

BAHRAIN

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A tale of a torturer and the tortured

The recent discovery that the notorious torturer Ian Henderson was still enjoying the protection of the Al Khalifa regime in Bahrain has infuriated human rights activists and added impetus to the moves to try him and other torturers for crimes against humanity. Mr Henderson was seen on 22nd July at London's Heathrow airport taking a British Airways flight back to Bahrain after spending few weeks in London. Accompanied by his wife, Henderson was not worried that any action against former torturers would be taken by the Bahraini regime. In the brief conversation at the marquee outside Terminal 4, the former British colonial officer, who had served in Kenya in the fifties, did not show the slightest feeling of remorse for what he has been accused of committing. He considered the victims who had been tortured to death such as Saeed Al Eskafi and Nooh Khalil Al Nooh, as inevitable in such a political conflict. Furthermore, he described the notorious torturer, Adel Flaifel, as "good man".

The story of torture in Bahrain is closely linked to Ian Henderson. Soon after his arrival in Bahrain on 26th April 1966, he was given the task of re-organising the Special Branch in such a way that it would provide good protection for the ruling Al Khalifa family after the departure of the British in 1971. His employment came after a "recommendation" by the British Political Agent in Bahrain, Anthony Parsons. It is ironic that the two men had lives in two adjacent villages in Devon, separated by no more than five miles or arid land. His first years saw his heavy-handed treatment of the active members of the Bahrain Liberation Front, a Marxist movement that had been formed in mid-fifties. Several of its members said that they had been tortured by Henderson and his men. After the withdrawal of the British, Henderson assumed a stronger role, especially after the imposition of the notorious State Security Law in 1974. When the first and last elected Parliament rejected this law, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, ordered the dissolution of the Parliament and the suspension of significant articles of the Constitution. For the following quarter of a century, Hen-

derson played the trumpet at high tunes imposing a reign of terror that had never been seen before. Scores of young Bahrainis were killed by the secret security service under his command.

Between 1975 and 2000 local and international human rights activists and organizations raised their voices against the torture regime, the arbitrary detentions, the forcible exiles and the maltreatment of peaceful protesters. The Al Khalifa would not listen to these pleas and Henderson continued his policies unperturbed. Some of his surviving victims decided to take action against him, urging the British police to build up a criminal case to pin him down. For the past ten years, testimonies were collected by the Metropolitan police with vivid details of the torture regime he had employed against Bahrainis. New disturbing facts have now emerged. The Police are alleged to have given guarantees to Henderson's lawyers that he would not be arrested or even questioned if he came to London for treatment. This may explain his relaxed attitude when confronted at the airport by one of the Bahraini activists about his past. He was not ready to apologise for his victims arguing that casualties were inevitable in the political conflict that had engulfed the Gulf islands. The hope was that a powerful lesson would be given to others by bringing Ian Henderson to account for his misdemeanors. After all, he is a man with a long history of mistreatment of his foes.

He had started his career in the fifties as a colonial officer, pursuing the Mao Mao fighters in Mount Kenya. His biggest achievement was the capture of

Deedan Kimathi, one of the leaders of the rebels. He continued his campaign against the Mao Mao until the British rule ended and a new nationalist regime took over in 1964. The new leadership immediately took action against a number of British officers, including Ian Henderson. The new Vice President, Oginga Odinga ordered the immediate expulsion of these officers. Henderson left Kenya and is said to have served briefly in Rhodesia under Ian Smith's racist regime. Two years later he was recruited by the British administration in Bahrain, where his earlier experience against armed revolutionaries was extensively used against unarmed civilians. Despite his secretive movements, acts and personality, his notoriety as the head of one of the most brutal secret service in the region, made him an attractive story to the news media. Several reports, articles and TV programmes were published to highlight his role as an alleged torturer. However, he has remained defiant, relying mainly on the goodwill of the Al Khalifa regime. When the present ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, inherited the throne following the death of his father in 1999, Henderson was swiftly retired. To eliminate his fear of any prosecution, Sheikh Hamad issued the notorious decree 56/2002 that gave impunity to torturers. Henderson was thus sheltered from any impending lawsuits. When some of his victims attempted to bring their cases to court, the Al Khalifa-appointed judiciary simply brushed them aside.

