

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrain and Al Khalifa have mutually-exclusive interests

Bahrain and Al Khalifa are two distinctive entities, whose interests, are often mutually exclusive. What is good for Bahrain may not be good for the Al Khalifa and the opposite is true. The courageous Bahraini opposition is clear about this distinction and have all along adopted a line of action that helps the people and targets the oppression and dictatorship of the ruling family. Indeed, Bahrain has been ruled by the present regime for two centuries after the Al Khalifa pirates invaded the country and occupied its territories. But the two centuries of occupation have produced no real benefit for the inhabitants of the land. For example, most of the islands belonging to Bahrain have been transferred into the private ownership of the ruling family. Even the last island to come under the sovereignty of Bahrain after decades of lengthy litigation processes with Qatar, has now become the private property of the ruler. This is in addition to Umm Al Na'ssan, which is more than 10 square miles and which can house more than 100,000 people who are in dire need for accommodation.

This private ownership of whole islands has now been compounded by ownership of miles upon miles of sea shores along the mainland. Google Earth would show clearly how these shores have been transformed into private beaches and marine anchors, all belonging to members of Al Khalifa and their allies. In some areas, the native inhabitants were denied access to the sea to earn their livelihood through fishing.

It is thus essential to make the clear distinction between the two entities. The opposition has always been clear about its priorities; to enhance the well-being of the people of Bahrain and curtail the excesses of the regime. When the name of Bahrain is mentioned international bodies such as the Human Rights Council, the opposition often attempts to encourage these bodies to scrutinise the policies of the Al Khalifa. Thus when Bahrain was selected for special scrutiny by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the people of Bahrain were overwhelmed by joy. It was not a scrutiny of Bahrain as land, people and history, but as a ruling family whose prac-

tices had been source of extreme worry to the international community. However, the ruling family, having laid their hands on the whole wealth of the country, hurriedly decided to change the tide through bribery and deception. Millions of dollars were spent in the past few months to recruit agents, lobbyists and mouthpieces to "market" the regime. To the dismay of the people of Bahrain the plan has worked. But it is a two-edge sword. The Al Khalifa's dismal human rights records will become under closer scrutiny, especially from international human rights bodies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, who had objected to the membership of Bahrain.

Big problems arise when the interests of the regime and those of the people become mutually exclusive. Bahrain is a country that is ruled by foreign elements that have hitherto failed to integrate with the society. They live in segregated areas while the people live in slums and townships. In many areas they lack the basic amenities such as sewage system, proper health clinics or decent schooling. This is in addition to the chronic lack of jobs and housing in a country whose native population does not exceed half a million.

What is adding salt to the injury is the "cultural" coup de tat by the ruling family against the people. In the past few months the official media has been spreading a dangerous myth; that there is no native population in Bahrain. This is an attempt to counter the long-held fact that the Baharna (Shia Muslims) had lived in the country since the early days of Islam and that the others came much later. The Al Khalifa had no roots in the country, but they have adopted an educational line that culture had only started in Bahrain after they had conquered the land. The great scholars and saints were totally ignored by the educational system of the ruling family. In addition, the historic names of some villages have been changed in order to draw a line between the history and modern times. Coupled with the hundred of thousands of the newly naturalised foreigners, the Ba-

harna are threatened with extinction. It is a human genocide where ethnic engineering, in its worst of forms, is being ruthlessly implemented. This is the cornerstone of Sheikh Hamad's "reform programme". In return for releasing the innocent prisoners, both US and UK had supported this genocidal policy. The aim, as they see it, is to create a balance in a country that is part of the Arab community of the Gulf. Bahrainis are now encouraged to migrate to neighbouring countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait where they would be employed and offered housing. This is in contrast to their position in Bahrain where they are neither employed nor housed.

The cultural ocean between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa is widening with the passage of time. The opposition has sought international support for their demands of curtailing the excesses of the Al Khalifa, especially the misappropriation of land and public funds, protecting the cultural identity of the country, stop the political and sectarian naturalisation programme and end the monopoly by the ruling family on power. It is an uphill struggle as the Saudis have been rallying support worldwide for the Al Khalifa, with both money and political influence. The people have relied on themselves to present their case to the outside world. The ruling family has succeeded in containing and co-opting former members of opposition, religious scholars and journalists. It is a serious escalation in the battle of wills between the two sides. In many ways, it is a battle to the bone, and a war for existence. The ruling family's greed has no bounds while the people's main demands are; proper governance in accordance to an agreed constitution, proper distribution of wealth, ending the ethno-cide programme and return the islands which are under the occupation of senior members of the ruling family to the people. With more than 70 political prisoners languishing behind bars and subjected to horrific torture, the scene is set for more escalation in the battle of wills between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa ruling family.

