

# BAHRAIN

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

## Corruption, dictatorship, terrorism and the Al Khalifa poker games

As the relations between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa ruler took a sharp downturn in recent months, questions are being asked as to whether the rulers had really grasped the significance of recent developments on the world stage, and their impact on dictators and despots in the region. Sheikh Hamad should have understood that the lull in the historical confrontation between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa rulers was only possible after he had promised the people a fundamental change in the policies adopted by his uncle over the past decades. To back away from these promises could only land him and his family in deep troubles. The trust that he had managed to build with the people of Bahrain in the first two years after he had become a ruler, has rapidly evaporated, and a state of total mistrust has now reigned. Could he have changed this? Certainly, only if he did not adopt the policy of deception.

Today, the opposition has exploited every possible opportunity to prevent the collapse of trust, but without success. The regime has made it impossible for anyone to attempt a salvage. Every possible means of deception was employed, while real dialogue has never been initiated. Few days before the G8 in Georgia, the deception machine of the Al Khalifa sought to prevent any backlash during the summit, and promised a dialogue with the people. Soon after the summit, the deception machine changed the concept into meetings with marginal figures of the government who attended with the aim of persuading the people to accept the destructive Al Khalifa programme, but not to listen to them. The heads of the political societies have always assumed good will on behalf of the ruling family, and refrained from any act that would anger the rulers. They are too good-hearted. In a world of political prostitution, good people are ill-equipped to engage in real politics because they are bound by their noble values and principles while those on the other side have full liberty to manoeuvre, deceive, and lie. It is an unbalanced situation that could only lead to more troubles and discontent. The opposition is guided by several principles. The first is that the political problem is not with the government but with the system. It is the ruling family and its laws that are the main foe, the government is merely a tool to implement the policies of the regime.

The second is that a meaningful dialogue can only be achieved through direct contact between representatives of the people of Bahrain and senior members of the ruling family. Intermediaries from the government are powerless and thus engaging with them in debate is futile. They cannot either promise or deliver. Thirdly, the regime is devoid of legitimacy outside the only binding document; 1973 constitution. As long as this document remains shelved, legitimacy cannot be granted to the regime. The 2002 document is not a source of legitimacy because it was produced by one party without the approval, or acceptance or consent of the other.

Fourthly, the opposition has adopted peaceful means to achieve its aims. It has, so far, adopted an approach of reconciliation with the regime, but it may have now realised that this path is not productive. It will, however, continue to adopt peaceful means and it is likely that this will gradually lead to a civil resistance programme.

The regime is, undoubtedly in a political quagmire. On one hand, it seeks to appease the Americans who claim to promote democracy and respect of human rights in the region. They do not want the opposition to take an active role and expose the contradictions of the Al Khalifa. At the same time they are resisting to carry out real reforms that may curtail the excesses of the senior members of the ruling family. Behind the scenes there is rising tension in the relations between the US and the Al Khalifa on the backdrop of the recent arrests that took place in Bahrain. In June, six people were arrested, and were accused of being members of Al Qa'eda, only to be released few days later. This apparently enraged the Americans who issued a statement asking their people to leave Bahrain, and declared the country unsafe for US citizens. The Al Khalifa reacted by re-arresting the group in order to please the Americans. Nothing has yet been heard of the case. It is possible that Al Qa'eda had infiltrated the country through the newly naturalised non-Bahrainis. The Al Khalifa selected particular regions in Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for the process of political naturalisation. These regions are known for breeding extremism and religious fanaticism. Most of those who had allegedly taken part in the 11<sup>th</sup> September attacks came from these regions. They are fertile regions for recruitment of Al Qa'eda members. The aim of the Al Khalifa is to bring into the country elements that could offset the overwhelming dominance of the Shia faith. But they have, perhaps inadvertently, created a suitable environment in our country for these tendencies.

