

BAHRAIN

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Saddam's saga created fear among tyrants

The execution in Baghdad of "Baghdad Butcher" was a necessary step on the road to the salvation of the country from the ills of the Ba'thist regime that ruled Mesopotamia with fear and fire. The removal of Saddam Hussain from the political scene of the world has made it a safer place. It will soon be followed by the removal of other leaders from top posts of their countries, as they have, alongside Saddam, contributed to the culture of war, spread fear and created impossible conditions for peace especially in the Middle East. The Iraqi dictator was made by them, and was enabled to carry out wars and aggression both against his own people and Iraq's neighbours. It is unfortunate that his execution should be viewed with skepticism, condemnation and feelings of indifference towards those who lost friends or relatives at his hands. Saddam Hussain could not be viewed except with disdain and utter revulsion, since no other leader in the Middle East had committed atrocities of the kind he had done. He used chemical weapons against his own people, undertook demographic transformation at a grand scale as was evident in Anfal project and subjected the people of Iraq to a reign of terror at the grandest scale.

Was it real or a myth? Those who have not yet grown up to feel what this dictator did to Iraq will never appreciate the events of the past three decades in that country which had once been the thriving country in the Middle East with its human and material riches. By the time he was removed from power Iraq was in utter destruction. Iraqis had been scattered in all corners of the earth while their country's wealth was being blundered by the Saddamist regime with its destructive military and environmental projects. He pursued these projects in order to satisfy his inner ego paying no attention to the real needs of the country and the development of its people. Iraq is potentially the strongest and wealthiest country in the Middle East, but the policies of Saddam Hussain and his Ba'th Party meant that the country could not realize its full potential. On the contrary, Saddam took it from one conflict to another. Finally he met his fate, but only

after Iraq has been weakened and demoralized. The United States and Britain could not have invaded the country if he had acted sensibly and in line with the needs of the country. Economically, he destroyed Iraq and bankrupted the second largest oil producer in the region. Politically he created a regime that started with internal ethnic and religious problems, became embroiled in regional conflicts first with the Gulf states and Syria (in the seventies) then with Iran and Kuwait. Finally it became embroiled in international conflict with the US and its allies.

Of course the US had always looked for problems with one country or another in the region, but Saddam provided it with the opportunity to take centre stage in regional politics. The US first intervened directly in 1988 in support of Saddam's attacks on Iran, then came in full force to his forces from Kuwait. His internal and external policies provided the catalyst for the military escalation that ended his rule in 2003 and led to his dramatic downfall. The region has thus passed through a traumatic experience that needs years to overcome. Now that Iraq's dictator has gone, the problems may yet take more dramatic up turn. With the departure of Saddam, the US forces have no more reasons to remain in that country, but the US administration has its own designs in Iraq and the region and is unlikely to leave promptly. Saddam and US have caused enormous damage to Iraq that will need decades to repair. The US continued presence in the country is exacerbating the situation and will become even more contentious after Saddam's death. The people of Iraq deserve to live in peace with themselves and with their neighbours, and the sooner the US withdraws its forces from Iraq the easier it becomes for Iraqis to manage their own affairs, and the more likely that violence will ease.

One important lesson from the saga that has surrounded Saddam's final years is that tyrants cannot win the battle of wills with the people. Dictators employ their tactics that aim at breaking the will

of the people, but their determination eventually leads to change. In a region which is ruled by tyrants and dictators the Iraq lesson must remain vivid in the memory of those striving to improve the situation in their countries. The people are subjugated by the deployment of means of state terror, with the connivance of western powers who offer unlimited support to tyrants. In Bahrain, for example, the present ruler is promoted as a democrat while in reality he has been putting in place policies similar to those imposed by Saddam Hussain especially in demographic engineering, deception and sectarianism. The present sectarian strife in Iraq today is a direct result of decades of Saddam's policy of fostering sectarianism as a means to prop up the minority rule. The Al Khalifa are in the same boat, and Sheikh Hamad has adopted similar policies to those of Saddam, marginalizing the majority and propping up minority rule. The future of Bahrain is bleak under the Al Khalifa rule, and the execution of Saddam Hussain is seen as a triumph for the dispossessed in their struggle against absolute dictatorship, sectarianism and absolutist rule.

