

# BAHRAIN

*Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights*

## One family affair: Al -Khalifa dominate cabinet and rape the country

Of the 18 ministers with portfolios in the cabinet, half of them are members of the al-Khalifa family, who in turn effectively control the government. Some of these al-Khalifa ministers have been in their jobs since the early 1970s, and include ones uniquely not qualified for their jobs, in terms of education and/or experience. For example in 2001, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salman al-Khalifa was appointed as minister of electricity & water though he had spent his entire professional life in the military—his last military job was serving as the joint chief of the staff. Following is a brief account about each of the al-Khalifa ministers in the cabinet as of May 2002.

Prime minister Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa has been in his post ever since it was created in the early 1970s when Bahrain became independent from Britain. It is certainly extraordinary for any country to have one person dominating the day-to-day government affairs for more than 30 years. Worse yet, he is an active businessman—owning several top hotels including Le Royal Meridien and Regency as well as travel agencies, not to mention the practice of serving as agent for a number of foreign firms. Sheikh Khalifa's businesses are controlled through his United Group or Unitag. Businessmen in Bahrain complain of unfair competition from Sheikh Khalifa since Unitag can put its hand on any worthy business opportunity, not least because it does not play by the rule and is exempted from paying government fees. For years, Sheikh Khalifa has developed a taste for the practice of land reclamation at government expense and then selling it in smaller allotments. For instance, he sold a plot of land to Citibank for more than US\$10m to set up its regional headquarters in the Seef district, west of Manama. The government has recently made a commitment to stop the practice of land reclamation for the next fifty years.

The prime minister's son, Sheikh Ali serves minister of transport & communications—widely regarded as not fit for his job. As such, Bahrain International Airport (BIA) falls under his authority. Under his tenure, BIA has lost to competition from Dubai, which in turn has emerged as the leading airport in the region. A number of airliners, including Air France,

Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines stopped flying to BIA. More importantly, Sheikh Ali controls Bahrain Telecommunications Company (Batelco), a cash rich monopoly firm that reported a net profit of BD52.29m in 2001 (\$139m). Many of Batelco's customers complain of high charges and bad services.

The defence minister is Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Khalifa. He was named to the job basically for being a close associate of Sheikh Hamad, the current ruler. Sheikh Hamad, who was then serving as the Crown Prince, created the defence force in the 1960s, and has always fallen under his control. Then there is, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salman al-Khalifa, the minister of electricity & water, and the former military top man. He was appointed to the job following the death of Sheikh Daej, the father in law of Crown Prince Salman, in a London hospital in 2001. Sheikh Abdullah is accused of mismanagement—the electricity service currently suffers from repeated failures thus promising residents and business owners a long, hot summer.

Oil minister Sheikh Isa bin Ali al-Khalifa is noted for his unique corruptive practices. He is said to have a machine in office, which he uses to count the cash he receives in return for granting jobs to contractors. Local contractors know that they risk losing future businesses in case they fail to provide a "gift" to Sheikh Ali. It is believed that Sheikh Ali stands to lose his portfolio in the planned government reshuffle in late 2002 mainly because King Hamad is annoyed with his practices. But Sheikh Salman, the prime minister's youngest son, is the closest aide to Sheikh Ali and is said to have put his eye on this lucrative portfolio. Currently, Sheikh Salman controls Bahrain Petroleum Company, which is undergoing modernisation programme, which translates into big commission money

By all standards it is a bad taste to have father and son serving ministers in the same government. But that is no strange in Bahrain. Sheikh Abdullah bin Khaled al-Khalifa has been serving as

minister of justice & Islamic affairs while his son Sheikh Khaled bin Abdullah al-Khalifa has occupied the job of minister of housing. During the weekly cabinet meeting, Sheikh Abdullah and Sheikh Khaled in turn kiss the nose of Sheikh Khalifa, the prime minister. Sheikh Abdullah has passed the retirement age, and definitely there are qualified persons to replace him. Sheikh Khaled is said to have earned a substantial amount of money from selling lands and favours at the Seef district.

The minister of interior Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Khalifa has long presided over the most infamous ministry in Bahrain. Under his term that extends from the 1970s, the interior ministry has caused the killing of tens of innocent Bahrainis while imprisoning and torturing thousands others. Numerous international organisations have condemned the practices of the interior ministry but that has not convinced the government to remove Sheikh Mohammed from his post. Worse yet, colonel Adel Flaifel, fled the country last month despite an alleged government ban against his travel. Flaifel has been working for the criminal and now disbanded Bahrain Security & Intelligence Service (BSIS), which has been directly responsible for the suffering of hundreds of families, whose loved ones had been imprisoned and ill-treated merely on suspicion of working against the regime. At the minimum, Sheikh Mohammed should have been sacked from his job following the fleeing of Flaifel, from the airport, whose security is controlled by the interior ministry.

