

# BAHRAIN

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

## **Bahraini hostages at Torture Chambers is evidence Al Khalifa failure**

The desperate attempts by the ruling Al Khalifa family in Bahrain to increase people's participation in its ill-fated political programme has taken new dimensions in recent months. In addition to fabrications in the official media that some senior figures would stand for elections in order to break the morale of the opposition, the Al Khalifa proposed delaying the municipal elections until October. They aim to make it harder for people who may vote in council election not to take part in the Shura elections. This step may backfire. There is increasing tendency among the people against taking any part in the Al Khalifa political project that is considered disastrous to the country, politically, religiously and culturally. The ruling family has not helped its cause by increasing its policies of terrorising the people into submission. More people have now realised the destructive nature of Sheikh Hamad's political programme and declared their intentions not only to refrain from taking part in the pseudo-elections, but also to intensify their civil resistance to the hereditary dictatorship that is becoming ever more isolated. There are now dozens of political prisoners; a phenomenon that was absent in the first four years of Sheikh Hamad's programme. This is causing enormous tension within the society and has tarnished the political programme and embarrassed its supporters.

Furthermore, the role of two foreign powers in supporting the Al Khalifa dictatorship is becoming clearer to the people. They are accused of colluding in the demographic change that is being undertaken by Sheikh Hamad as essential component of his political programme. In 2000 intelligence services of these two countries took active role in luring some opposition figures into the trap of the regime in return for some personal gains. Over the following four years, more figures were trapped into the system through the 2002 municipal and shura elections. Fortunately, the lack of success of those two bodies has confirmed the opposition's charge that anyone caught by the Al Khalifa traps would gradually be sucked into their corruption and would lose any

public standing within the community. With the excesses of those allied with the Al Khalifa in terms of economic, moral and political corruption, that has played well into the hands of the opposition. There is now a rising trend among the dis-encharmed youth to take more principled stands in their dealing with the regime which has failed to honour its numerous promises or tackle the serious problems of unemployment, housing, public services or human rights issues. A feeling of alienation is thus becoming more entrenched as the system becomes increasingly unable to accommodate opposing views. Last month, the Court of Cassation upheld an earlier ruling by an Al Khalifa court banning the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) for speaking on matters that the ruling family did not like. The ruling by the Court of Cassation had been expected. In Bahrain the Al Khalifa are both the judge and the plaintiff, and the whole judiciary is under their jurisdiction. The message of that ruling is clear; if you do not follow our rules you lose.

The cruelty of the ruling family is not bound by any principle or law. They are known for their cruelty in their treatment of the people of Bahrain. In fact, the political naturalisation process is one more indication of this cruelty. The people who are given Bahraini nationality are chosen from areas where extremism and sectarianism are rife. Sheikh Hamad is emulating his predecessors who sought help from certain tribes from the Arabian peninsula in order to crush the native Bahrainis. This was the case with Sheikh Isa bin Ali Al Khalifa in the 1920s who was eventually replaced by his son after the British intervened. Toady, Sheikh Hamad is seeking support not from the native Bahrainis, but from aliens who can easily be exploited to flare up a campaign of sectarian hatred. This process has already started by some salafi extremists within Sheikh Hamad's shura council. A war is now being waged against the natives of the land after the Al Khalifa had been given

the green light by the two foreign powers to pursue a policy of ethnic cleansing through the process of political naturalisation. It is a dangerous game that could flare up sectarian tension in a country known for the peaceful nature of its citizens, both Shia and Sunni. The Al Khalifa are playing a dirty game and are supported in this game by the two foreign powers. In recent months, the embassies of these countries have adopted new policies in support of the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. Individuals or groups who do not conform to these policies are treated with suspicion and rejection.

The polarisation of the political situation in Bahrain in recent years is a dangerous development that could have serious repercussions. The opposition has made it clear that it would not, in any circumstances, approve of the Al Khalifa constitution and would pursue its campaign of civil resistance to force the Al Khalifa and their allies into accepting that in this day and age dictators are not allowed to impose their wills on people. Good governance is that which recognises the right of people to share in the running of their affairs, write their constitutions, participate in transparent democratic process and resist subjugation, totalitarianism, tribalism or despotism.

Despite the protestations by the people over the past four years, the Al Khalifa have not taken one serious step to address their grievances, amend their constitution or respect the native Bahrainis as partners in the political process. In light of these facts, the people have decided, once again, to boycott the elections for the Al Khalifa powerless bodies and concentrate their efforts on combating the rising phenomena of repression, torture, corruption and hereditary dictatorship. The popular petition that has been signed by tens of thousands of citizens and addressed to the United Nations is testimony to the strong resolve by the people of Bahrain to oppose this illegitimate and unconstitutional rule. They need the support of the freedom-loving people in the world in order to establish peace, moderation and democracy in the place of absolute tribal dictatorship.