The freedom fighters in Bahrain are urged to take heart in the developments in Iraq. They have a legitimate cause to fight for, while the Al Khalifa have been disheartened by the execution of Iraq's tyrant. They are fearful of the backlash against their rule as the people awaken to the sad realities of their social and political engineering. The policies of the US and UK have failed in Iraq, prior and after the departure of Saddam, and are unlikely to succeed in the region without a fundamental re-think of the political and ethical issues. Hereditary dictatorship is an obsolete form of government that has to be encountered by modern-thinking people, who aspire to a democratic form of government and respect of human rights. The recent escalation in the attacks on personal freedoms in Bahrain and the crackdown against activists, coupled with the extensive use of torture is a shame on those who support Sheikh Hamad and his clique. He has to be challenged at every level to avoid a repeat of the Saddam saga with its disastrous consequences.

Bahrain: More arrests and torture by Al Khalifa to celebrate the New Year

The execution of Saddam Hussain has been welcomed by the people of Bahrain who had lost several of their sons at the hands of his regime. Eight young students in Najaf were executed by Saddam's agents in 1991, and five others had earlier been killed at the war front with Iran. People's spirits have been uplifted by the news that one of the most vicious tyrants had been punished by his own people. It is a positive development that has awakened the feelings that the Al Khalifa murderers may one day be brought to justice. It is a divine law that no dictator may escape justice no matter how he/she tries to escape. The arrest three years ago of Saddam Hussain had sealed his fate, while the prayers of his victims have been answered by the Almighty God. Bahraini fathers and mothers have prayed for justice to be meted out against those who had killed their sons and shown no remorse for their evil deeds. The prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa has a lot of blood on his hands, and will be pursued by the souls of his victims, while the present ruler will not escape justice for killing Nooh Khalil Al Nooh, Mohammad Jum'a Al Shakhouri and Mahdi Abdul Rahman, and the torture and imprisonment of many others over the past few years. Meanwhile the Al Khalifa regime has started the new year with more repression.

Today, a young man, Hassan Abdul Nabi, a member of the Committee of the Unemployed was being tortured at Budaya' detention centre, while six others have been detained over the past 24 hours for their opposition to the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. Some of them had been involved in demonstrations in the past few days calling for the release of political prisoners and an end to absolute dictatorship. In the early hours of this morning, the house of Hassan Ali Muhsin, 17, in Duraz was surrounded by members of the Al Khalifa death squads and he was arrested and taken to the torture chambers. He was severely tortured at the scene, even before being arrested and transferred to the torture headquarters of the Northern Province near Budaya. Later, the torturers realised that the young man was mentally unstable, so they decided to replace him with his older brother, Hussain, 18 who was snatched from his house. Eyewitnesses confirmed that he was subjected to horrific treatment as he was being arrested. His clothes were removed and he was kept undressed in the cold weather. At the same time, Hussain Yousef Zayed, 18 and Hussain Zayer Ali, 19, both from Duraz have also been arrested. A younger



citizen, Ahmad Al Muta-ghawwi, 17, has been kidnapped by the death squads after a merciless attack on his house. He was only released from the torture chambers last September after a detention that had lasted several months without charge or trial.

Two other citizens have also been arrested. Khalil Ibrahim, from Salmabad and Jaffar Abdul Aziz from Duraz. Last night, the Al Khalifa death squads arrested a young citizen, Kumail Hussain Abdul Hassan, from Al Ma'amir village, following a peaceful demonstration against the continued detention of political prisoners and the absolute dictatorship of the present ruler.

