

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrainis preparing for major encounter with dictatorship on world stage

More people are languishing behind bars. Why? Because they call for democracy and oppose hereditary dictatorship. In a country where people are destined to be ruled by an invading tribe, notions such as democracy, pluralism, rule of law or contractual constitution are not only beyond comprehension, but to promote them is a crime. Any Bahraini who does not abide by the decrees and orders from the royal court is liable to be jailed, tortured and even banished. When international pressure mounts for example, actions against activists are delayed but not cancelled. It is a tragic tale of a people who have struggled for generations to get themselves from the tyranny of the invading tribe that has caused misery, fear and poverty. Today, Bahrain's ability to function is curtailed by the excesses of the ruling family members who compete to rob the nation of the last drop of its wealth. When a group of people decided to undertake a trip to an offshore island during the Eid festivities, they were swiftly repressed, threatened and some of them jailed. Umm Al Na'ssan is located to the West of the mainland and is the same size as Muharraq, the second largest inhabited island with a population of around 120,000. The offshore island is inhabited by one person, the ruler Sheikh Hamad and only occasionally. He has other palaces where he spends most of his time. Other islands are occupied by other senior members of the Al Khalifa; Umm Al Subban and Jeda are occupied by the ruler's two uncles. The islands of Huwar, which were returned to the sovereignty of Bahrain by the International Court of Justice in 2001, have become the sole property of the ruler. Another island containing the tomb of a great religious figure for twelve centuries is now closed to visitors while the tomb is left to decay. This is yet another sign of the attempts by the Al Khalifa occupiers to destroy the cultural heritage of the people of Bahrain. In recent years, the ruling family have extended their occupation to the sea-shores. More than 90 percent of Bahrain's coastline have been made private property mostly owned by members of the ruling family. In many areas, access to sea is

restricted and fishermen have often found themselves unable to go to their fishing nets in the sea. Moreover, the process of reclamation of sealands has produced large areas, only to be given to Al Khalifa members. The cost of reclamation is paid from the national treasury. This is how the process of reclamation would go. First, the ruler or his son, another billionaire prince, would announce a grand housing plan for Bahrainis. Then the process of reclamation would start, paid for by the treasury. Once the land becomes available, most of it becomes the property of Al Khalifa members, and the rehousing initiative thus fizzles out to few houses offered to selected individuals. What about the rest of Bahrainis? In recent years "grand initiatives" have been devised to solve their job and housing problems. Agreements have been reached with other Gulf states to offer low-paid jobs to Bahrainis to relieve the Al Khalifa of the persistent accusations of racism, corruption and ethnic genocide. Young Bahrainis are encouraged to seek employment in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates or Kuwait where he would receive better pay and housing. The result is a forcible migration of native Bahrainis from their motherland. It is yet another evil plan to destroy the social and cultural fabric of a civic society that had existed in the land for centuries before they were enslaved by the Al Khalifa pirates.

It is shocking to see these events materialising while the regime is given legitimacy by the international community to the extent that the US president considered the repressive regime as "a beacon of democracy" in the Middle East. The ongoing strife of the people has, however, continued. Last month, scores of Bahrainis have been arrested, tortured and jailed for speaking out against the hereditary dictatorship. Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights Council, has decided to scrutinize Bahrain's human rights record, along Tunisia and Guatemala. That is a positive sign on the part of the international community. While Bahraini human rights activists

have started preparing the case against the regime, the ruling family has allocated millions of dollars to ensure the failure of this investigation. They know that their reputation and with it the long-term occupation of Bahrain, are at stake. They have approached several public relations companies, human rights bodies and lobbying groups to do whatever in their capacity to defend them as they face one of the most important and long-lasting episodes in their international standing. To them, it is a matter of life and death as a political system grown in an unfriendly environment. To the Bahrainis, it is a matter of long-term survival, freedom and protection of cultural identity. It is a race against time as both sides compete to make their point. For the Bahrainis they have all the evidence of a rogue regime bent on destroying their historical and religious identity, utilising every possible means of repression including torture and extra-judicial killing. They have no shortage of human rights abuses accumulated over the past three decades and unlimited personal testimonies that equate the Al Khalifa regime with the most ruthless dictatorships the world has ever known. Sheikh Hamad has shot himself and his family in the foot by claiming to identify with democracy. Unfortunately for him, his botched job is now haunting his authority especially with his right-hand man, Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, royal court minister, being accused of masterminding the ethnic cleansing against the Shia majority. The next few months are crucial for both sides, and the people of Bahrain have appealed to international human rights bodies to come forward with their support to the cause of human rights and democracy in this troubled Gulf island. The world will be a better place for the human survival and decency if regimes like the one ruling in Bahrain are denied political and moral support. They do not deserve to remain in power; they are destined to the dustbin of history. A moral stand is needed from the world community to stop the systematic ethnic-cleansing and gross human rights violations in Bahrain. Without this stand, the world will be an accomplice in the rising tide of extremism and terrorism.