Last and not least, there is Sheikh Mohammed bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, minister of foreign affairs, who has occupied the portfolio for the last three decades. It is rumored that he would assume a new portfolio—deputy prime minister. One pitfall of Sheikh Mohammed—he insisted on naming his younger brother but inexperienced Sheikh Abdel Aziz to the high profile post of Bahrain's ambassador to the UK for several years until 2001. Needless to say, Bahrain's head of state is Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, who unilaterally declared himself king in February 2002 while his eldest son Sheikh Salman is heir to the throne. All in all, under al-Khalifa rule, Bahrain is truly a one family affair.

## The Constitution is the Foundation

Article 104, is seen as one of the most important constitutional tools to regulate the law-making - confines the power to change any article of the Constitution within the elected parliament. This article especially significant for its recognition of basic rights in the legislative process. The National Charter explicitly limited the power of the appointed Shura Council to giving advice and is not empowered to have legislative power.. The government of Bahrain introduced a bicameral Parliament. One chamber is the Council of Representative consisting of forty elected members. The other is the Shura Council, composed of 40 senators to be appointed by the government. Prior to this change the free elected parliament had the final say over disagreements and differences between government ministers and MPs but now the government has the final say over the two houses as a result of transferring 50% of the legislative power from National Assembly to the Shura Council, ie. the government.

According to the Constitution the legislative power is vested in the National Assembly and cannot be

delegated or shared. The rules of the Constitution are binding and of a superior quality and the basic legal regulations which bind the legislative, executive and judicial organs, the government and other organizations. The violation of this principle in the new constitution is significant and affects the three powers. Most importantly it violates the principle of the supremacy of the Constitution. Article 104 of the Constitution serves to maintain a balance between the rights of the people and the powers of the government preserving democracy. Furthermore, it prevents abuse of the constitution by the gov-



ernment and constitutes the source of legality for any proposed amendment. The New political "reforms" initiated by the King have given unchecked powers to the government and have thus limited the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. The government has embarked on an economic policy that favours foreigners to local workforce. The 1973 Constitution makes everyone equal before the law. However, in Bahrain both the Public sector and the Private sector discriminate against individuals on sectarian and political grounds. Privileges are granted to the royal family or those associated with it. The majority of the citizens are denied access to top governmental posts. Many are denied employment with foreign, defence and interior ministries.

The legislation rights are fundamental rights, which are inviolable and non-transferable. The national charter was introduced with the objective of violating those basic rights by placing the people of Bahrain under the sole control of the government. The new distribution of the municipal election ballots was used in such a way as to emphasise the hegemony of one social class over others. Also it was structured on discriminatory basis based on religious and political opinions.

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## The dual nationality decree is null and void

The unilateral and undemocratic approach has continued to shape the politics of Bahrain for the past 16 months. The recent dual nationality decree allowing other Gulf nationals the right to a Bahraini nationality is a striking example of the new decision -making culture imposed on the country.

While the Information Minister claims that the decree is strategically linked to the attempts of the Gulf Cooperation Council to form a unified Gulf identity, the decree transcends basic facts and fundamental requirements for that unity to become a reality. It also ignores the serious economic, social and political implications that will result from this immature adventure.

Economically, the dual nationality will put unbearable burden on the already exhausted and blundered resources of the country. The government has shown a great inefficiency in addressing the housing crisis facing thousands of young Bahrainis, and the urgency to update the infrastructure of the country, such as water and power. So far, the granting of citizenship to many from Jordan, Syria, Yemen and Pakistan has resulted in the deprivation of many Bahrainis of decent jobs in a number of government institutions.

The social structure and cultural identity

are being threatened by the huge influx of a the new "citizens". It is certain that the unbalanced nature of the policy will debilitate the social fabric and create social tensions.

Politically, this is likely to lead to a situation in which political cohesion will not exist in the country. Legislation pertaining to the electoral regions and the changes to the constitution have all been directed toward minimising public participation



and marginalising the influence of the majority of the people. This new decree seems to reinforce this strategy by emphasising the sectarian nature of the electoral regional distribution. While directly and significantly affecting their political rights, the new royal decree has totally ignored the will of the people of Bahrain, thereby making it the most undemocratic. The unity among the GCC countries needs political, social and economic infrastructures to be developed across all the borders of gulf states before these drastic steps. It also needs to be preceded by collective actions to diminish the apparent disparity in the level of services as well as civil and political rights. The unilateral move by the Bahrain government gives no recognition to realities, nor is it based on a proper understanding of the consequences.