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## Unprovoked attack on women

On 19th March extreme violence was used against women in Bahrain. It was an attack sanctioned by the top leadership of the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship, and carried out by their thugs. Moreover, it was carried out within what should have been a place with immunity; the court. The result was scores of women injured, one of them still in a coma at the hospital. It was a disgraceful day in the history of the ruling family, and the world is urged to intervene as a matter of urgency to end this black era in this troubled country.

The Court was held ostensibly to hear the appeal by 16 young Bahrainis who had been unjustly sentenced to two years imprisonment for taking part in a peaceful protest at the airport last January. In February they were tried by a kangaroo court which lasted only two days and the judge was ordered by the top political figures to pass the sentence. It was seen as an act of revenge by the Al Khalifa who are increasingly becoming hostile and aggressive to the people of Bahrain. The session

was held to hear the appeal against the earlier sentence. Instead of hearing the appeal the judge was instructed by the Al Khalifa to postpone the hearing. The prisoners of conscience objected to the postponement and sat on the ground in protest. They were immediately attacked inside the court by the heavily-armed death squads. They were beaten mercilessly, and most of them were severely injured. Blood was seen on their faces as they struggled to shelter themselves from the barbaric assault by their attackers.

The mothers and sisters of the prisoners insisted on seeing their children but were prevented by the Al Khalifa agents. The women tried to look inside the courtroom to get a glance at their children, but were prevented by the mercenaries.

They were pushed against the walls and the windows of the courtroom, and this led to a mayhem in which some windows were shattered. The mercenaries continued beating the women without any mercy. The mother of Jawad and Mohsin Al Salman was severely injured and was taken to hospital after some delay. She is still in a coma and there are growing fears for her life. Other women were treated for wounds and bruises. The unconscious woman had spoken to the minister of the interior, one of the Al Khalifa torturers, and vowed to continue her peaceful struggle to get her children freed.

It was a back day in the long history of maltreatment of women by the Al Khalifa.

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## More revenge attacks and arrests and the situation approaches anarchy

In revenge for its propaganda fiasco during the Formula 1 Race last week, the Al Khalifa ruling family ordered an all-out attack on peaceful demonstrators, causing large number of injuries. The demonstration was organised to highlight the plight of more than twenty young men being held in torture cells for taking part in a peaceful rally at the airport in January.

The Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship has been adopting harsh measures any political dissent including summary trials, field torture, sacking from jobs and threats of revenge from people's families. Two young girls were held hostage by Al Khalifa death squads last week, causing anxiety, fear and frustration as the search continued to find them. This action followed a peaceful demonstrations in the town of Sanabis and Daih to protest the unlawful arrest and detention of tens of Bahraini citizens.

The situation has remained volatile in the aftermath of the vicious attack by Al Khalifa mercenaries on peaceful demonstrators near the Dana Mall in Manama on. A seminar was held last Friday night (16th March) at Al Sadiq Mosque in Al Qofool by the Committee to Defend Political Prisoners.

A number of victims gave testaments on their ordeal, explaining in some detail the barbaric acts of the Al Khalifa death squads. It was a moving experience as the victims exposed their wounds to the audience. One woman's testimony led to an emotional reaction by those who were present. Some people burst in tears while others shouted slogans against the torturers. Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Meqdad, a leading religious figure, offered a detailed picture of what had happened on that day. Among the victims were a young woman,

Samira Ahmad Ali, who was taken to hospital because of her horrific injuries. Others, including those who work in other countries, such as Kuwait, were subjected to arrest and interrogation on the instigation of the Al Khalifa.

The peaceful demonstrations continued, however, and places such as Duraz, Daih, Sanabis, Karzakkan and Sitra erupted in protests against the Al Khalifa dictatorial rule. These protests are in response to the rising cruelty of the ruling family. More than 42 people are now languishing in the Al Khalifa torture cells. Sixteen were arrested after the demonstrations at the airport in January, seven in Daih and 19 in the Dana Mall demonstrations.