It is therefore the duty of the international community to put pressure on the Al Khalifa rulers to stop this illegal process whose ill-effects have already been felt both by the natives and the guests of the country. It may be the aim of the Al Khalifa to preserve their dictatorship at any cost, but the people of Bahrain and the international community share the anxiety resulting from the material support offered by the Al Khalifa to potential extremists. This is, of course, a direct consequence of the dictatorial policies and corruption of the ruling family, which have been endorsed and entrenched by Sheikh Hamad. The opposition is resolute in its stand to fight dictatorship, corruption and despotism. While they accept that the ruling family, which had occupied the land in 1783 by force, may remain in power, they demand that this is acceptable only within a contractual constitution which binds the Al Khalifa to acceptable standards of rule and behaviour. Without this, the situation could only deteriorate and create favourable atmosphere for terrorism and violence that have been made easier by the naturalisation project imposed by the Al Khalifa.

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## Electricity cuts add to summer misery

Summer 2004 proved to be one of the worst on record in Bahrain in terms of power cuts. Power supply was frequently disrupted in the first half of July in particular. Repeated interruptions were occurring despite soaring temperatures, which crossed 40 degrees Celsius, to be made more miserable with almost 100 percent humidity.

Power cuts have hit residential districts as well as industrial parks. Many parts of Bahrain have experienced interruptions of electricity notably rural areas, as the authorities had been paying negligible attentions to villages.

Additionally, industrial complexes such as the petrochemical plant, known as GPIC, had no reliable electricity supply for three consecutive days. However, residences of the "royal family" had experienced no disruption whatsoever.

For obvious reasons, the authorities had failed to furnish the United Nations Development Programme with some vital details. The UNDP 2004 report has placed Bahrain on top of Arab countries in respect to human development. However, Bahrain officials had not supplied

important statistics to the report concerning access to electricity supply and water, amongst others.

Over the last few years, the portfolio of minister of electricity & water has changed hands more so than any other position. Four ministers in a span of five years have taken up the job. The current minister, Abdullah bin Salman Al Khalifa is a member of the royal family. He was named to the job in late 2002.

But he is uniquely not fit for the job, having spent most of his career life in the military establishment. His last job was that of joint chief of staff. In a recent news conference, the minister conveniently fixed all debacles related to power supply on his predecessors. Still, he condemned the media for its "negative" coverage of the matters.

Strangely enough, there is no shortage of power supply, only if one trusts the authorities. Power generation amounts to 1,840 megawatts, with peak demand put at nearly 1600 megawatts. Hence, there is excess supply of 240 MW. Officials at the ministry have attributed the problems to transmission and maintenance.

Thus, the government has focused efforts on generation but overlooked transmission to clients. Yet, one wonders of the logic behind carrying out maintenance works during the demand period, namely the lengthy summer season.

Reacting to mounting complaints of the interruptions to the power supply, the government has announced that it would increase spending on the utility sector.

But one wonders about the source of such extra funds! Yet, the regime has decided not to issue any apologies for the debacle. Also, it has failed to admit any guilt or wrong planning whatsoever.

In conclusion, the losers of repeated electricity interruptions include ordinary people, industrial undertakings and of course the economy at large. How could Bahrain attract new investments if the country suffers from shortage of such basic services?

Clearly, those in power do not care if others have no access to power.

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## Bahrain's mounting debt headache

Several indications suggest that the authorities in Bahrain have decided to increase the nation's debt level without considering the possible consequences on the future generations.

According to figures released by the Ministry of Finance & National Economy, the debt stock has increased by 32 percent in 2003. Specifically, the outstanding amount rose from 1,024 million Bahraini dinars to 1,352 million dinars (or 3,586 million American dollars). The authorities issued some \$500 million worth of bonds in the international markets to finance several projects including constructing a circuit to stage Formula One race.