This decree comes as the most serious in a series of unlawful legislations aimed at confiscating the people's rights of political participation, even under the so-called 2002 constitution, which guarantees a total government control over the decision making process, thus circumventing any real participation by the people. In the absence of a representative legislature, this decree is considered null and void. Any attempt to enforce it will be viewed as a political and cultural genocide, which is a crime in international law.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
19 June 2002

## Bahrain bans al-Jazeera news station

Robert Stevens, 11 June 2002

On May 10, Bahrain Information Minister Nabeel Yacoub al-Hamer announced the banning of the Qatar-based Arabic TV station al-Jazeera from reporting inside its borders. Al-Hamer said that the ban had been imposed because al-Jazeera "deliberately seeks to harm Bahrain". The minister is reported to have stated that, "It is a channel penetrated by Zionists."

The ban, a flagrant attack on press freedom, was imposed during the first general election held in the country for nearly 30 years and the station was specifically denied its request to cover the event. There is no doubt that the decision has also been prompted by al-Jazeera showing footage considered embarrassing by the Bahrain elite, of demonstrations against the US led war in Afghanistan and protests against the recent Israeli onslaught against the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Among these was the demonstration on October 20 last year when anti-war protesters gathered at the main mosque in the capital city Manama and tore up US flags. The protest occurred following the first military strikes on Afghanistan by US and British fighter planes and warships on October 7. Bahrain is the headquarters of the US Navy's Fifth Fleet.

On April 5, demonstrators in Manama threw makeshift firebombs and stones at the US embassy to protest the Israeli military action against the Palestinians. The demonstration ended when security police fired rounds into the air and threw tear gas, dispersing the protesters.

In February last year the King of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, inaugurated a new period of reforms that would include the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, national elections in 2002, and the creation of an independent judiciary by 2004.

On November 12, US armed forces dropped a 500-pound bomb on the al-Jazeera studio in Kabul, Afghanistan, immediately before the Northern Alliance occupied the city, so as to prevent any footage being broadcast that was not vetted by Washington. The station's London bureau chief, Muftah Al Suwaidan, told the media, "The building is the only one to have been hit so it looks like it was deliberate."

The Saudi Arabian ruling family and Tunisia also ban the station. Jordan, Egypt, as well as the Palestinian Authority have all sought to limit its transmissions.

Another factor in Bahrain's banning of al-Jazeera is that it is used by Qatar to further its own foreign policy. Qatar has often been at loggerheads with its much larger neighbour, Bahrain, particularly over control of the Hawar Islands. Bahrain has sought to develop the islands as a

tourist resort and invited international oil companies to drill there after the International Court of Justice decision in March last year that the islands belonged to Bahrain, not Qatar. Bahrain was the first Gulf Arab state to produce oil, in 1932, but its reserves are now near exhaustion.

The crackdown on al-Jazeera by Bahrain's ruling Al Khalifah family was not carried out in isolation. The regime fears any criticism of its policies or internal dissent amongst the 650,000 population being made known to the outside world. The Al Khalifah family, members of the Sunni Bani Utbah tribe, have ruled the territory since 1783 and hold all-important political and military posts. There is a long history of civil unrest involving the Shi'ite majority, who are effectively barred from holding public office.

The dissemination of news and information in Bahrain is strictly monitored, censored and regularly curtailed. The government owns the Bahrain Radio and Television Corporation (BRTC), which operates five terrestrial television channels and although there are a number of private newspapers, these are closely linked to ruling circles. Satellite TV is officially banned, but it is estimated that around six percent of Bahrain's 230,000 homes had access to satellite television in 1999.

The proscription of al-Jazeera follows the banning of websites operated by



opposition groups. On March 26, al-Hamer announced that the government had blocked four websites, claiming they were "inciting sectarian strife."

On May 4, a demonstration was held outside the Bahrain Telecommunications Company headquarters to protest government censorship

of the Internet. The company has a state monopoly on Internet access. Some of those in attendance had their mouths taped up.

Individual journalists have also been subjected to intense harassment and prosecution. In November 2001, freelance journalist Hafedh El Sheikh Saleh was prosecuted by the government for articles that were deemed unlawful and "not compatible with the spirit of the national charter and of the constitution." Saleh's articles were condemned on the basis that they served to "undermine national unity." The Ministry of Information then attempted to ban him from writing for the Akhbar al-Khaleej newspaper and appealed to other Gulf states to request that regional journals also ban his writings. Saleh successfully sued the ministry and in January of this year the banning order was lifted. Saleh was originally prosecuted over an article he wrote for the Lebanon Daily Star about the position of the majority Shi'ite Muslim community in Bahrain. Saleh, however, said that he believed his prosecution stemmed from an article he wrote for a Lebanese paper criticising Bahrain's foreign policy toward the US.