Children detained, tortured and prevented from setting exams

In a bizarre development, reminiscent of the days of the Barbarians, a child of no more than ten years has been summoned by the Al Khalifa Death Squads to appear at their torture offices. Jihad Sayyed Aqeel Al Sari, 10, of Saar village is accused of "sedition and spreading hate against the regime" and is being pursued relentlessly. Few days ago, his mother had been contacted and asked to bring her son to the torture chambers, but when she refused, their house was surrounded yesterday by members of the Death Squads. Two months ago the students of Saar School had demonstrated in protest against the maltreatment of a young cleric, Sayyed Aqeel Al Sari, for his anti-regime activities. He was subjected to horrific treatment before fleeing the country. The Al Khalifa decided to seek revenge against his family, and his son is now pursued for taking part in the peaceful demonstration.

Another anti-regime activist has been targeted for revenge, and members of his family have been selected for abuse and torture. The daughter of Sheikh Ali bin Ahmad Al Jidhafs was last week subjected to a horrific attack in the street by members of the Death Squads. There was a public furore as the news of the attack

spread, and calls were made for action against those who had perpetrated the crime, but no one has been questioned.

Yesterday eight children were arrested as they left the gates of Saar Primary School. Nothing has been heard of them since then. The arrests may be linked to the earlier peaceful demonstration. Their families have not yet established their whereabouts or the conditions under which they are being held. There are rising fears for their safety and well-being, as well as their future studies. Students are now preparing for the end of year exams but there are scores of students and pupils who are languishing behind bars in the Al Khalifa dungeons.

Yesterday was the last day for visiting the 29 detainees from the town of Karzakkan. They had been arrested in period 27th March – 15th April and were denied family visits until their relatives staged a well-organised and peaceful protest demanding to visit their beloved ones in torture chambers. The families had been extremely worried for the safety and welfare of their children as the news of extensive forms of torture were being administered on them. On 21st April the families received permission to visit the detainees in batches. Each visit lasted no more than

15 minutes in the presence and close surveillance of two members of the notorious Death Squads. There were no physical contacts between the prisoners and their relatives as they had been kept behind metal mesh. They had also been warned of severe consequences if they told their relatives of the torture they had endured. None of them has been given medical treatment except one who had lost his left eye. They have been held in solitary confinement shackled and subjected to severe beating and torture. They had been hanged from their hands for long hours while electric torture was being inflicted on them. They were forced to sign pre-prepared statements which are considered "confessions" to be used as evidence against them during their summary justice. They will be tried on 1st and 2nd of June and will receive sentences that have already been decided by the ruling Al Khalifa family.

Haq, the Movement for Rights and Freedom, has documented the torture inflicted on many of the detainees. The information came mainly from family visits and are considered an authentic account of the suffering of the Bahraini youth at the hands of the Al Khalifa thugs.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
16th May 2008

Torture and repression at unprecedented scale

Zuhair Makki Abdulla Khalaf is a 16 years old Bahraini youth, but he looked much more drained for his age when he appeared at a kangaroo court on 30th April. He exhibited all signs of extreme forms of torture, including beating, electric shocks and deprivation of sleep. Nine other young men were paraded in front of the court, presided over by one of the Al Khalifa stooges, who refused to cooperate with the lawyers who asked him to set the Bahrainis free. The nine are: Mahmood Mohammad Mansoor, 27, Ali Makki Radhi Abdul Hussain, 26, Hassan Ahmad Jum'a, 20, Ali Mohammad Abdulla Khalaf, 18, Faisal Sayyed Mohammad Saleh Salman, 18 and Sayyed Ahmad Aqeel Al Sari, 18. They are being held hostage by the Al Khalifa tribal regime for taking part in protest against the continued oppression of this antiquated regime. The youth are from the village of Sar which has been a target for the regime's policy of ethnic engineering through a massive settlement programme that aims at eradicating the cultural and human face of the village. The lawyers asked for their immediate release, but that was refused. They asked the "judge" to allow the prisoners to prepare and set for end of year exami-

nation and examine them to reveal the extent of torture they had been subjected to. They had been arrested last month following a peaceful protest against the continued repression against a young religious leader, Sayyed Ageel Al Sari for his anti-regime stands. They were attacked by the foreign-staffed riot police and Death Squads, using rubber bullets, chemical and tear gases.