Among the known prisoners of conscience are: Ali Anwar Marzooq, Isa Abdullah Al Sarh, Ahmad Jaffar Al Mutaghawwi (from Duraz), Mohammad Jassim, Sadiq, Mohammad Hassan Saif (from Manama), Hassan Al Afo, 19, from Na'aim, Musa Abd Ali, Isa Abd Ali Ahmad Al Qamar, from Isa Town, Ahmad Yousef Ahmad, Jaffar Abdul Jabbar Jaffar, Abdul Amir Madan, from Ma'aamir, Jawad Al Salman and Mohsen Al Salman, Majeed Ali, from Tashan, Isma'il Hassan, Fakhri Abdulla, Ibrahim Habib, Nader Abdul Salam, Yasser Khalifa, Aa'tif Mahdi, Hassan Al Haddad, Hassan Abdul Nabi, Nasser Ali Nasser, Bader Al Jazeeri, Isa Abdulla, Jaffar Abdul Jabbar, Mohammad Hassan Hila and Mohammad Habib Hilal.

In reaction to the imposition of a controversial family law, the senior scholars organised a seminar in which they attacked the law and called for it to be repealed. Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassim, the most senior scholar also called for a new constitution as the 2002 document is a hopeless one.

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## Threats, intimidation to UN petition coordinators

As a result of overwhelming popular attendance to the petition addressed to UN general secretary and asking for a new democratic constitution drafted by an elected body from the people of Bahrain and supervised by the UN, a media campaign from sources close to the State started to give signals for a security-related attack on those collecting signatures. Furthermore, coordinators of the petition have received phone calls from State Security personnel threatening them of severe punishment for collecting signatures. Direct verbal messages from individuals close to the authorities passed similar threats and further indicated that the State is not bothered by concerns brought up by international organizations looking after the welfare of activists and defenders of human rights.

This State attitude indicates the severity of desperation resulting on the State Security Commission taking over the situation which recalls the measures and counter measures in the nineties era which resulted in tens of killing and thousands of political prisoners. Such overrun of the political situation means, nothing but full and uncontrolled deterioration and destabilization on all aspects which inevitably will affect the stability in the region. Signatures is a peaceful practice and will continue, as it is also rightful.

All doors for dialogue between the State and the people have been tightly closed, that's why the UN, as a universal umbrella for the peoples and governments, is approached. The people of Bahrain will not be the first nor the last to approach the UN, through petitions or otherwise, asking for support for their rightful demands.

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## Bahrain: A Year of Decision

**Toby Jones**

A political showdown is looming in Bahrain this year. Intensifying domestic and regional pressures—including frustration over Bahrain's disappointing experiment in political reform, escalating social problems, and aggravated sectarian tensions—grip the country. The moment of truth will come in October 2006, when elections to the national parliament are scheduled to be held.

Four years ago, frustrated by the promulgation of what they correctly viewed as a flawed constitution, the country's four main political societies joined in rejecting the unilateral changes handed down to them by a ruling family more interested in protecting its power than sharing it. Technically political parties remain illegal, but political societies such as Al Wafaq ("Concord," Bahrain's largest and predominantly Shiite political society) have decided to end their boycott and field candidates for the October elections. Despite this change in tactics, the opposition societies remain committed to pursuing their long-established goal of rewriting the constitution to bring it into line with their vision of Bahrain as a constitutional monarchy. In addition, largely as a result of the galvanizing influence of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights in drawing attention to the charged issues of unemployment and predominant poverty in the Shiite community, Al Wafaq has branched out to turn some of its attention to addressing these crises.

The prospect of political competition has raised uncomfortable questions as well as the possibility of an escalation of tensions. Even though opposition political societies enjoy considerable support in Bahrain, they are unlikely to capture even half of the parliament's 40 elected seats. The government guaranteed that the Shiites would remain underrepresented when it gerrymandered openly discriminatory electoral districts in 2002, a system that remains unchanged today. At best, Al Wafaq and the rest of the opposition, who will not compete against each other in individual parliamentary races, hope to capture between 15 and 18 seats.

Opposition leaders also face the possibility of having to quit parliament if the government refuses to address their key grievances, as well as the fact that rapidly emerging alternatives could drain away their support if they misstep. A number of members split from Al Wafaq and formed the Haqq ("Justice") society in late 2005, mostly as a result of their conviction that by deciding to participate in the system Al Wafaq was lending credibility to an illegitimate government. Haqq gained public attention recently

when it circulated a petition calling for the United Nations to intervene in Bahrain and compel the writing of a new constitution. Should the opposition fail in parliament, Haqq might well benefit, as could more populist and confrontational organizations that orbit around the outlawed but omnipresent Bahraini Center for Human Rights, groups that have already demonstrated their willingness to provoke and endure the violent tactics employed by the state.