It is thus the duty of the international community to reclaim a degree of moral high ground and act decisively against torturers employing the UN legal tools against them. The cases of torture of Bahraini victims are abundant. The perpetrators of these heinous crimes are enjoying the protection of the regime. Infact, this regime is encouraging other officers to perpetrate similar crimes against the innocent people of Bahrain. In the past six years, at least three young men have been mercilessly murdered by Sheikh Hamad's death squads. The latest victim, Abbas Al Shakhouri, was killed earlier this year. Other victims were tortured in the open air on orders from the royal court. *Continued on Page 3*



Silence, corruption and repression

The situation has suddenly flared up again with the news that the founder of the torture regime in the country was heading for Bahrain yesterday. Ian Henderson was seen with his wife at Heathrow airport on his way back after two weeks in London. The news of his return was received by his victims with indignation and disgust. For several years the metropolitan police have been preparing a dossier of his era as the founder of the security service in Bahrain, with the purported intention of bringing a criminal case against him. Many of his victims had been interviewed in the process, but no action has yet been taken. Human rights organisations who undertook to prepare the case had hoped that their efforts would be rewarded with serious steps from the police. The news that he was heading back to Bahrain was greeted with frustration and disappointment by members of these organisations. Meanwhile the news of his return provoked painful memories amongst his victims who decided to stage a peaceful protest at Bahrain International airport. The news of the protest quickly spread. The security service soon mobilised large numbers of riot police and death squads, cordoned off the airport and arrested three journalists. A state of emergency was declared in the vicinity of the airport and when the protesters headed to the airport

they were prevented from entering the area. Death squads used harsh tactics to deter protesters and cars were thoroughly searched, supported by armoured vehicles and heavy machinery and arms. Mr Henderson who was in charge of the secret service (1966-2000) implemented harsh regime of torture against political activists. He had gained notoriety from his earlier role in Kenya fighting against the Mau Mau.

At another level, death squads were deployed to suppress a peaceful act by the citizens of Al Malikiya village in the South West of Bahrain. The people had gathered to protest the erection of fish traps along the coast by the cousin of the ruler. Khalid bin Mohammad Al Khalifa had defied the law and occupied the coast by force, preventing the people from access to the sea. The village was besieged by the death squads who showered the protesters with chemical tear gas and rubber bullets. The situation has continued for the past three weeks despite appeals by the locals to end the siege from the sea. The people are planning more protests in the next few days. To them access to the sea is a matter of life or death. More than one hundred poor families depend on fishery for their livelihood.

At the same time the people are planning a demonstration to express their discontent

at the insistence by the ruling family to impose the one percent unemployment tax that had been rejected by most citizens. The planned demonstration on Friday is likely to lead to more repression by the death squads.

In protest against the widespread corruption within the Gulf Air Board of Directors, the Chief Executive resigned few days ago. During a routine investigation by the CE the extent of corruption was found to be beyond comprehension with senior figures, including officials from the Ministry of Commerce. The corruption scandal is linked to the Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the crown prince who had played a dirty game to cleanse the company from other partners and recruit corrupt non-Bahraini elements who would facilitate his designs.

On another hand, the labour movement is still struggling to gain recognition as a main player in the labour market and play a role in defending the rights of the workers. A prominent union activist within the Postal service syndicate has been subjected to internal disciplinary action for speaking out against privatisation of the postal service. In a similar manner, another committee within the ministry of health have persecuted the President of the Bahrain Medical Society for speaking out against the drain of medical consultants. Silence has become the order of the day in the Kingdom of Silence.