The trouble is that the government considers this as an acceptable level, especially when compared to Bahrain's neighbours. For example, the debt level in Saudi Arabia stands at US\$170 billion, representing about 90 percent of the kingdom's gross national product (GDP). In the case of Qatar, debt makes up about 75 percent of the GDP. However, the comparison is unwarranted mainly because Saudi Arabia and Qatar are rich in terms of oil and gas, respectively. However, Bahrain largely depends on oil source, which is controlled by Saudi Aramco. Bahrain's daily oil revenue is generated from two sources, Abu Saafa and Awali. Of the two, Abu Saafa is the

largest with production amounting to 143,000 barrels per day. In fact, this amount should be divided between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. However, in 1996, Saudi Arabia agreed to allocate the entire output of Abu Saafa indefinitely to Bahrain to help the regime address its socio-economic problems. The other source of oil supply is the onshore Awali field, which produces about 38,000 bpd.

The debt amount increased by some \$870 million in 2003, in turn considered exceptionally high for a small economy like that of Bahrain. The increase alone amounted to more than 10 percent of Bahrain's GDP. By all means, this is exceptionally high in a span of one year not least because Bahrain's economy is uniquely dependent on oil. The petroleum sector (oil plus gas) is uniquely significant to Bahrain, as it contributes about 70 percent of the treasury income. Currently, outstanding debt amounts to more than 40 percent of the GDP.

Certainly, the authorities had to pay some \$131 million to service the debt. This amounted to 37 percent increase on the interest incurred in 2002. In short, the regime has embarked on a spending spree without looking into possible consequences on the economy's future. Clearly, Bahrain's economy is mismanaged. Once Again: The Minister of Labour Threatens To Close the BCHR

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## The mistrust deepens

A seminar was held at Al Oruba Club on 28th July to reflect on the recent altercations between the political societies and the minister of labour. It has now become clear that the two parties (the ruling family and the societies) have not agreed on the agenda of these meetings. While the societies thought they were engaged in a serious debate on the constitutional crisis, the ruling family presented the meetings as attempts to woo the societies back to the political agenda of the ruling family.

In the seminar, Mr Abdul Wahab Husain, one of the participants in the meetings lashed at the ruling family's envoy for his statements in which he said the meetings were an attempt to force the societies to take part in Sheikh Hamad's destructive programme.

Other speakers highlighted the crisis and warned against too over-optimism especially after those remarks by the Al Khalifa's envoy. The lawyer, Mohammad Ahmad, highlighted the discrepancies in the envoy's remarks and how he went against the spirit of what had been agreed upon in the last meeting. The general feeling is that the failure of the meetings is due to the deceptive practices of the ruling family. There was a heated debate in which the mistrust between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa.

# Security services are tarnishing Bahrain's reputation

In a span of six weeks, al-Khalifa's security services demonstrated lack of sophistication in handling simple security matters. In May, for example, the security forces attacked a peaceful rally concerning developments in Iraq, causing public outrage. In June, six people were accused of potentially grave crimes and then suddenly released. Then in early July, the US demanded the departure of Americans from Bahrain citing terrorist threats. The following paragraphs provide some details about the entire fiasco.

On May 21st, security forces attacked a peaceful rally organised to protest coalition forces' attacks on Iraq's religious sites. Specifically, the rally was meant to register the displeasure of Bahrainis against American military actions in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Suddenly, and without warning, security forces (mainly non-locals) assaulted the protestors and in the process injured scores of people. Several protestors had to be hospitalised and one was sent abroad for treatment, at government expense.

The presence of senior religious figures in the rally failed to deter the security forces from carrying out such cowardly acts. Nevertheless, the protestors elected not to confront riot police. Fearing possible backlash, Bahrain's ruler, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, took a symbolic gesture that had no relevance of relieving the interior minister Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Khalifa of his duties. The minister had been largely dormant due to ill health. Chief of staff of Bahrain's Defence Forces Rashid bin Abdullah bin Ahmed al-Khalifa was named the new minister.