Meanwhile, the ruling family has intervened to stop a peaceful demonstration scheduled for today, in protest against the detention of two young Bahrainis; Dr Mohammad Saeed Al Sahlawi and Hussain Abdul Aziz Al Habshi. The protest had been called for by the families of the two hostages whose patience is running out as the Al Khalifa continue their torture and maltreatment. They have now re-scheduled the demonstration for Wednesday. Earlier demonstrations had been mercilessly attacked by riot police on the orders of the royal court.

More frustration as the majority Shia are marginalised and their youth detained

The appointed half of the Shura council has been announced only to indicate the reality of the Al Khalifa destructive political programme in Bahrain. Out of forty appointed members, 20 are Sunnis, 18 Shia, one Christian and one Jew. It is widely known that the appointment of a Christian and a Jew is part of the deception programme being implemented by the Al Khalifa dictatorship to impress their western backers. But the appointment of less Shia members than Sunnis has dangerous implications. It is an attempt by the ruling family who had occupied Bahrain in eighteenth century, to impose a new reality in the country, that the Shia have become a minority. This follows an extensive programme of political naturalisation over the past five years that created tens of thousands "new Bahrainis", mainly from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan; the countries where extremism flourishes. Until few years ago, the Shia comprised over 70 percent of the population. Their percentage now is not known as Sheikh Hamad, with the support of Washington and London, enforced his programme of demographic engineering to change the population balance that existed for decades. It is a crime equivalent to ethnic cleansing but without the bloody part. It is implemented in two ways: the granting of Bahraini nationality to tens of thousands of Sunnis from other countries,

and the repatriating of native Shia youth to other Gulf states under the pretext of better job opportunities and housing.

In the past, Shia and Sunnis were given similar portions in the cabinet and membership of the Shura council. Sheikh Hamad is now adopting a completely different approach. Half of the cabinet posts are now allocated to the Al Khalifa and the rest to Shia and Sunni ministers with inclination to grant Sunnis more posts. It is a crime to divide the country on ethnic and sectarian lines. It is a greater sin to treat the Shia as the underdog of the society, limit their influence and transform them into a minority. In the recent elections, only 17 seats out of the 40 seats of the elected half of the Shura council went to the Shia. Now they are under-represented in the two halves of the Shura council and in the cabinet.

Meanwhile the two political prisoners who had been detained for possessing leaflets calling for the boycott of the elections, had their detention extended by 15 more days without trial. Their plight has become a cause of concern to their families and human rights activists who view them as prisoners of conscience. They are being maltreated in the torture chambers of the Al Khalifa and are denied proper access to information regarding their case. Their lawyers have complained of a total blackout by the regime on the nature of their

offences and the articles of the penal code under which they are being held or are likely to be charged in accordance with. Despite their repeated demands for clarity, the lawyers are in the dark and believe that the two citizens are being persecuted for their opinion.

In Denmark petition calling for the release of political prisoners has been signed by 33 Danish personalities representing various groups. The petition is as follows:

We, the undersigned, have noted with concern the unlawful detention of political and human rights activists for peacefully expressing their views on the current situation in the country. Of particular concern is the arrest last month of Dr Mohammad Saeed Matar and Hussain Abdul Aziz Al Habshi. We call on the Government of Bahrain to release these prisoners of conscience without further delay, as their continued detention is contrary to the basic human rights.

In Bahrain, the people are preparing to commemorate the Day of the Martyrs on 17th December, the day in 1994 in which two demonstrators were gunned down on orders from the prime minister. It is expected that demonstrations and other civil actions will be undertaken by the people who are frustrated by the Al Khalifa policies and programmes of mass deception, corruption and despotism.