Repression intensifies as more international pressure is sought

The plight of one woman could have significant impact on thousands of dispossessed families in Bahrain. Safiyya Ahmad Ali, 36, from the town of Dair in Muharraq, has been living on the street for the past ten days, with no decent lodging. The notorious prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, has been boasting of his new skyscraper which will host the newly-established Bahrain Financial Harbour. Yet he has failed to provide decent accommodation to thousands of families. He is not alone in this. The ruler who is his nephew, has put his hands on vast areas of the seashores, reclaiming sealand plundering people's money in the process. His son has collected millions of dinars in loyalties from henchmen for reclaiming more sealand. The environment has suffered immensely, with coral reefs suffering total destruction in large areas. Yet, the world is led to believe that despotic Al Khalifa ruling family is the solution to Bahrain ills. Safiyya Ali started her picket outside the ministry of housing earlier in the month, accompanied by her 10-years old daughter, Maryam, but she feared for her life as the temperatures soared to the high forties. The child was subsequently lodged with her relatives. Meanwhile, the people were shocked to see foreign mercenaries painting over

patriotic slogans in several areas, including Al Eker. Anti-regime activists have adopted peaceful means to express their anti-regime views on the wall of these towns and repeated their call for the dismissal of the prime minister who has been accused of committing serious crimes including torture, extra-judicial killing and the plundering of the country's wealth. The people feel utter disgust at the granting of a special reward by the UN Human Settlements programme while thousands remain homeless. It has now transpired that Sheikh Khalifa had given the programme one million dollars as a "gift" only one month prior to receiving the "reward". International Human Rights organizations have been appalled by this reward. Human Rights Watch considered it a wrong act that would send the wrong message to the tyrants and oppressors.

The downturn in the public service sectors has been accompanied with sharp rises in human rights violations. As the people of Sanabis were preparing for the 12th anniversary of the martyrdom of Saeed Al Iskafi who was brutally murdered by torturers on 8th July 1995, foreign mercenaries were seen in the past two days tearing off Saeed's images from the walls. His mutilated body was handed to his father few days after his arrest. He was a young boy, full of activism and hope. His killers,

including Khalid Al Wazzan, have since remained under the protection of Sheikh Hamad, the ruler, who, in 2002, issued the notorious law 56 that shelters torturers. Sheik Hamad has been enraged by the Bahraini human rights activists who have campaigned for the repeal of this notorious law. He is reported to have ordered the employment of heavy-handed policies against the Bahraini activists. In the past few days, one of the activists, Nabeel Rajab, has been pursued by unmarked cars belonging to the notorious intelligence system. Plain-clothed torturers have been following him at every corner he turns. Calls have been made, once more, to the UN and other agencies to intervene to protect human rights activists, especially Nabeel Rajab, a senior official at the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights.

Reports from the ruling family circles have indicated unease among its senior figures after the publishing of an article on 7th July in the Los Angeles Times. The article, written by Borzou Daragahi, and titled "Strategic rift in Bahrain's royal court". It said: "One faction believes in reconciliation with the Persian Gulf nation's disenfranchised Shiite Muslim majority. The other believes in suppressing Shiite aspirations, even if it means supporting Sunni groups propelled by the same ideologies that inspire bin Laden".

Riots reinforce Bahrain rulers' fears

By Bill Law in Manama, Sunday Telegraph

The acrid smell of tear gas hung in the air as a group of young men drifted across a street where piles of garbage and tyres were burning.

Storm of protest: Shia youths carry an injured man after a clash with the security forces in Bahrain

Not far ahead stood a line of riot police. An officer wearing a balaclava gestured at the youths to stop and as his colleagues fired off a volley of tear gas canisters, he shouted: "You have no permission to be here. Leave now."

This was the scene in Malkiya, a small Shia fishing village on the outskirts of Manama, the capital city of the Gulf state of Bahrain.