Sheikh Hamad had promised an in-depth investigation into the causes of the problem. However, in June, the new minister declared that no such probe was necessary since the "king" had intervened in resolving the problem.

In June, barely a month following the May aggression, security forces used customary tactics to break into the houses of six locals on charges of plotting attacks against the country's interests. The procedures included breaking gateways and handcuffing suspects in front of family members. In a statement, the interior ministry asserted that the six were planning to carry out "dangerous acts targeting citizens and properties by using dangerous materials."

Nevertheless, in less than 48 hours, the interior ministry completed its investigations and referred the case to the general prosecutor. To everyone's surprise, the general prosecution office ordered the

release of six for lack of evidence. Later, the six held a news conference and lashed at the inhumane practices of the security forces (i.e. breaking doors and handcuffing in front of crying children). Some have attributed the whole debacle to infighting within the al-Khalifa family, with one camp demanding the arrests and another ordering the release of the suspects. Prime minister Khalifa bin Salman and ruler Hamad bin Isa continue to rival each other for influence.

Yet, in early July, the US government declared that Bahrain was unsafe and could be subjected to unspecified terrorist threats. In subsequent moves, the Pentagon demanded evacuation of some 650 American from Bahrain. It was widely believed that the Americans, like many others, were displeased with the interior ministry. Clearly, the actions of the security services are undermining the country's reputation. The regime should be condemned for its damaging practices.

## More threats to close the BCHR

Response by the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, 7 July 2004

In an interview with Al Arabiya satellite TV channel, on 30th June, 2004, the minister of Labour and Social Affairs Dr. Majeed Al-Alawi, threatened once again to close the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) because of what he described as "political activities".

The minister reaffirmed the threat made by his ministry to close the BCHR "if some of its members do not stop practicing roles, which are not permitted by the societies law".

He stressed that the BCHR is a political opposition body that has adopted a political agenda, adding that this would harm and impair its neutrality. He pointed out that the human rights bodies should not call for demonstrations, because that would turn it into a political body.

When asked if the 'threat' was an appropriate manner to deal with the BCHR, the minister replied "no", claiming that for two years the centre has been carrying out many political activities, thus the ministry previously notified the centre that if it does not comply with its internal regulation and objectives, legal action will be taken against it.

When asked about the BCHR current activities, he said, "the BCHR is merely writing articles and sending letters to organizations abroad, and not pursuing professional work like that of the Bahrain Human Rights Society" which is engaged in providing training for public employees.

When asked if he considered the BCHR to be preoccupied with the opposition, he replied "yes", hinting that the BCHR is clearly anti-government.

### Response by the BCHR:

The BCHR considers the accusations

stated by the minister as unfounded, noting that the ministry failed until now to officially respond to 2 letters by the centre, recommending written clarifications of such accusations.

The BCHR considers the minister's threats as a part of a campaign by the authorities to discredit the BCHR, and to hinder its amounting role in monitoring violations of human rights. The centre had staged effective awareness and advocacy campaigns especially in issues such as discriminations, corruption, privileges enjoyed by some members of the ruling family, impunity for perpetrators of torture, defects of the political and judicial system, and the laws that restrict and criminalize the practice of basic freedoms such as the freedoms of association, assemble and expression. The BCHR is highly concerned in regard to the threats to be closed down, and stresses on the importance to amend the Penal Code and the Law on Societies, which could be used effectively by the authorities to restrict, influence or close human rights societies for not complying with its policies and undefined criteria of what should human rights activists do and not do.

### Background

The BCHR received the first warning letter to have its premises closed down by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, last October, 2003, following the release of the report on discrimination in the symposium held on 16th October, 2003. The second warning letter was faxed to the centre on 14th May, 2004, following the campaigning for the immediate release of the prisoners of

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## Urgent Appeal to stop threats against BCHR

**URGENT APPEAL –  
THE OBSERVATORY  
BHR 001 / 0704 / OBS 054  
Defamation of an NGO  
Kingdom of Bahrain  
July 8, 2004.**

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Brief description of the situation: The Observatory has been informed by a reliable source of the ongoing harassment of the Bahrain Human Rights Center, based in Manama.

