

# BAHRAIN

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

## A stagnant political regime in changing times

The international community has taken the right decision by denying the Al Khalifa ruling family membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The Government of Bahrain failed to achieve support from any other country when it sought to renew its membership of the Council. It was good news for human rights activists who have repeatedly campaigned against transforming the Council into an ineffective body whose members are those who commit more human rights violations than non-members. It was a political fiasco for the ruling family which had attempted to achieve international support for its repressive internal policies. For the past twelve months it has exploited its membership of the Council in its media campaign for recognition of its internal policies. It has attempted to convince the world of its "democracy" which it claims "has no parallel except in the well-established constitutional democracies". It sought to confine the notions of democracy within mechanical processes such as "constitution", "elections" and "parliament" despite the fact that non of these mechanisms contained the spirit of freedom of choice, pluralism, ability to change the government, accountability or freedom of legislation.

The downturn in the fortunes of the ruling family came shortly after the last pseudo-elections last November. Some factions of the opposition which had boycotted the process in the past changed their minds and participated in those elections hoping to make a change. The ruling family presented this as the final victory over the opposition and thought it would be long-lasting. However, the steadfast opposition felt relieved that it would no longer be bogged down in trivial debates over participation and boycott. Then came the near-fatal decision by Sheikh Hamad to put the most senior political and human rights activists on trial. On 16<sup>th</sup> February Mr Hassan Mushaime, the Secretary of Haq Movement and Mr Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, the President of the Bahrain Centre of Human Rights and Shakir Mohammad, a young activist, were summoned by the regime's security service.

The country erupted in protests against the ruling family, forcing their immediate release. Intermittent clashes between Bahraini youth, riot police and death squads resulted in more injuries and deaths. In April, Abbas Al Shakhouri, a young Bahraini employee at one of the Manama hotels was shot dead by Death Squads. More protests ensued, and more Bahrainis were arrested and tortured. The scene was set for more showdowns between the two sides. Then came the decision by Sheikh Hamad to resume the trial of the three activists. They were summoned to appear at a court run by the Al Khalifa on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Once again, the country erupted in protests against the Al Khalifa dictatorship. The three decided not to appear at the court. It was a courageous and historical step that shook the regime to its core. Sheikh Hamad had no alternative but to order the cancellation of the whole show. It was a clear defeat of the ruling family.

What has made the situation more polarised is several developments. First the trial, the people's reaction and the subsequent cancellation of the show. It gave the people the confidence they needed to be able to stand up to the challenges of the regime and pursue their civil resistance campaign. Then came the admission by those who had ended their boycott of Sheikh Hamad's pseudo-democratic show and participated in the last "elections". Al Wefaq members said that the achievement of the Shura Council had been nil. It was the straw that was needed to break the back of the "participating camel". Third came the onslaught by the Death Squads and riot police on demonstrators. The past few months have seen a sharp rise in torture acts, extra-judicial killings and intimidation. In particular, death squads have been active on the streets and they inflicted enormous injuries on innocent demonstrators. The aim is to break the public will to fight against dictatorship, corruption and the mentality of occupation. Several people have sustained serious injuries including Ali Saeed Al Khabaz, Hussain Abbas Ali and Sayyed Abbas Sayyed Mahdi. It is a sign of

despair on the part of Sheikh Hamad and his clique that they should resort to extreme forms of violence against Bahraini people in such vicious ways. If they believe these practices will lead to peace and tranquillity, they are far from reality.

There is now a spreading consensus among opposition figures and factions that it is becoming more difficult for the people of Bahrain to coexist with the ruling family, especially in light of the experience of the past six years. First the Al Khalifa ruling family has abandoned the legally-binding document in the form of the 1973 constitution. This is a confirmation by them that they do not believe in bi-partisan companionship. Second; it is difficult to imagine coexistence between mutually-exclusive entities. Sheikh Hamad was the first to assume this exclusivity when he resorted to importing new breeds of people from outside the country, offer them Bahraini nationality and build settlements for them. Third; The "political programme" of Sheikh Hamad has achieved negative rating among the citizens. Even those who swallowed the poison of participation with a repressive regime have now admitted the futility of this participation. It is not based on equality, mutual respect or recognition, but on one-sided power base that allows no room of manoeuvre for or participation from others. Forth; the existence of a secret agenda with ruling family, the implementation of which had been allocated to Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, has seriously affected the relations between the people of Bahrain and the ruling family. What made the episode more painful is the total silence of Sheikh Hamad and his clique on the contents of the plan as presented by the Al Bandar report. Instead of addressing the main issue; ie, the secret plan, Sheikh Hamad ordered the trial of Dr Salah Al Bandar for exposing government secrets. That action did not go well with the people. It is now becoming a new culture among them to look forward to a total divorce with the ruling family which has failed to adapt the realities of modern world. It may not be long before public calls for their removal are repeated in all corners of Bahrain. They have failed their people and it may be time for them to go.