Cognizant of all these risks, opposition leaders nonetheless hope that their decision to participate will exert more pressure on the government than the boycott did. With regard to reform, state leaders have for over four years proven not only resistant to compromise and unwilling to negotiate a middle ground with its critics, but reluctant even to engage in dialogue. The October elections will prove an important litmus test. It is likely that the country's leaders will be tempted to declare victory with the end of the boycott, pointing to the opposition's participation as a sign of weakness and refusing to address seriously the long list of opposition critiques. Another possibility, one that has taken shape as a rumor, is that King Hamad will postpone the elections in order to delay a test of strength. Either of these two courses could lead to a

radicalization of politics.

The elephant in the room is the problem of sectarianism. Shiites make up approximately 70 percent of the country's indigenous population, and many have grown restive in recent years as a result of government-led discrimination. The bombing of the Askariyya Shrine in Iraq in February 2005 led to the largest public protests in Bahrain's history, with as many as 100,000 Shiites taking to the streets the Friday following the attack. Demonstrators downplayed sectarian strife, but the event was clearly a show of Shiite force. Widespread sectarian violence is unlikely for now even with Iraq's slide toward civil war. But that could easily change. Bahrain's leaders have historically proven more adept at inflaming sectarian anxieties than soothing them and can even now be seen as periodically maneuvering Sunnis and Shiites against one another. If Bahrain's Sunni leadership reacts to rising Shiite power throughout the region by becoming more intransigent in dealing with sectarian problems and stalling reforms, this year's political showdown may prove to be a prelude to a more ominous one later on.

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### Rights Activist Moved to Hospital after Health Deterioration

Detainees Subjected to Assault before and After Arrest

The detention of nineteen Bahrainis who were arrested on 10th March, including two human rights defenders, has been extended for two weeks. The arrest took place following the forceful dispersion by the Bahraini riot police of a set-in near Al-Dana Mall in Manama, calling for the release of the detainees related to "Airport Incident" (BCHR Ref: 16010605).

Reports received by the BCHR accuse the authorities of unjustifiable use of excessive force against demonstrators and subjecting detainees to physical assault during and after their arrest. The detainees were held incommunicado and denied medical treatment and clean clothes for 3 days and were reportedly threatened and mistreated during interrogations.

Moosa Abd-Ali, 24 years, Ekr village, has been reportedly taken to the hospital twice since his arrest, and his health continues to deteriorate as he continues his hunger strike. Mr. Abd-Ali is a human rights activist who in a previous case was kidnapped and assaulted by secret police (BCHR Ref: 04020603). Mohammed Mustafa Al-Kamel, has also reportedly been admitted to the Salmaniya Medical Complex for

treatment as a result of a hunger strike.

Qanee Saleh Abdel-nabi, 26 years, Sitra, who is also among the detainees, is an elected member of "The

Committee to Defend the Rights of Those with Inherited Blood Diseases" (CDRTIBD). He himself suffers from blood disease (sickle-cell) and needs special medical care to prevent episodes. His mother and brother were allowed briefly to visit him yesterday and they noticed swelling in his foot which is a sign of health deterioration.

We urge you to do whatever is in your power to intervene in order to secure the release and well-being of the detainees, and insure that they receive proper treatment and medical care and to insure a just and fair trial if their case gets turned to the criminal court. Thanking you kindly for your continued cooperation and please do not hesitate in contacting us for any additional information.



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## Excerpts from US Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005

*Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 8 2006*

The following human rights problems were reported:

inability to change the government, political parties prohibited, impunity, restrictions on civil liberties--freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association, lengthy pretrial detention, lack of judicial independence, allegations of corruption in the judicial system, discrimination based on gender, religion, sect, and ethnicity, infringement of citizens' privacy rights, restrictions on freedom of religion and of movement, violence against women, trafficking, restrictions on labor rights.

Controversy continued over impunity for alleged torturers which the government maintained was granted by the 2001 general amnesty. In May, the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) and the dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) in cooperation with the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture (NCMVT) briefed the UN Committee Against Torture on their concerns. They focused on impunity for acts of torture committed prior to 2001; rejection by courts of all cases lodged against alleged torturers and of all requests for compensation; and the absence of redress and rehabilitation mechanisms for victims of torture.

The government owns and operates all local radio and television stations. In 2004, the government lifted its ban on correspondents from the Qatar based Al - Jazeera satellite television channel, but maintained control over the selection of the locally-based correspondent. Al - Jazeera was available in the country via satellite.

Between February 27 and March 1, authorities arrested three Web site administrators on charges of inciting hatred against the regime and spreading false rumors that could undermine state security, and held them for 15 days. Their Web site, [www.bahrainonline.org](http://www.bahrainonline.org), had been blocked by the government for several years. Supporters of the administrators held a number of demonstrations against the detentions. The three detainees went on a hunger strike for several days. On March 14, the government released the three men, but prohibited them from traveling. They continued to face charges with a maximum sentence of six years in prison.