Strenuous efforts to reclaim islands from Al Khalifa usurpers

A decision by activists to claim back occupied lands from senior figures of the Al Khalifa has been welcomed by a wide strata of well-wishers and supporters. It was decided that expeditions be made to annexed islands that have remained for decades the sole property of individuals while tens of thousands of Bahrainis remain without decent homes. The first of these expeditions to the "no go areas" was planned to take place during the holiday marking Eid El Fitr on Saturday/Sunday (13th and 14th October). The idea was to explore the various islands of the country and spend pleasurable times on the soil of the forefathers of the people. The destination was the largest of the offshore island known as "Umm Al Na'ssan", which houses the palace of the ruler. But the ruling family reacted with fury to the suggestion that Bahrainis would set foot on the island, contrary to the policy of isolating those islands from the public and leaving them in the possession of senior Al Khalifa figures. Almost all the islands are under their occupation and no Bahraini is allowed to approach them.

No sooner had the ruler heard of the intention to share his pleasurable island

than did he react with anger and fury. Troops were put on high alert while the organisers of the trip were subjected to severe threats.

The "exploratory" trips being organised by disgruntled Bahrainis to these occupied islands will continue and are likely to lead to new clashes. Earlier, the ruling family had ordered an all-out show of force to prevent the first such trip on the grounds that Umm Al Na'ssan island was a "military area". The island houses some palaces for Sheikh Hamad and his relatives, date palm groves and small ports (jetties) for the private boats of the occupiers. According to the International Herald Tribune; "Part of the controversy was also sparked when the Web browser-based mapping tool Google Earth was first introduced in Bahrain, showing pictures of the vast areas of Bahraini territories occupied by royal family palaces." It added: "Only those who obtain a permission from the king are allowed to enter those islands."

The situation was heightened by the calls for a demonstration tomorrow calling for the downfall of the present government headed by Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the ageing dictator and the big-

gest of all property owners in the land. The demonstration will start from Sanabis and head towards Manama. There are growing fears that the ruling family may resort to the use of violence to prevent the planned peaceful protest. Two days ago, a planned sea trip by boats from Al Malikiya village was mercilessly attacked by government troops and death squads.

At another level, six foreigners have been arrested following an attack on Bahrainis in the village of Askar, south of the country. The mayhem resulting from the unprovoked attack by several newly-naturalised persons led to many injuries among the Bahrainis. It is not clear yet whether the Al Khalifa will investigate the depth of the social problems resulting from their unalwful decision to alter the demographic balance in the country. Calls have been made by many activists and organisations to end the ethnic cleansing implemented by the ruler and his clique.

On another front, the Reporters Without Frontiers group has renewed its concerns about the Bahrain Government's policy towards the internet sites. In its latest letter to Sheikh Hamad, the group said that it was the second letter this year warning against the curtailment of public freedoms.

rejection of investigation into ethnic genocide

The case of Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, the brother of the notorious torturer, Abdul Aziz, is fast becoming a central issue in Bahrain's domestic politics. Atiyyat Allah, the Cabinet Affairs Minister, is heading a secret web, funded by the royal court, to alter the demographic balance in the country in what amount to ethnic cleansing against the native Baharna population. His role was uncovered last year by the Al Bandar report which presented damning evidence of Atiyyat Allah's horrendous crimes and the role of Sheikh Hamad's office in the criminal plot. The minister of royal court, Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, one of the most notorious sectarian figures in Bahrain, was also shown by the Report as the main force behind the ethnic cleansing policies of Sheikh Hamad. What is making the case more intriguing is the attempts by ruling family to suppress any attempt to scrutinise those two individuals and their criminal roles. Sheikh Hamad has extended impunity to them. It is now more than one year since Al Bandar's report was published but the Al Khalifa have failed to answer to the charges laid against them by the report. Instead, they have issued directives banning any media coverage of the report or discussions about it. When members of Sheikh Hamad's incumbent parliament attempted to question Atiyyat Allah, these attempts were

thwarted. The feelings among the natives are boiling as the ethnic cleansing continued unabated. It is expected that the situation may escalate in the coming months as the natives become more aware of the disastrous consequences of the political naturalisation process undertaken by Sheikh Hamad.