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## Political prisoners tortured and summary justice for demonstrators

A young detainee has been transferred to hospital after his health deteriorated following extensive torture at the hands of the government agents. Ali Saeed Al Khabbaz, 22, from Sanabis has been taken three times to hospital since he was arrested two days ago. Concern has been raised about his physical health after his family was denied access to see him. He is now at the military hospital and reports about his health from those who accidentally saw him this morning described his health as poor. Human rights activists in Bahrain have called for an immediate investigation into allegation of torture and maltreatment of political prisoners. The country has been embroiled in serious troubles over the past two weeks in reaction to the decision by the ruling family to try three activists for their political views.

Another citizen, Hamid Yousif, in his mid-thirties, is also suffering extensive injuries to his body. He was tortured ex-

tensively at the hands of the death squads who attacked the peaceful demonstration in Sanabis on Sunday. An elderly woman who tried to fend off the attack on Hamid was threatened by members of the squads who were acting on orders from higher authorities.

The number of political prisoners has risen steadily in recent days. The known detainees are: Radhi Ali Radhi from Abu Saibe (sentenced to one year imprisonment for expressing his views), Jaffar Fardan, from Karranah (one year imprisonment for expressing his views), Majid Hussain Eid and Hussain Ali Baqir (both from Ma'amir), Ali Ahmad Hobail, from Sitra, Sayyed Alawi Sayyed Hadi Al Abbar and Sayyed Baqir Sayyed Sadiq Al Abbar (both from Nu'aim), Younis Ahmad Khamis (from Nuwaidrat), Aqeel Ahmad Mansoor, from Daih, and Saeed from Sanabis.

Meanwhile, the ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, has ordered the rise of his

Shura council (with both the elected and appointed chambers) at the end of this month. This means that the whole period of the convening of this council lasted only five months. In an interview with the Saudi daily, Al Sharaq Al Awsat today, a member of this council, Sheikh Ali Salman, summarised the achievement of this council during this period as zero. Since the inception of this powerless body, the country has become embroiled in political and social tension and the public feelings have been marked by anger, mistrust and despair.

In the past three days demonstrations spread to many areas in protest against the policies of the ruling family especially the political naturalisation and discrimination on ethnic and sectarian lines. Eyewitnesses described the treatment of demonstrators as "aggressive and barbarian" with riot police using extreme force to disperse demonstrators.

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2007

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## Dramatic escalation following the Al Khalifa defeat on the issue of trial

The situation in Bahrain has deteriorated rapidly in the past few weeks and the stage has now been set to more polarisation between the people and the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. What happened in the past three days has now set the stage for this polarisation with emerging consensus for the Sheikh Hamad's regime to go. The world has made significant steps towards democracy everywhere except in the Gulf region.

First came the decision by the ruling family to try three opposition figures for criticising the policies of the ruler: Hassan Mushaime', Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja and Shakir Mohammad Al Aali. This followed their brief arrest on 16<sup>th</sup> February, that resulted in a country-wide uprising. They were released immediately. Instead of addressing the grievances of the people especially the demands for a democratically-elected government, the ruling family decided to put the three on a trial that would have taken place on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The people reacted angrily, staging protests and demonstrations throughout the country. On Friday, for example, Bahrainis expressed their anger against the ruling family by staging pickets, protests and demonstrations in Sanabis, Daih, Malikiyah and other places. Sheikh Hamad ordered his death squads to attack worshippers in many mosques, and many injuries were reported.