Known in the West as a booming business centre, Bahrain is increasingly being promoted as an upmarket tourist destination, with luxury villas built on land reclaimed from the warm blue sea. Yet the country's authorities, bolstered by an almost entirely Sunni muslim police force and army, are being forced to step up security in preparation for a summer of unrest by the country's Shia majority. As riot police clashed with Malkiya's protesters, Nabeel Rajab, a human rights activist, said: "They want you to see Formula One and the Financial Harbour. But that's not the real Bahrain. What you see here? This is the real Bahrain."

Bahrain, an island linked to Saudi Arabia by a causeway, is the strategically sensitive home to the American Fifth Fleet. More than half its 750,000 population are Shia - one of only three such countries in the region, along with Iran and Iraq. But its ruling elite are Sunni, and for decades they have suspected that Iran, from just across the Gulf, is fomenting dissent among Bahrain's Shia.

Since the beginning of this year, dozens of riots have taken place in Shia villages across the kingdom, most of them unreported by the tightly controlled local media. Human rights watchers say that hundreds of people have been injured.

Since the first oil well began production in Bahrain in 1931, its ruling al Khalifa royal family has grown enormously. Mustafa al Sayed, the chief executive officer of Bapco, the government-owned petroleum company, said: "Bahrain was, before and after oil, a garden of Eden. Even today when you enter you feel you are in paradise."

Yet the Shia disagree. They complain that the Sunni elite have discriminated against them for years, and Malkiya has become a dangerous flashpoint.

For the ruling family, land has become the new oil. Land reclaimed from the shallow sea can be sold to the highest bidder to build another business com-

plex or tourist resort, and 97 per cent of the country's coastline is now in private hands.

So the fishermen of Malkiya were infuriated when a cousin of the king, a powerful member of the royal family, seized coastline to which the villagers had always had access, potentially threatening their livelihood. When villagers protested - peacefully, they insist - they were met by riot police deploying tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets.

Even worse, say the villagers, many of the police are foreign Sunni, some of the thousands being lured in to shore up the security forces and help offset the population imbalance.

One young Shia protester, surrounded by his mostly unemployed friends said: "They bring people from the outside and give them jobs. Why do they have priority over us? It's not right."

For years, the authorities have recruited Sunni from Yemen, Jordan, Syria and Pakistan to police Bahrain. Opposition activists point to the exclusion of Shia from the defence force and the police as evidence of systematic discrimination.

But Hassan Fakhro, the minister for industry and commerce, said: "There is a lack of confidence between the ruled and the rulers. It is not unusual. There is a small percentage who do not have loyalty to the state. Sometimes, for good reasons, you have to be careful who you employ."

Many Shia feel they have been betrayed by King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, who promised democratic reform when he took over from his father in 1999. He gave women the vote and organised limited parliamentary elections but now, critics complain, reform has been stalled - there was gerrymandering in last year's elections and Shia votes were heavily discounted.

Ghanim al Buainanin, the first vice-speaker of Bahrain's parliament and leader of a Sunni Islamist bloc, denied any discrimination and said there were other reasons for the unrest. He pointed the finger at Iran, whose coast lies less than 100 miles away and whose intelligence services have long been suspected of exploiting Shia grievances to foment trouble for the West. Asked if he blamed Iran, he said: "Yes, 100 per cent. I have the feeling Iran is involved directly in destabilising Bahrain."

However, Shia leaders insist they are loyal to the country. Jalila Said, a lawyer and outspoken critic of the government, said that she believed that questions about loyalty masked another agenda. "Denying people their rights on the pretext that they are a tool of the Iranian regime is a joke."