Earlier, two Bahrainis were presented to the court for taking part in a peaceful protest. Abbas Ali Mohammad, 41 and Jamil Abdulla Abdul Karim, 37, both from Sar village. They were standing outside their houses when the Death Squads carried out a vicious attack against anyone in the street. The regime was nervous at the time as its flagship Formula 1 race was underway, and would not tolerate any open dissent that could be seen by foreigners.

Another group of Bahrainis have also been arrested and tortured for political motives. Hassan RAdhi Hassan Al Baqqali, 20, from Jidhafs was arrested on 2nd April, Hussain Ali Mansoor Al Bash, 17 was arrested on 7th April, Saeed Khamis Yousif Marzooq, 16, from Jidhafs was also arrested on 7th April and Ali Abdullah Sa'ad Ahmad, 23, from Jidhafs was arrested on 8th April. Their families have

described in graphic details the extent of torture inflicted on these innocent young Bahrainis at the hands of the Death Squads who are becoming more ruthless.

In the past two days several Bahrainis have been detained by the ruthless Al Khalifa torturers. Taher Mohammad Taher Al Ghanmi, 18 from Bani Jamra was arrested in the early hours of this morning and taken to the Prosecution department. The list of Bani Jamra detainees is extending by the day. Among them are: Naji Fateel, Hussain Shakar, Isa Sarh, Ibrahim Arab and Jaffar Moosa.

In another dangerous development, Sheikh Hamad's shura council has rubber-stamped the draconian press law that makes it a crime to possess anti-regime leaflets. Since it was drafted five years ago, the Press Law has been subjected to attacks from international organisations for its lack of respect to human rights. The Al Khalifa have now resorted to a new trick; leave the journalists form prosecution for what they write, but legalise the persecution of the Bahrainis for anti-regime activities including the possession of political leaflets and books. It is one of the most draconian laws ever imposed on the people. The approval co

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NGOs say five nations unfit to serve on UN rights body

AFP - Tuesday, May 6 11:53 pm
UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - Gabon, Bahrain, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Zambia do not deserve a seat on the Human Rights Council, the United Nations' top rights body, two non-governmental organizations said Tuesday.
In a joint report, UN Watch and Freedom House, which champion human rights worldwide, lamented that Gabon and Zambia were guaranteed seats on the council because of a lack of competition from more democratic countries in their African group.
Their report was unveiled here as the UN General Assembly is set to elect 15 new

Continued ill-treatment and torture of detained human rights defenders

Front Line is deeply concerned following reports of the continued ill-treatment and torture of human rights defenders Mohammed Abdullah Al Sengais, head of the Committee to Combat High Prices; Hassan Abdulnabi Hassan and Maytham Bader Jassim Al-Sheikh, members of the Unemployment Committee; and Naji Ali Fateel, member of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR). They were arrested between 21 December and 28 December 2007 and are being detained in the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB).
Further Information. Front Line previously communicated with your office on 13 February 2008 in connection with the ongoing detention and continued ill-treatment of these human rights defenders, which has included extreme physical and sexual abuse.
On 16 April 2008, a medical report asserted that the human rights defenders had been subjected to torture. This has reportedly led to very painful spinal disk injuries suffered by Mohammed Abdullah Al Sengais, which have caused him sleep deprivation, nausea and psychological trauma. He is currently receiving psychiatric treatment and he is displaying low haemoglobin levels, indicating that he is suffering from malnutrition. The judge of the Higher Criminal Court, Shaikh Mohammed Al-Khalifa, has postponed the prosecution to 11 May 2008.
Front Line believes that Mohammed Abdullah Al Sengais, Hassan Abdulnabi Hassan, Maytham Bader Jassim Al-Sheikh, and Naji Ali Fateel, have been detained and subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading forms of ill-treatment and torture as a result of their legitimate and peaceful activities in defence of human rights. Front Line is extremely concerned for the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders who are detained.