The scene was set for a major showdown between the Bahrainis and the Al Khalifa regime. The day of the intended trial was to become a test for the re-

solves of both sides. Sheikh Hamad was thus forced to order the cancellation of the trial. He was forced to this decision for several reasons. First, the trial would have definitely exposed the weakness of the regime's accusations, as the three popular figures did nothing more than the peaceful expression of opinion. Second, the consequences of the trial would have trapped the ruling family into yet another public relations fiasco as it would have led to even more polarisation of public opinion against the ruling family. Third, he was aware of the negative image it would have left on the group of Members of the European Parliaments next week. The MEPs have been informed of the deteriorating human rights situation and the trial would have confirmed this state of affairs.

The decision to cancel the trial on the eleventh hour has, however, confirmed a more serious accusation against the regime; that the three powers are not separated but are in the hands of the ruler, and that the judiciary is a tool in his hands. It was a blow to the rule of law and a mockery of the judiciary. How can one man decide the fate of people? Where is the rule of law and where is the independence of the judiciary? It is now clear that Sheikh Hamad found himself embroiled in a situation that could cause fatal wounds not only to his personal style of rule but to his family's chances of survival as a hereditary dictatorship. He chose to cancel the trial hoping that it would lead to a more stable situation. That did not happen. Last night, as Bahrainis prepared to celebrate their victory against the Al Khalifa in the village of Nuwaidrat, they were

mercilessly attacked by the riot police who often receive their instructions from the royal court. Tear gas and chemical agents were used against the Bahrainis who were taking part in the meeting, in addition to extensive use of rubber bullets. What annoyed the government was the unity of the various religious and ideological trends in the country. On the platform which was specifically targeted by the attackers were representatives of Shia, Sunni, Islamist and liberals who were celebrating the defeat of the Al Khalifa in the trial issue. Several prominent figures were injured as they were showered with various weapons as they addressed the people. Among them were: Ibrahim Sharif, the President of Wa'ad Society, Hassan Mushaime, the President of Haq Movement and Isa Al Jowdar, another member of Haq Movement. It could prove to be a turning point in the tense relations between the Bahrainis and the Al Khalifa.

In addition to injuries, several young people were arrested including: Younis Ahmad Khamis, 30 and Mustafa Bahar, 18.

More protests and public meetings are scheduled for the next few days and the situation is likely to remain tense, amid calls for a popular and final rejection of the Al Khalifa hereditary rule that has failed to adapt to modern realities and the rule of law. Many Bahrainis are now publicly saying that the Al Khalifa have overstayed in power and that time has come to rid the country of their mischiefs.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**

21 May 2007

## Images of vicious repression in Bahrain, Al Khalifa-style



### Sayyed Abbas Sayyed Mahdi

Bahraini citizen Sayed Abbas Sayed Mahdi, who was passing by the house of the political activist Hassan Mushaima on Sunday May 20, while people were gathering in relation to solidarity with him, when he was stopped by the police.

He was beaten severely by the Foreign Special Security Forces that works for the ministry of interior. They beaten him continuously all over his body, kicked his head and hit it against the ground till he started bleeding. Sayed Abbas does not know why he was stopped.

### Ali Saeed Al Khabbaz

22 years, from Al-Qufool. An eyewitness told BCHR that he saw Al-Khabbaz being beaten severely by more than ten of the Special Security Police, most of them were non-Bahrainis.

"They were beating him continuously all over his body, they hit his head against the wall until he started bleeding. After that one of the police held him up from his hair, putting a rubber bullet gun on his shoulder, and pushing him forward using him as human shield against protesters stones while advancing in the narrow streets"

Mr. Al-Khabbaz was arrested on the 21st of this month when security forces attacked a peaceful gathering by the house of the political activist Hassan Mushaima in relation to solidarity with the latter.

The family of the victim have heard about the brutal way their son was beaten and that he was transferred to the Military hospital suffering of severe injuries. They have written a letter of urgent appeal, asking human rights organization for an intervention in their sons case. On the 23rd of May, the family gathered at the Al-Nuaim police station demanding to see their son. After about four hours the family, including ten women and their children, refused to leave, the special police were brought and the family were physically thrown out. Now, after four days from the arrest, Al-Khabbaz's family still do not know about his condition, and they have been denied any visitation or information

### Hammed Yousif Ahamad

46 year-old Hameed Yousef Ahmed is currently being treated in the military hospital because of injuries reportedly caused by S. S. police. Among his injuries are a broken tooth, and a broken jaw.