## Fitch cuts Bahrain Int'l Bank L-T rating to BB+

LONDON, May 27 (Fitch) - Fitch Ratings, the international rating agency, has today downgraded Bahrain International Bank's ratings as follows: Long-term foreign currency rating to 'BB+' from 'BBB-' (BBB minus), Short-term foreign currency to 'B' from 'F3', and Individual to 'C/D' from 'C'.

The Support rating remains at '5'. At the same time the Long-term Outlook has been changed to Negative from Stable, but will be reviewed by Fitch upon announcement of first half 2002 results.

The rating changes follow the announcement of a substantial loss for 2001, and reflect the agency's concerns over the sustainability of the bank's profitability levels, the need to implement a more diversified strategy and the potential impact upon the bank's wholesale funding base. These negative factors are balanced by a still adequate capital base and an ex-

perienced and hitherto successful management team.

The Negative Outlook reflects the agency's concern that resolving the bank's strategic and financial issues may prove challenging over the short/medium term. Bahrain International Bank (BIB) was established in 1982 with an original brief to engage in commercial banking. A strategic review in 1991 called for BIB to become a pure investment bank servicing its predominantly high net worth Gulf client base.

The bank focuses on five main activities: investment banking, (the origination of direct investments in the private and quoted corporate sectors in the USA and increasingly in Europe); corporate finance (the provision of M&A advisory services in the Gulf private sector); real estate, (focusing on the development and leasing of UK properties); investment securities (investment in the US corporate and government bond markets), and treasury activities.



## Britain silent on 'Butcher of Bahrain'

Tony Thompson, crime correspondent  
**The Observer**, Sun 30 Jun 2002

The Government has been accused of stalling attempts to prosecute a British citizen accused of running a brutal regime of torture in Bahrain in order to protect the UK's relationship with the Arab state.

Scots-born Colonel Ian Henderson, dubbed the 'Butcher of Bahrain', spent 30 years as head of the Bahraini secret police. During this time his men allegedly detained and tortured thousands of anti-government activists.

Their activities are said to have included the ransacking of villages, sadistic sexual abuse and using power drills to maim prisoners. On many occasions they are said to have detained children without informing their parents, only to return them months later in body bags. Between 1994 and 1998 at least seven people died as a result of torture at the hands of the Bahraini regime. Human rights organisations have collected evidence from thousands of victims of the regime who have provided horrific accounts of the torture they suffered. Yaser al-Sayegh's case is typical. 'My wrists were shackled to my ankles and they suspended me upside down from a pole,' he said. 'They then beat me on my legs and feet and face with iron bars and rubber hoses.'

Hashem Redha, a Bahrainian pro-democracy activist who now lives in Britain, said he was attacked personally by Henderson. 'He tortured me one time. He kicked me and shook me two times. He said, "If you like to be hit, we can hit you more than that".'

A Carlton documentary, *Blind Eye to the Butcher*, to be screened on Wednesday, reveals that despite solid evidence torture took place on many occasions, a two-year investigation by Scotland Yard's Serious Crimes Branch and questions being asked in Parliament, Henderson has never been interviewed about the allegations.

However, under international law, he would be responsible for acts of torture carried out under his command, regardless of whether he was personally involved.

A file was submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service last August but police say they are still waiting for a response.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have repeatedly called for an investigation into the allegations but believe successive governments have been reluctant because of Britain's close ties with the Arab state. Britain has 85 defence staff based in Bahrain and members of the country's armed forces are invited to defence colleges in this country for training.

Since retirement, Henderson has spent much of his time living at an extensive property called Stoke Shallows on the edge of Dartmoor where his neighbours know nothing of his past. He continues to travel frequently to Bahrain where he remains an adviser.

In the programme Henderson denies allegations of torture and refused to take part in any discussion. However, he issued a statement saying there was no truth in any of the allegations.

The Home Office refused to comment on allegations of torture in Bahrain.

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### The Constitution is the foundation

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The constitution was fundamentally changed without the approval of the National Assembly, while the people were denied the right to discuss these changes. These changes are illegal and violate the 1973 Constitution in substance.

Every Bahraini has the right to defend his/her fundamental rights and freedoms when they are violated. According to the Constitution, the legislative process belongs to the nation and not to the government. The Constitution respects that basic human right whilst the national charter does not. The people of Bahrain demand the supremacy of the 1973 constitution over the national charter as promised by the King last year. This demand is indispensable to the movement to establish a democratic life.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
29th June 2002