Meanwhile, anger has also surfaced as it became clear that one of the most senior officials of Gulf Air was allowed to slip through the net and flee the country after reports of embezzlement at a massive scale within the company. Jeff Living fled to London last Thursday amid reports that he had recruited six consultants at a cost of US\$6000 per day. He is also said to have submitted an invoice for US\$4.2 million allegedly for "services rendered by those consultants and another company linked to Living. The company's auditor refused to endorse the invoice. Jeff Living had been paid a monthly salary of around US\$275,000 in addition to housing allowance of US\$6000 and US\$1500 car allowance. To complete his package he received an annual bonuses totalling more than US\$120,000. He fled with most of the documents that could be used to indict him. There are speculations that senior members of the ruling family had assisted him to flee.

These intrigues come at a time when poverty has reached record levels as official corruption takes monumental dimensions.

Several seminars and films have highlighted this phenomena in a country which has plenty of oil wealth. The predicament of many of the youth is now forcing many of them either to leave the country to nearby states or organise protests to highlight their plight. One such desperate youth is Mr Ali Salman, a young unemployed citizen from Al Hamala village. Mr Ali Salman, a young unemployed citizen from Al Hamala village. Yesterday he stood near the royal palace, raising a banner calling for decent employment and asking for his rights as a native citizen whose rights are usurped by occupiers and settlers. He was immediately arrested by members of the death squads, run by the royal court, maltreated and warned against any protests. He was later released after strong warnings and threats of serious consequences if he continued his legitimate demands for employment.

At another level, a massive demonstration was organised to mark the International Qud Day and call for an end to the occupation of Palestine and especially Jerusalem. The issue of occupation hits sensitive nerves with the ruling family who had occupied Bahrain by force and who have embarked on a new programme of settlement for newly-naturalised foreigners. The demonstrators called for an end of occupation and the right of indigenous people to determine their own destiny. The demonstration passed peacefully despite intimidation from death squads.

Recent Cases of Clamping to Freedom of Expression

1 - Preventing a Women Activist from Access to Media

In the first week of October, the Bahraini known women activist Ms Ghada Jamsheer revealed, through a statement to Aafaq news site (http://www.aafaq.org/search_details.aspx?id_arch=8323) the existence of a formal decision preventing her from appearing in any of the Bahraini media, which includes the official radio and television, newspapers, whether state or nearby.

As per Aafaq press sources in the capital Manama, the blockade resolution came directly from the Royal Court, through its Minister- Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, who gave a direct instruction to newspapers preventing publication any article or news related to Jamsheer.

The sources believed that the blockade came as a result of Ghada Jamsheer's letter in April 2007 addressed to the King, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in which she called for resolving the Supreme Council for Women, chaired by King wife Sheikha Sabika Bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, because of its failure in promoting the

rights of women and consecrating political loyalty to the Government.

2- Forbidding Printing Books and Novels

On the beginning of the third week of October, the Bahrain Journalists Association (BJA) disclosed the news about a book manuscript written by academician Dr Nader Kathem titled: 'Memory Exploitations: In a Pluralistic Society, Saddled with History' was disapproved for printing inside Bahrain. The manuscript is a collection of academic series published by the author in the local press, during the past period. Dr Kathem's book is a historical analysis of the development of multiculturalism in Bahrain.

The official refusal came after the legal period of three months of submitting a publication request, dated 19 July 2007, after the BJA made a public media stir up of this case as well as of other three publications, banned or held without an official response, incenuating disapproval [4]. The Publication Directorate of the Ministry of Information (MI) declared in a statement that Dr Kathem's content is against the Press Decree Code no. 47 of 2002.

The other book withheld by the MI are the novel 'Omar bin Al-Khattab, A Martyr' by the well known writer Abdullah Khalifa, whose application for printing exceeded seven months. The earlier novel by Mr Khalifa, 'Husain's Head', was denied approval for publication by the MI.

The forth book withheld by the MI is a documentary by journalist Mohammed Al-Sawad and titled "Ominous and humerous Bahraini Court Cases in 2006" whose application was made last March 2007. The only official response was after the raw made after Dr Kathem's book, and was justifying the delay in response upon the approval from the Bahraini Ministry of Justice

3- Barring access to Popular organization Web site

On the second week of October 2007, the homepage of the Movement of Liberties and Democracy in Bahrain- "HAQ", was blocked from access inside Bahrain. This is not the first nor the last electronic site the Bahraini Authorities forbid its access to local residents. At one instance early this year, the number of barred sites exceeded 26 (local and international) as a result of reporting of the violations in Bahrain, mainly the issue of what was locally dubbed as "Bandergate report". In addition, HAQ site has recently documented land misappropriation in Bahrain, which is considered subversive to the local Authorities. Please refer to a detailed report on the prosecution of freedom of expression in Bahrain.