Mr Ahmed, an unemployed Bahraini, said that he was on his way home to Sanabis on the 21st of May when he saw young men running away from the S. S. police. Minutes later he was seized by the security police and beaten.

He told the BCHR that he was then taken by the security forces to Sanabis graveyard and got more beatings. After that he was handed over to another group of the S. S. police who took him and another man (Alkhabbaz, Ref.24/05/07) to the Exhibition center roundabout, beating them all the way there. When they reached the roundabout the two men were thrown on the ground and beaten.

Amongst the non Bahraini S. S. police, there was one who was dressed in traditional Arab clothes and he looked Bahraini. This man started stepping on Mr. Ahmed's head. Mr. Ahmed continues:

"I started telling them that I was thirsty, I was pleading for water. The Bahraini-looking police told the others to open my mouth, and they filled my mouth with sand. In the sand there were pebbles and that caused my tooth to break. Then the same man turned his gun and hit me on my face with it, and broke my jaw."

At that point there was a woman who was driving by, she stopped her car and asked the police to stop beating the two men. The S. S. police started swearing at her, hitting her car and damaging it, until she drove off. Finally, the two men were taken to Exhibition center police station, where the police took pictures for them, placed tear gas shells in front of them, and put masks on their faces, according to Mr. Ahmed.

In addition to the broken jaw and tooth, Mr. Ahmed also suffers from difficulty in breathing, and bruises in his legs, knee cap, knees and ribs. Moreover, he complained that he has no balance and therefore has great difficulty in standing or walking.



### Hussain Abbas Ali

A 23 year old Bahraini, Husain Abbas Ali, who was wounded in an attack carried out by security forces on a gathering. The gathering took place in the village of Karzakkan on the 18th of May. It was held in protest against the violent attack carried out by security forces on a seminar organized by the opposition. Mr Ali is currently in the Salmaniya hospital, wing 62, bed no. 12. He has lost eyesight in his right eye as a result of the injury But he was told that could be temporary.

Mr. Ali is one of many who were attacked that day, however, his injury is one of



the more serious. The security forces, who are mainly non-Bahrainis, attacked the gathering using mainly rubber bullets and tear gas. Although these weapons are less dangerous when compared to live ammunition, they have been the cause of many serious injuries in the past. The use of excessive force against peaceful civilians has again caused a serious injury when Mr. Ali was hit by a rubber bullet in his right eye.

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## Four developments indicate serious rise in tension

The reverberations from the decision by the ruling family to put three activists on trial are taking new dimensions. The situation in the country is expected to take a new turn to the worse as the civil resistance movement takes deeper roots in the Bahraini society. The situation is becoming more polarised as the people become further disenchanted with the policies of the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. Preparations are being made to turn the show trial into a day of public fury and expression of total rejection of the antiquated regime. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the political process initiated by the present ruler, Sheikh Hamad, has been exposed as nothing more than an attempt to annihilate the natives of the country through a process of sectarian cleansing unseen in any other country in the world in cotemporary history. Several negative developments have taken place in the past few days that has confirmed the people's fear of a

First came the decision by Sheikh Hamad to put three activists on trial for expressing views undesirable to the ruling family. Mr Hassan Mushaime', the Secretary-General of Haq Movement (the only movement in the country that has crossed the ideological and sectarian prejudices and include members of all persuasions), Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, the President of the Bahrain Centre of Human Rights and Shakir Mohammad, an activist have been targeted for persecution by the ruling family for their outspoken criticism of the authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hamad ordered to appear before an Al Khalifa-appointed court on 21<sup>st</sup> of May. The three had been arrested on 16<sup>th</sup> February and released on the same day when the people reacted angrily and the country was poised for a new uprising. The proposed trial is considered as further clampdown against freedom of expression and curtailment of public liberties.

Second came the rejection by the ruling family of a proposed questioning of Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa for his part in directing a secret net whose main aim is to enforce sectarianism in the country and create discord among the people. His activities had been documented by Dr Salah Al Bandar, a former advisor to the ministry headed by Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, whose brother was the notorious torturer whose trial is demanded by the victims. Some members of Sheikh Hamad's half-elected Shura council had, under public pressure, demanded the questioning. Sheikh Hamad refused the request, a step that has angered even those who thought they would be able to make headway through participation in the political process under the domination of the Al Khalifa dictatorship.