members of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council (HRC) -- one third of its membership -- on May 21.
"Democratic countries are squandering a golden opportunity to promote human rights through this important UN body," Hillel Neuer, executive director of the Geneva-based UN Watch, told reporters.
"Instead they lend international credibility to repressive governments that routinely violate the rights of their own citizens." Paula Schriefer, the advocacy director of Freedom House, noted the HRC already includes three countries -- China, Cuba and Saudi Arabia -- listed on her organization's "Worst of the Worst" 2008 report on the world's most repressive societies.
The other countries on the list are Myanmar, Libya, North Korea, Somalia and Sudan, as well as two territories, Chechnya and Tibet.
"With the exception of Burma (Myanmar), the UN Human Rights Council has so far failed to adequately address any of the egregious human rights situation taking place in the countries in our Worst of the Worst report," Schriefer said.
In the African group, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Ghana and Zambia are vying for the HRC seats currently held by Gabon, Ghana, Mali and Zambia.
Gabon and Zambia were deemed "not qualified", Ghana "qualified" and Burkina Faso "questionable" by the two pro-

democracy groups.
In the Asian group, Bahrain, East Timor, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea and Sri Lanka are in contention for the seats currently held by Japan, Pakistan, South Korea and Sri Lanka.
Bahrain, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were deemed "not qualified", Japan and South Korea "qualified" and East Timor "questionable."
In the East European group, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine are battling for the seats held by Romania and Ukraine. All four were thought to be "qualified."
In the Latin American group, Argentina, Brazil and Chile are running for the seats held by Brazil, Guatemala and Peru. Argentina and Chile were deemed "qualified" and Brazil "questionable."
And in the West European group, the contest involves France, Spain and Britain for the seats currently held by Britain and France. All three contenders were judged to be "qualified."
No country can be elected to the HRC unless an absolute majority (at least 97 members) of the UN General Assembly writes in the name of the candidate on a ballot. Members are elected to staggered three-year terms.
The HRC was created two years ago to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission as part of UN reforms

Saudi authorities keep mum over detention of Bahrainis

By Habib Toumi, May 16, 2008
Manama: The Bahraini embassy in Riyadh has yet to receive new information about eight Bahrainis who have been held in a prison near Riyadh in a case steeped in secrecy.
"We are following up letters submitted by relatives of the eight detainees to the Bahraini ambassador and the Saudi authorities, but we have nothing new on the case," Mousa Al Naimi, first secretary at the embassy, said on Friday in a press statement.
The detention of the detainees, most of whom are teachers, has baffled Bahrain in the absence of formal charges or official explanations from the Saudi authorities. Bahraini officials said they were closely monitoring the case.
A Bahraini human rights watchdog last week expressed concern that the detention of eight Shiite Bahrainis in a Saudi jail may be motivated by sectarian tension plaguing the region.
The Bahrainis have been held in a Saudi prison since February 29, allegedly after they strayed into a military zone near Riyadh, the capital. In the absence of full information from competent authorities, speculation is rife about their detention.
'Concerned'
"We are deeply concerned that the eight detainees are in fact the victims of politi-

cal conflicts and sectarian tensions in the region," the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights said in a statement sent to Gulf News.
"We call for their immediate release if there is no evidence they committed a crime or a felony. We also urge the authorities to allow their families and their lawyers to visit them regularly," the watchdog said.
Despite efforts by Bahraini diplomats posted in Riyadh, Shaikh Hassan Al Safar, a Saudi religious leader, and Turki Al Sudairi, head of the Saudi Human Rights Commission, little has transpired about their detention.
Eventually, 55 days after they were arrested, the detainees were allowed to meet separately and for about one hour with their relatives in the Haer prison near Riyadh. "They told their relatives they had driven two cars on back roads from a tourism site towards the Saudi capital, but got lost and after an hour ended up near a military base where they were arrested and put in solitary confinement," the centre said.
Last Sunday, four opposition groups, Al Wefaq, Islamic Action, the National Democratic Action and the Democratic Forum called on Bahraini and Saudi authorities to draw on their special relations and work on releasing the men.

Bahrain in Amnesty International's annual report

BAHRAIN

Head of State

King Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa

Head of government

Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa

Death penalty retentionist

Population 0.8 million

Life expectancy 75.2 years

Under-5 mortality (m/f) 15/15 per 1,000

Adult literacy

86.5 per cent Isolated incidents of repression of human rights defenders, journalists and internet sites were reported. Courts passed two death sentences, but no one was executed.