4- Prosecuting and Convection of Writers in electronic chronicle

The Higher Criminal Court ruled last Sunday 21 October 2007 three Bahrainis writers of a fine each of 200 Bahraini Dinars (BD), a civil compensation of BD 51 in addition to the court fees (1BD=2.7 US\$), after convection insulting and defamation of the director of "Dar Al-Manar"- Elderly Care Cener- and her husband using an electronic journal "Al-Saheefa".

The three Bahrainis are Mr Saleh Al-Amm, a journalist, a writer, editor of the journal, Muath Al-Meshari, a columnist in Al-wasat newspaper and Fareed Al-Shayeb, a writer in Al-Saheefa. It should be noted that Al-Saheefa (www.alsaheefa.net) is one of the electronic sites barred inside Bahraini by the Local Authorities.

The three writers published on the electronic site several articles related to the management of Dar Al-Manar, pointing to what they alleged as administrative and financial corruption.

The three defendant were convicted on the basis of Article 365 of the Bahraini Penal decree code no 15 of 1976. It is to be noted this Penal Code as well as the Press Code no. 47 of 2002 have been used, during the past period to interrogate and prosecute more than 14 journalists as well as bloggers and web administrators.

UN council selects first nations for unprecedented rights spotlight

GENEVA (AFP) — Bahrain, Ecuador and Tunisia will be the first UN members to have their human rights records reviewed next year under a crucial new process implemented by the world's body's rights council on Friday.

The three countries are the first among 16 who will be scrutinised at a session of the UN Human Rights Council scheduled for February 2008, according to a list released by the United Nations. The selection for the "Universal Periodic Review" was made by a random draw on Friday. It lays out a timetable for the systematic review of all 192 UN member states by the end of 2011.

UN human rights chief Louise Arbour last week urged the 47 countries in the Council to speed up the process, warning that the credibility of the United Nations human rights system was at stake.

"We are acutely aware that the credibility of the United Nations human rights system hinges upon satisfactory implementation of the review," Arbour said.

Three batches of 16 nations are due to be scrutinised a year.

The other countries due for review in the two week session in February are Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Britain, the

Czech Republic, Finland, India, Indonesia, Morocco, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland and South Africa.

"They say that the proof of the pudding is eating it... we have to see how it works," Council president Doru Costea of Romania told journalists.

"It will be very important to have a well prepared and well managed process," he added.

The Council agreed in June to adopt the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), whereby all countries have their human rights record reviewed once every four years.

It will be the first time in the UN's history that all members come under the spotlight, without exception.

However, the bid was marred in recent weeks by wrangling about how the order should be determined, and when the process should start. Non-aligned countries and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference had rejected the previously agreed January 2008 start date.

A UN spokesman said the February start was still tentative.

The Council was set up last year to replace the widely discredited Human Rights Commission.

BCHR: Collective punishment for planning a trip to Um-Na'ssan island

BCHR expresses its deep concerns about the reaction and ill-treatment carried out by the Bahraini Authorities to a group of citizens planned to make a "site seeing" trip to Um Ne'ssan- third largest island of the Bahrain archipelago. This island, to the west of Bahrain, is the first landing of King's Fahd Causeway, linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia.

Hundreds of security troops, armed with fired tear gas and heavy rubber bullets, were deployed early Monday morning to prevent entry to the sea, besieging the entire west coast from Al-Jasra down to Malekeya. Helicopters were hovering over the entire coast, as well as to support special force, and riot police scrutinizing vehicles intending to pass over King's Fahd Causeway. Around noon time,

A day earlier, the Bahrain's Interior Ministry issued a statement indicating that "the island of Um Ne'ssan is allocated by the King for special military use of Bahrain defense force and therefore, it's banned for anybody to approach or to carry out any activity close to it or he will be violating the law and will be punishable according to Article 135 of the Bahraini Penal Code".

The trip was organized by a local committee comprised of members from four villages on the west coast of Bahrain: Malekeya, Karazakan, Demestan and Hamala. The committee planned the trip to coincide with Eid Al-Fitr vacation, and publicized an advert few days ago such that groups leave the four villages, either by sea or land through King's Fahd Cause-

way, at 1pm on Monday, October 15, 2007. The idea of the trip came after the minister of municipalities issued a statement saying all the islands were public property.

