It said a decree issued by Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa named 19 newcomers to the council, including an Iraqi-born Jewish man, a Christian woman and an Indian-born man.

(Four) other women were also named to the previously all-male body which has 40 seats. The remaining members were re-appointed to the council, which will hold its first session on October 3, the agency said.

The council has no legislative powers and has a four-year term. It mainly reviews laws drafted by the cabinet before they are sent to the emir for final approval.

The government has said it plans to allow the council to be chosen by popular vote in about five years. Diplomats said it was not immediately clear if the body would then be given legislative powers.