Background

In February demonstrations were held after three people were arrested and protesters clashed with security forces. The three arrested – 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, President of the dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights; Hassan Mshaima', a former political prisoner and Head of the radical Shi'a opposition al-Haq Movement; and Shakir Mohammed 'Abdul Hussain – were charged with "inciting hatred and seeking to change the political system by illegal means" and other offences. They were released on bail the day of their arrest. Court proceedings against them were later dropped at the request of King Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa.

In September Bahrain acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Human rights defenders

Nabeel Rajab, Vice-President of the dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, was reportedly harassed: he was followed and he and his wife received offensive anonymous phone calls, letters and messages. In March, he was summoned to appear before the Criminal Investigation Directorate apparently for distributing documents related to a report issued in September 2006 by Salah al-Bandar, a UK national and former adviser to the Bahraini government. The report alleged that officials had planned to manipulate the outcome of the November 2006 parliamentary elections at the expense of the majority Shi'a Muslim population. In October 2006 the High Criminal Court had banned publication of any information related to Salah al-Bandar's report.

No charges were known to have been brought against Nabeel Rajab.

Freedom of expression

In May some 200 Bahraini journalists held protests outside the Council of Representatives (parliament) calling for greater press freedom and an end to prison terms for press-related offences. The same month the Shura (Consultative) Council unanimously passed a new draft law that excluded prison terms for press-related offences. However, the law had not been promul-

gated by the end of the year.

At least 22 internet sites, including some known for carrying criticism of the government, remained banned.

The local media was reportedly banned from interviewing Ghada Jamsheer, a woman human rights defender.

'War on terror'

The two remaining Bahraini nationals still held by the US authorities at Guantánamo – Juma'a Mohammed al-Dossari, a Saudi Arabia resident, and 'Issa 'Abdullah al-Murbati – were returned to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in July and August respectively. They were released uncharged by the Saudi Arabian and Bahraini authorities.

Counter-terrorism

At least 11 people were reportedly arrested under Bahrain's 2006 counter-terrorism law. Six people were released but five, detained in August, were still being held at the end of the year. They appeared in court on 23 October charged with "preparing attacks against another country, membership of a banned organization and financing terror attacks".

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Following demonstrations on 17 December and subsequently, about 45 people were arrested. Many were released within

hours or days, but at least 20 continued to be held at the Department of Criminal Investigations and in the Central Prison in al-Manama. They were held in solitary confinement and kept blindfolded for lengthy periods. Some were tortured during interrogation by security officials, including with beatings and electric shocks to various parts of the body. According to reports, three detainees – Mohammad Khalil al-Madoob, Hussain Khalil al-Madoob and Hussain 'Abd al-Nabi – alleged that they were tortured in the days following their arrest and had facial injuries apparently caused by beatings when they were seen by their legal representative.

Death penalty

In January a proposed amendment to the 1976 Penal Code to repeal the death penalty for drug trafficking was defeated in the Shura Council. In November the government voted against a moratorium on executions at the UN General Assembly. Two people were sentenced to death for murder: an unnamed Bangladeshi man in January; and another Bangladeshi national, Mizan Noor Al-Rahman Ayoub Miyah, in April.



An attack on demonstrators on Thursday 30th May 2008 near Karbabad/Sanabis

Violence flares up in Bahrain

EPA

Published: May 16, 2008, 23:39

Manama: A Bahraini protester hurls a Molotov cocktail towards police in Sehla village on the outskirts of the capital Manama on Thursday night. Three cars and a carpentry workshop were burned in Sehla village during clashes between police and protesters after anti-riot police intervened to end a sit-in calling for the release of more than 30 detainees held between late December and early May on charges of killing a policeman and setting several police cars and private property on fire.

Bahraini detainees in Saudi jail

Continued from Page 2

incides also with the approval of the "Molotov" law that criminalises the possession and the use of the Molotov cocktail bottles. It is a move intended to frighten the Bahrainis into submission to the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. Since Sheikh Hamad rose to power, he has sought to "legalise" his family's criminal acts against the people of Bahrain, using tricks, money and co-option as tools to facilitate these measures.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
6th May 2008