Just prior to noon time, all roads leading to the west coast have been sealed off with, the aid of armed troops on the ground and the helicopters hovering in the sky of the area. Witnesses reported that Associated Press photographer was threatened by a masked member of the security with a pistol, when he tried to approach the coast and was ordered to leave the premises.

Considering the tenseness of the situation created by the local security bodies all over the area of the west coast and in compliance with the request of many mediators, religious and political figures who promised to raise the islands issue to open the path for future trip, the committee of the trip to Um-Ne'ssan convened publically at 12:30pm. The meeting, which lasted over an hour, was with those wishing to go to the islands, and after discussing the matter thoroughly, the committee decided collectively to postpone the trip, after which everybody peacefully dispersed.

Nevertheless, the special forces at Malekeya coast started intimidating the fishermen who were near the coast looking after their boats, which were dragged by Bahrain Marine Forces last Saturday into the middle of the sea, as first reaction to the advert of the trip. The special

forces then fired gas and rubber bullets on the local fishermen who hurried back to their houses. The forces then, besieged the small village, showered it with chemical tear gas and rubber bullets. As a reaction, rubber tyres were blazed by protestors, which were pursued by the security forces, and started ransacking some houses.

Witnesses reported some injuries, and apprehension of some youths, who were collectively subjected to torture and were beaten by batons and heels of the rubber boots before being released. The injuries included women and children who suffered from suffocation and inhaling the chemical tear gas.

BCHR denounces the Authorities reactions and measures taken against the citizens, either in the four coastal villages, or those who were subjected to humiliating inspection prior to the polling station of King's Fahd Causeway. It through light on the issue and legitimacy of islands and public lands misappropriation, considering the inherent right for the right of the people of Bahrain to travel to public islands, as guaranteed by the international charters. BCHR demands setting out a national independent enquiry on this issue ensuring protection and maintenance of public properties, as well as bring to justice those responsible of the violations and atrocities and collective punishment carried out by the security forces in and nearby Malekeya.

Anti-riot police clash with Bahrainis protesting restricted access to tiny islands

The Associated Press
Monday, October 15, 2007

Hundreds of security troops fired tear gas and heavy rubber bullets on Monday to disperse Bahrainis who gathered in an attempt to visit the kingdom's third largest island, which the public is normally restricted from visiting, local officials and witnesses said. Security troops deployed along Bahrain's western coastal line, especially in Shiite-dominated villages to prevent Bahrainis from approaching Um Nasan island, witnesses said.

Helicopters hovered above and women were seen hurrying to their houses fearing anti-riot police, which sealed off roads leading up to the village of Malikiya and other small towns on the western coast.

"They fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the people gathering," said Sayed Hashim, one of the protest organizers.

No one was allowed to approach the coastal line, including an Associated Press photographer who was threatened by a masked policeman with a pistol and ordered to leave.

Some young Bahrainis reacted by setting tires on fire, according to witnesses.

"The young protesters tried to blow up a gas cylinder, but they failed to do so," said Ahmed Mansour, a city council official in Malikiya.

The protests appear to have been triggered by Shiite opposition in Bahrain to defy a taboo by debating the royal family's ownership of some 30 Bahraini islands and banning citizens and residents from having access to them.

Regular Bahrainis occupy four main islands while the rest are inhibited by royal family palaces and some are used for military purposes.

Bahrain's Interior Ministry said in a statement that the island of Um Nasan is for military use and national defense.

"Therefore it's banned for anybody to approach or to carry out any activity close to it or he will be violating the law and will be punishable by law," the statement carried by Bahrain's official news agency said.

The idea for Monday's protest came

after the minister of municipalities issued a statement saying all the islands were public property. A committee of residents from western villages then sent an invitation to Bahrainis to visit the island. On Sunday, the royal endowment warned citizens against visiting Um Nasan.

Discussion over the royal family's possession of the majority of Bahraini islands was taboo for many years until about two years ago when the parliament, which Shiites make up about 40 percent, began questioning it. Shiites, who make up more than 60 percent of Bahrain's 700,000 people, have long complained they are squeezed out of power by the Sunni monarchy.

Part of the controversy was also sparked when the Web browser-based mapping tool Google Earth was first introduced in Bahrain, showing pictures of the vast areas of Bahraini territories occupied by royal family palaces.

Only those who obtain a permission from the king are allowed to enter those islands.

Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, is a close ally of Washington