Bill Law presented Crossing Continents: Bahrain at 1pm on Thursday 26th July on BBC Radio 4



Nabil Rajab harrassed

The human activist Nabil Ahmed Rajab (1964) - Vice Bahrain Center for Human Rights- has been exposed, once again, to severe and continued harassment, exemplified recently in the daily pursuits by civilian cars to and from home since last Sunday. Mr Rajab stated to Al-Wasat newspaper that: "the work of human defenders and activists in Bahrain, since 2001 and even today, is public and not confidential, as it used to be under the State Security Law. The Government does not need to adopt methods of surveillance, tapping phones and trailing activists in front of their homes and workplaces. He continued: "the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) is well informed of what we are doing, as it is on my email list. What is sent to the press and people is also sent to the MOI. This method of surveillance is not the first, but already been practiced by more than one car in 2005, and this shows that the State does not believe in transparency".

This is not the only case, not the first of its kind, which Rajab was exposed to, in a campaign by the Bahraini Authorities targeting activists. In last March, the Public Prosecution Office in Bahrain summoned Mr. Rajab to investigate charges of defamation by one of the persons whose name was among implicated in the Bandergate scandal. At the same instance, the same office has not shown any form of interaction-even for once - with the numerous complaints made by Mr. Rajab, and his wife, concerning the threatening messages of threat, slander and intimidation which were unusually delivered via mail and short text messages.

Not sufficient to the security body, Mr Rajab was targeted by the military forces while he was preparing to participate in a march of the unemployed on July 15, 2005. That incident led to a sliding disc in his back, He was attacked along with a small group of activists and demonstrators. He was transferred instantly to a Government hospital. Members of the military troops attacked Rajab, using plastic batons and kicked him in various parts of the body, especially the back and head, after he made himself known to them, and was recognised.

Los Angeles Times:
Strategic rift in Bahrain's royal court

Some members of the ruling family reportedly back hard-line Sunni groups; others advise helping disenfranchised Shiites.
By Borzou Daragahi, Times Staff Writer
July 7, 2007

MANAMA, BAHRAIN — Leading members of Bahrain's royal family have thrown their weight behind hard-line Sunni Muslim groups, some of whom share the outlook of Al Qaeda, in an attempt to counter a perceived Shiite threat, government officials and critics say. The strategy, first exposed in a government report that surfaced last year, has revealed a rift within the court of the ruling Khalifa family.

One faction believes in reconciliation with the Persian Gulf nation's disenfranchised Shiite Muslim majority. The other believes in suppressing Shiite aspirations, even if it means supporting Sunni groups propelled by the same ideologies that inspire Osama bin Laden.

A ranking government official who is a member of the royal family said there was "no doubt" that a hard-line movement existed within the Bahraini power structure. "Then, there are the moderates who believe that cohesion is the way to go forward," he said.

The official, who counts himself among the moderates, spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. Members of the royal family are unanimous in public, and analysts say they rarely discuss internal rifts.

But Bahrain, a small, oil-rich nation of 750,000 people where the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet is based, is anything but united. It rests uneasily on the increasingly volatile sectarian fault line rattling the Middle East. Impoverished Shiites, some of whom share close religious and cultural ties to Iran, demand more power from the dominant Sunnis, who have ties to Saudi Arabia. Inter-marriage between the sects has become rare. Bahrain's Shiites and Sunnis have different last names and speak Arabic with different accents.

Crown Prince Salman ibn Hamed Khalifa, a 37-year-old graduate of American University in Washington and Cambridge University in England, leads the moderates, who have focused on creating job opportunities for Bahrain's young as a way of staving off sectarian tensions. Khalid ibn Ahmed Khalifa, minister of state for royal court affairs, is known as the leader of the hard-liners.

Few know where King Hamed ibn Isa Khalifa, the ultimate authority in Bahrain, stands. "The royal court minister is backed by the Sunni extremists and he backs them," said one Bahraini analyst, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "It's a very dangerous game. They're going down

a slippery road."