Bahrain: Demise of Sheikh Al Jamri, the historic leader

The demise of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri was announced in Bahrain yesterday after an illness that lasted three years. Last night, tens of thousands of citizens joined the spectacular funeral that stretched over several kilometres in a show of defiance unparalleled in recent years. Sheikh Al Jamri was the main religious figure during the national uprising against the Al Khalifa regime between 1994 and 2000. He was mercilessly treated by the ruling family. First he was imprisoned in April 1995 with other senior activists and thousands of citizens, following the attack on his village, Bani Jamra in which two people were murdered. He was released in September



of that year, only to be re-arrested few months later. On 21st January 1996, Sheikh Al Jamri and other senior political figures were arrested under the notorious State Security Law which had been imposed by the British colonial officer, Ian Henderson. While in prison Sheikh Al Jamri was maltreated, threatened with retribution and subjected to vicious psychological pressures in order to force him to give up his struggle. The worst was to come during the reign of the present ruler.

Sheikh Hamad became the ruler, in line with the system of hereditary dictatorship, after the death of his father, Sheikh Isa, in March 1999. The CIA then took a particular interest in the Bahraini situation, and encouraged the new ruler to introduce some reforms in return for more security measures to the domination of the ruling family. This political programme which is now being implemented has created a worse situation to the majority of the population who have been subjected to a fundamental demographic transformation. One of the first initiatives of Sheikh Hamad, was the release of Sheikh Al Jamri in the summer of 1999, under the most humiliating conditions. The Americans allowed him to administer victor's justice. In the first week of July 1999 the Al Khalifa held a secret trial for Sheikh Al Jamri. He was sentenced to ten years in jail and a penalty of BD15 million (\$40 million). This led to a popular and legal outrage inside and outside the country. The following day (8th July 1999) Sheikh Hamad inflicted the most humiliating act on the country by parading Sheikh Al Jamri

from the torture chamber to his palace. He was released only to be placed under house arrest for 18 months. The house arrest was lifted on 23rd January 2001. Two years later, Sheikh Al Jamri travelled to Germany for an operation to his back, during which he allegedly suffered a stroke. Suspicion has been raised about the circumstances of this stroke which had not been detected until a week later despite the fact that he had been under intensive care. The stroke crippled Sheikh Al Jamri's health and he remained bed-stricken until his demise. The human waves that participated in his funeral yesterday indicate the extent of love and respect of this unique leader who was present

among the people in their hour of need. He will remain alive in the hearts and minds of the people of Bahrain.

Meanwhile, the Al Khalifa mercenaries attacked a peaceful demonstration in Manama on Sunday 17th December which was organised to mark the Day of the Martyrs. It was a vicious attack that led to injuries and arrests.

In London, a seminar was held yesterday (18th December) under the title "Elections without democracy or human rights). Several speakers took to the platform including Lord Avebury, the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee", Hassan Mushaime, the Secretary General of Haq Movement in Bahrain, Ghada Jamsheer, a woman activist from Bahrain, Dr Salah Al Bandar and Mr Andrew Anderson of Frontline Defenders in Dublin. A one minute silence was observed in respect of Sheikh Al Jamri who had passed away earlier in the day. The event received good coverage from at least two TV stations.

Bahrainis Mourn Leader of Democracy

MANAMA, 19 December 2006 — Thousands of Bahrainis marched yesterday from Manama and the surrounding areas to mourn the passing of Shiite scholar and opposition leader, Sheikh Abdul Ameer Al-Jamri.

Hundreds joined the long procession as the march passed the main Shiite villages to the hometown and final resting place of Sheikh Al-Jamri, 69, who died earlier in the day from heart and kidney failure.

The marchers carried black flags and pictures of Al-Jamri, a former opposition MP in the dissolved 1975 Parliament and a central figure in the mid-1990s unrest that swept Bahrain.

They also carried symbolic coffins with his turban placed on top and pictures of several Shiites, who the opposition claims were killed by security forces during the unrest.

Hundreds of women also took part in the march with many of them weeping and condoling each other, as news of the Al-Jamri's death broke.

The main Shiite political groupings, Al-Wefaq Islamic Society, Haq (Right) and the Islamic Enlightenment Society, which he founded, all issued statements mourning the passing of Al-Jamri.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of the great mujahid (Islamic fighter), the national and Islamic symbol, and the leader of the 1990 Dignity intifada," said a statement from Al-Wefaq, for which he was also a spiritual leader.