On June 30, 2004, in an interview with Al Arabiya TV Channel, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in Bahrain openly threatened to shut down the Bah-

rain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) because of "its political activities." The Minister, Dr. Majeed Al Alawi, called BCHR a political opposition body that has adopted a political agenda. Furthermore, Dr. Alawi criticized the organization's use of demonstrations as well as article and letter writing to defend and protect human rights in Bahrain.

These accusations follow earlier threats from the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs to withdraw the Center's operating license if it continued its political activities, as they contradicted Law No. 21 of 1989 on Societies. According to the information received, such threats were issued in letters to BCHR in October 2003 and May 2004.

The Observatory is extremely concerned about these threats and accusations, which challenge the credibility of the Center and the important work that it carries out, especially concerning the

issues of migrant workers, discrimination, torture and legal actions intended to violate the freedoms of expression and association Bahrain.

### Action requested:

Please write to the authorities of the Kingdom Bahrain urging them to:

- put an immediate end to any form of harassment or threat of closure to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights;
- reform the Societies law of 1989 in order to conform with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, in particular article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels," and article 5(b), stating that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups;

- ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Declaration and all other international human rights standards.

### Addresses:

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Paris – Geneva, July 8, 2004

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need. The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

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### Call for pressing US to release Guantanamo detainees

The US government is just beginning to realise how "pointless and counter-productive" it is now to go ahead with its policy in regard to the detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison, a lawyer representing a number of detainees from Bahrain and other countries, said here yesterday while praising the US judiciary for its impartiality and expressing confidence in winning the cases in US courts.

Addressing a Press conference at the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), the internationally-noted US human rights lawyer Clive A. Stafford-Smith, director of The Justice Centre, also urged the governments of Bahrain and other regional states to exert a strong political pressure, "just as the United Kingdom did, in order to succeed in ensuring the release of their nationals" from the prison, which is known for torture and gross violation of human rights. He also called upon the families of detainees, both from Bahrain and other regional countries, "to come forward and meet him to give detailed statements so to help him to file the cases against the US government in the US court of law."

Stafford-Smith, who is currently representing 50 Guantanamo Bay detainees, including six Bahrainis, will be here until next week, and has come to the Kingdom on the invitation of the BCHR, which has appointed him.

He said in the last two weeks, 53 cases have been filed against the US administration in the US courts of law, expressing his "confidence" that he would win these cases and would secure the release of innocent people.

He said that the "US administration must

allow lawyers to meet the detainees, particularly after the ruling of the US Supreme Court, which recently said that all detainees can present their case in the US court of law."

He said that the US administration is so secretive about the functioning of Guantanamo Bay prison in Cuba that "the names of nearly 300 out of the 593 detainees from around 42 countries are not made known to the world," while apologising publicly, as a US national, for the violation of human rights by his country's government.. He said currently 80 people from 11 out of the 42 countries are represented in the US courts, and with the representation of the regional cases, the number would go much higher. The Press conference was also attended by BCHR president Nabeel Rajab, Saeed Rajab Z. Omar of BCHR and the head of the Kuwaiti Detainee's Committee, Khalid Al Odah, whose son is also a detainee at the Guantanamo Bay prison.

Al Odah praised the assistance of the Kuwaiti government, right from the prime minister to all concerned at the government level, and this support also includes monetary assistance including the monetary support.

He also appealed to all the regional states "to follow the suit of the government of Kuwait and extend full support to release their nationals from the notorious prison."

The six Bahrainis - Salah Al Balooshi, Abdulla Al Nuaimi, Adel Hajji, Isa Al Murbati, Shaikh Sulman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa, and Juma Al Dossari, aged between 19 and 31 years - are held in the prison.