Even opposition figures say that the most extreme of their nation's Sunnis are moderate compared with Al Qaeda-inspired insurgents fighting governments in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan. One Sunni hard-liner has said he welcomes the presence of American and British military officials in Bahrain if it keeps the Iranian influence at bay. Yet secular and Shiite Bahrainis have become alarmed by the growth of Sunni fundamentalism.

Figures allied with the Muslim Brotherhood or more extreme groups have gained the upper hand over the ministries of information, finance and large parts of the military, government critics and human rights groups say. Banks owned by Muslim charities or organizations have grown rich with the return of Arab funds from the United States and Europe after the increased post-Sept. 11 scrutiny of Persian Gulf money in the West. Islamic charities have morphed into powerful political groups, with the government's encouragement, critics say.

Some likened the rapid buildup of Sunni groups to the U.S. and Saudi support for Islamist Afghan warriors during the 1980s Soviet occupation.

"This is the Saudi Frankenstein," said Ebrahim Sharif Alsayed, a member of the National Democratic Action Society, a secular opposition group. "I don't think terrorism is a serious threat. But this is the same play. They think they can manage the Islamists."

Critics worry that in a country long a bastion of relative moderation, clerics are glorifying holy war. Islamic newspapers have grown more strident and anti-American. One, Akhbar Khaleej, refers to Bin Laden as a "sheik," a title of honor. Two controversial Sunni figures who left the United States have found refuge and employment in Bahrain: Wagdy Mohammed Ghoneim, the head of an Orange County mosque who was suspected of giving speeches in support of terrorist organizations and arrested in November 2004 on suspicion of overstaying his U.S. visa; and Salah Soltan, a scholar. "Every week they appear on television, telling people how to be clean and religious and pious," said one journalist who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Evidence of government support for Sunni extremists first emerged in a report prepared by former government official Salah Bander, which detailed ties between regime officials and hard-liners as part of a plan to crush Shiite aspirations. Sunnis' fear of the country's Shiite majority has been heightened by events in Iraq, where newly empowered Shiites rule

over the once-dominant Sunni minority. Though shimmering with ostentatious wealth, Bahrain has not been immune to political and sectarian violence. Shiites say that for decades they've received a disproportionately small share of the country's riches and opportunities. Shiite districts west of Manama, the capital, tend to be poor and run-down. Independent observers have criticized the government for regularly staffing security forces with non-Bahraini Sunnis.

Anger and resentment bubbled up in the 1970s. And in 1981, a group of Bahraini Shiites, allegedly backed by elements in Iran, attempted to overthrow the monarchy. Violent clashes between Shiites and security forces erupted in the late 1990s, sending prominent Shiites into exile.

Many Sunnis regard Bahrain's Shiites as an Iranian fifth column.

"Sunnis and Shiites are all in the same boat," said Mohammed Khaled, a Sunni lawmaker who has been described as a hard-liner. "But we won't allow anyone to guide that boat. We will not accept any foreign interference, not from the Americans nor the Iranians."

Many of Bahrain's Shiites maintain strong ties to the burgeoning Shiite movements throughout the Middle East. The homes and cars of pious Shiites are adorned by posters of the leader of the Lebanese militant Shiite group Hezbollah, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah; Iraqi cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani; and Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

King Hamed launched a plan of reconciliation and democratic reform when he ascended to the throne in 1999, but many say it has stalled, in part because of fears that giving Shiites more power would open the way for an Iranian takeover of the island nation, over which Iran once claimed sovereignty.

Moderates in the government, including the crown prince, argue that democratic reform and economic opportunity will be far more effective in coaxing Shiites away from Iran. "The hard-liners haven't succeeded," the government official said. "They have only done one thing: turn a lot of people against them."

A tale of torture, *Cont from P 1*

It is expected that torture will be widely used as the opposition to the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship intensifies in the coming months. Pursuing torturers such as Henderson, Flaifel and Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah and bringing them to international courts will undoubtedly send strong signals to other torturers and dictators. It will be a great service to the victims, activists and, above all, international justice.