MP and Secretary-General of Al Wefaq, Sheikh Ali Salman, was to lead prayers

before the body of Al-Jamri was carried to the burial grounds of the northern village of Bani Jamarah.

The Bahraini authorities had relieved Sheikh Al-Jamri from his judicial post in 1988 because of his political activities.

In 1992, he was one of six co-signees of the petition to Sheikh Isa ibn Salman Al Khalifa, which called for reforms.

In 1994, he was a co-signer of a popular petition calling for constitutional reforms, release of political prisoners, and the abolition of the state security act.

The 1994 petition was one of the underlying causes for the political unrest in Bahrain, with the authorities placing him under house arrest for five months in 1995.

He was rearrested in 1996 and three and half years later was sentenced to 10 years in jail. However, King Hamad released him and 299 political prisoners the next day to make way for reforms after his rise to power.

Al-Wefaq, which won 17 seats in last month's parliamentary elections and became the largest political bloc in Parliament, is currently locked in a dispute with the government. It boycotted Friday's opening session of the second term of the National Assembly.

Al-Wefaq's move came in protest over what they said was an attempt to prevent them from holding the parliamentary chairman post and reappointing controversial figures to the new Cabinet and Shoura, the upper house of the assembly.

Lord Avebury's introductory remarks at the House of Lords seminar

18 December 2006

The theme of today's seminar is Bahrain: Elections without democracy or human rights, and we have to say first that democracy isn't simply a matter of graciously allowing people to cast votes for a national parliament every few years. Hitler came to power through a vote in the Reichstag in 1933; Mugabe is the elected head of state in Zimbabwe and is backed by a Zanu-PF majority in his Parliament, and even the North Koreans have a Supreme People's Assembly elected by popular vote. I was interested to see that the President of that Assembly sent a message to King Hamad on Bahrain's National Day expressing his belief that the relations between North Korea and Bahrain would grow stronger in their interests.

No doubt people would say it is unfair to compare North Korea with Bahrain, but they share more than one feature of their political systems. Both have hereditary executive heads of state, who are above criticism and are generally surrounded by sycophants, and in both, the people have no say in choosing their governments. For Bahrain, this was underlined again when King Hamad appointed his cabinet just after the elections, perhaps to insinuate that there was some connection between the two events. The new Prime Minister – if one can use the adjective to describe a man who has held the post for the last 36 years – is Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa. The first deputy Prime Minister is Shaikh Ali bin Khalifa al-Khalifa. The Court Minister is Shaikh Khalid bin Abdulla al-Khalifa. The Defence Minister is Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Khalifa. The Minister of State for Defence is Dr Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulla and so on. Altogether 11 of the 23 cabinet ministers are members of the royal family, and they hold most of the important jobs. So the election has made no difference whatsoever to the government, and the US State Department list this as one of 13 major human rights problems in Bahrain in their latest report of March 2006.

In spite of the marginal role played by the parliament, however, the al-Khalifa realise that it is important for several reasons. First, it enables them to masquerade as a constitutional democracy on the world stage. Second, it is hoped to deflect popular opinion away from genuinely democratic reforms, which would mean that the king would be reduced to a figurehead role, as in democratic monarchies such as Thailand, the Netherlands and Nepal, at least until the new constitution comes into force, under which the king becomes a non-person, constitutionally speaking. Third, it could act as a channel through which some lesser grievances might be aired harmlessly and thereby dispersed. The trouble with that is that in the absence of internal self-determination, all other human rights and freedoms are conditional on the will of the ruler.