On February 22, Ghazi Mohamed was arrested and charged with "provoking and urging enmity of the system" for displaying a banner on his car on which was written "No to 2002 Constitution, Yes to 1973 Constitution." He was released on \$135 (50 dinars) bail the same day he was detained. The case was later dismissed.

Scores of demonstrations occurred throughout the year, including many that were not approved by the government and

in which the government did not intervene. There were allegations that the MOI told the owners of venues to close their premises to prevent meetings from occurring, but it was not possible to determine the number of times this happened. The MOI reported that in the period between July 2004 and May 2005, there were 180 demonstrations, rallies, and sit-ins, the vast majority of which related to domestic issues such as unemployment, housing, and other social issues. Statistics between May and the end of the year were not available. Throughout the year, the National Committee for the Unemployed staged numerous rallies calling on the government to find solutions to Bahrain's unemployment problem.

On July 15, 100-150 protesters gathered in Manama with plans to throw rotten food at the parliament building to protest the recently-passed budget because it lacked unemployment benefits. According to the press, police blocked the protesters' path and a confrontation broke out between the security forces and protesters. Ten to twenty protesters and one police officer reportedly suffered injuries. Among the injuries sustained by the protesters included deep welts, broken bones, and back problems. The government did not punish or prosecute anyone in this case.

On December 25 Shaikh Mohamed Al-Sanad was detained upon his return from Qom, Iran. Approximately three weeks earlier Shaikh Al-Sanad's office in Qom had released a statement questioning the legitimacy of the Bahraini government regime and calling for a repeat of a UN referendum conducted in 1971 concerning Bahrain's independence. As Shaikh Al-Sanad was being held at the airport, a group of 100-300 protesters gathered in the airport arrival lounge. Riot police were deployed and clashes between protesters and riot police ensued. Several individuals were detained but were released within hours. Several days later 21 individuals were rearrested and charged for their involvement in the events at the airport. At the end of the year the cases were ongoing. Although the Rifaa region constitutes approximately 40 percent of the country's landmass and has numerous Sunni mosques, in April 2004 the Royal Court denied an application for a Shi'a mosque declaring that land in Rifaa cannot be allocated for commercial enterprises.

Opposition groups claimed that the naturalization process was politically driven to manipulate demographics for voting purposes and to keep Shi'a out of the police and defense forces, which are allegedly dominated by naturalized Sunnis from foreign countries. Although naturalization requirements and process are clearly defined, they were not applied impartially, and adjudication of naturalization applications was not transparent. The government reportedly was more lenient with naturali-

zation requests from expatriates in the security forces. Shi'a and non-Arab applicants reportedly experienced longer delays in the processing of their cases. The government complied with a 2003 parliamentary committee's request for official naturalization data. Though the government required the committee to keep personal data confidential, the committee published the statistics in the press (see section 5). The government occasionally granted citizenship to Sunni residents from neighboring countries.

Citizens do not have the right to change their government or their political system; however, the constitution provides for a democratically elected Council of Representatives, the lower house of parliament. The king appoints the prime minister, who then proposes cabinet ministers who are appointed by the king. Members of the royal family held all strategic cabinet ministry positions.

Almost all citizens belong to the Shi'a and Sunni sects of Islam, with the Shi'a constituting approximately 70 percent of resident citizens. Members of the two sects have equal rights before the law. However, Sunnis predominate politically and economically. The royal family is Sunni and is supported by the armed forces and the security services, both of which contain very few Shi'a, and influential Sunni and Shi'a merchant families.

The king appointed a Christian and a Jewish member to the Shura Council. Twenty one Shura Council members were Shi'a Muslims and seventeen were Sunni. Five of the 20 cabinet ministers were Shi'a.

Article 3 of the 1963 Citizenship Law grants citizenship to Arab applicants who have resided in the country for 15 years and to non-Arab applicants who have resided in the country for 25 years. There were reports that the citizenship law was not applied uniformly, and that the government allowed expatriate Sunni Arabs who had served less than 15 years in the security services to apply for citizenship. There were also reports of Arab Shi'a who had resided in-country for more than 15 years and non-Arab expatriates who had resided more than 25 years who had not been granted citizenship. It was unclear how many of these cases were delayed due to the lack of required documentation. In 2003, the Council of Representatives formed a committee to investigate the naturalization process and allegations that the government illegally naturalized persons who did not reside in the country (see section 2.d.). The committee's report pointed out that political naturalization has a negative impact on security and socio-economic conditions. On April 5, the undersecretary testified before parliament and vowed to correct any violations of the nationality law. To date the MOI has reported no progress in this regard.