Third was the trial in absentia of Dr Salah Al Bandar for exposing the existence and

details of the secret web under the direct control of the royal court, headed by Atiyyat Allah. Instead of heeding the calls to sanction the criminals whose aim has been to fragment the society on sectarian basis, the Al Khalifa have decided to criminalise Dr Al Bandar. Observers have taken their decision to prosecute Al Bandar as a further sign of the ill-intentions of the ruling family which had occupied the country by force in 1783 and have never integrated within the Bahraini society. The secret web had been formed to change the demography of Bahrain after the failure of the Al Khalifa to integrate within the native popula-

tion (Shia and Sunni). The ruling family has now condemned Dr Al Bandar to one year imprisonment in a show trial that lasted only a few minutes.

Forth came the continued show trials of young activists who protest against the increasing dictatorship of Sheikh Hamad and his clique. The latest to be tried in these Al-Khalifa run courts are: Karim Ahmad Khamis, Nasser Sharif and Ahmad Mirza, all from Jid Al Haj village. They were arrested on 14<sup>th</sup> April as they prepared to take part in a peaceful demonstration to protest against the decision to persecute activists. Further protests are planned for Tuesday and Friday. On 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May more protests are planned.

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## Tension rising as Mushaime and Khawaja decide to ignore the trial

Mr Hassan Mushaime, the Secretary General of Haq Movement and Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, have said they would not attend their trial on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May. The trial was ordered by the Al Khalifa ruling family in revenge for the comments by the two popular leaders criticising the ruler, Sheikh Hamad for his dictatorship, blundering people's wealth and imposition of a strict tribal regime on the country. The statement said the trial as "Politically motivated", and refused to cooperate with the attempts to intimidate the people by threats, arrests and show trials.

The charges levelled against the three activists include: attempting to change the political system of the country by force and with illegal means, spreading hatred the regime, spreading false news which may lead to social unrest, encouraging non-compliance with the laws and criticising the king openly. The total imprisonment sentence for these "offences" could reach 14 years. These charges have been made up in revenge for peaceful expression of opinion by those public figures. It is an attempt to curtail public freedoms and end any form of freedom of expression. It is a serious setback and an indication of the authoritarian rule of Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, who is becoming one of most brutal dictators in the Middle East.

Today, a peaceful demonstration in support of the two leaders was attacked by the riot police using repressive tools. The demonstration was due to start from Nu'aim district of Manama when large numbers of foreign riot police attacked the Bahrainis from all directions, using tear gas and rubber bullets extensively. Some reports speak of some casualties among the demonstrators. Helicopters were seen hovering the area as the people

sought to move their demonstration to another spot.

More protests and demonstrations are planned for the next few days, with the largest-ever demonstration on 21<sup>st</sup> May. The people are risking their lives as they take part in peaceful demonstrations and face an army of heavily-armed riot police and death squads. Sheikh Hamad stands accused of ordering the extra-judicial killings that have taken place in the past few years. He has refused to order any inquiry into the murder by the death squads of several Bahrainis.

More than forty religious scholars have signed a statement condemning the trial of the two leaders. The statement outlined a series of failures by the Al Khalifa in running the country and accused them of politicising the case of Mr Mushaime. They warned of serious repercussions if he is arrested or maltreated by the regime's death squads. Among the signatories are: Sheikh Abdul Jalil Al Miqdad, Sayyed Kamil Al Hashimi, Sheikh Mohammad Ali Al Mahfoodh, Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad and Sheikh Munir Al Ma'tooq.

Several people were arrested by the death squads of the Al Khalifa last night, following a public meeting to commemorate the martyrdom of Sheikh Ali Al Nachas, who was murdered while in jail in 1997. His killers have never been identified or charged. Among the detainees are: Sami Ahmad Meftah, 27, Mohammad Abdulla Ibrahim, 17 and Sayyed Mohammad Sayyed Saeed, 16. They are all from Tubli village. Nothing has been heard of them since their brutal arrest. There is a grave concern that they may be subjected to torture and ill-treatment by their abductors.