But if the elections were genuinely free and fair, it is possible that the elected chamber

might have been ready to flex its muscles on some of the major issues of the day: the impunity enjoyed by the torturers of the previous régime including the notorious Scot Ian Henderson, who dares not return to Britain to enjoy his ill-gotten estate in Devon in case the British police arrest him; the rampant corruption which means that while some people get very rich in Bahrain, the poor remain poor; the discrimination against the Shi'a in employment rights, and particularly in the public service; the demographic engineering of the population by the illegal award of citizenship to large numbers of foreigners including Saudi Arabians and Syrians; the restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, documented by international human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as, of course, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, whose website is blocked in Bahrain.

The opposition Islamic National Accord Association might raise some of these issues, though they have already said they won't talk about constitutional matters such as the powers of the nominated upper house, the Shura Council, which has an effective veto against anything the elected members decide, or about the discrimination against the Shi'a, which could be dealt with effectively by equality legislation if there was the political will. But the opposition would at least have been able to pass resolutions, for instance on the appointment of a parliamentary human rights committee, if the elections hadn't been gerrymandered to ensure that Sunni loyalists won. Meanwhile the Shura decided to get their oar in first and establish their own human rights committee. According to Mahmood's Den, described by the FCO as 'a respected blogger' they were told to do this to counter the prospect of a Human Rights committee in the elected Council of Representatives.

Unfortunately, no foreign observers were allowed to monitor the elections, but the constituencies were so blatantly distorted that it was impossible for there to be free and fair elections, however good the polling day arrangements may have been. The Hawar Islands, awarded to Bahrain by the International Court of Justice in its judgement on the territorial dispute between Qatar and Bahrain, were uninhabited, but the authorities created a rotten borough by posting a few naturalised Sunni foreigners there to ensure that a government sympathiser was elected. At the other end of the scale, Sitra, with a population of 30,000 Shi'as, elected one member. The southern province, a Sunni area with a population of 15,000, elected 6 members. These and other gross anomalies meant that although according to the 'respected blogger', the Shi'a made up 62% of the electorate, they only gained 17 seats to the Sunnis' 23. But to be absolutely sure of getting this result,

the authorities also allegedly bussed the naturalised foreigners and military personnel into constituencies where their votes could have the greatest effect. We shall conduct an analysis of the gerrymandering and election malpractices and publish the results. We also need to look at the connections between the Bandargate operations and the manipulation of the election results. Money flowed from the taxpayers via the secret organisation run by Shaikh Ahmed bin Atiyattallah al-Khalifa – another royal, head of the Civil Informatics Organisation, a government intelligence outfit, and brother of a notorious torturer – into the pockets of Sunni election candidates, a variety of front organisations, a pro-government newspaper, and websites that foment sectarian hatred. Obviously, Shaikh Ahmed couldn't have conducted such an extensive operation without authority at the highest level, and the al-Khalifas have closed ranks.

The Bahrain government's response to these allegations was to expel Dr al-Bander, to refuse popular demands for a thorough independent investigation, and now to reappoint Shaikh Ahmed as a Cabinet Minister.

Meanwhile, there are signs of a return to the bad old days of the nineties, and as we commemorate the martyrs of December 17, 1994, the start of a dreadful era for Bahrain when thousands were imprisoned without trial, and many were tortured, some to death, history seems to be repeating itself. Two activists, Dr Mohammad Saeed Matar and Hussain Abdul Aziz Al Habshi were snatched off the street just over a month ago without a judicial warrant and were denied access to lawyers during interrogation. Apparently their 'crime' was to print and distribute leaflets calling for a boycott of the fraudulent elections, and when a demonstration against this violation of the right to freedom of expression was planned last week, heavily armed forces were rushed to the spot to threaten the protesters and stop their meeting.

When I met the king nearly two years ago I said to him that the essence of democracy was that it never reached finality, but continued to broaden out to meet the needs of all the people, and he appeared to agree with me. The process got stuck, however, and only the king has the power to ensure that it moves on. Unless there is the political will at the top to ensure that elections are fair, that demographic engineering of citizenship is halted; that genuine freedom of expression is advanced, and that there are mechanisms not only for hearing grievances but actively remedying them, Bahrain's fledgling democracy will perish in its infancy.