

# BAHRAIN

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

## Bahrain continues its struggle against hereditary dictatorship

Despite the developments of the past decade in Bahrain, the situation has remained as volatile as ever, with both sides; the ruling Al Khalifa family and the people of Bahrain clinging to their historic positions of mistrust and enmity without any sign of reprieve. What is it that has kept them apart? And what is it that is preventing a real reconciliation? What is behind the rhetoric of both sides? And finally what has the façade of democracy failed to stem the rising opposition to the regime. Undoubtedly the Al Khalifa's propaganda machine has succeeded in clouding the real situation. Their means to achieve this is multi-faceted. On one hand, the enormous wealth of the country that has been grabbed by them has become a powerful tool in "purchasing" some hearts of minds of those who are trading their morals and ethics for cash and privileges, both among citizens and foreigners. These include some parliamentarians who have become so corrupt that they are ready to support the hereditary dictatorship in return for extravagant holidays with their spouses or partners in Bahrain. Locally, corruption has reached unprecedented levels with cronyism, loyalty and favouritism have replaced competence, qualifications and professionalism. On the other hand, the support, moral, political and military, offered by the United States and Britain to this dictatorship has assumed new dimensions. The CIA in particular had operated with rigour and enthusiasm to save the fledgling regime for the past ten years. It has recruited some citizens for high office occupation as a way to enhance the reputation of the antiquated political system.

The question being asked by many observers is: Have these efforts really worked? The ongoing search for the soul and spirit of Bahrain by the natives and their supporters among the international community is an indication to the failure of the efforts to derail the efforts of the opposition and lead the country to more flamboyancy and instability.

Sheikh Hamad and his clique may have bought off their continued existence for some time with these measures, but can they survive on the long run outside the process of constitutional law? It is true that the level of defiance may not have yet reached alarming levels, but how long can the Al Khalifa and their supporters con-

tinue to prop up an illegitimate hereditary dictatorship? The politicians in Washington and London may not acknowledge the fact that they are supporting absolute dictatorship, arguing that the Al Khalifa have turned into a democratic regime, but they will fail to justify the lack of pluralism, the increasing grip on power by the Al Khalifa (17 out of 29 ministerial posts are occupied by Al Khalifa members, and the current prime minister has been in his post for almost 40 years!). Friendly gestures by these countries and favourable policies and attitudes will prove ineffective when countering the wrath of the oppressed and dispossessed people of Bahrain. The plight of the political prisoners; the lack of housing for the natives; the destructive policy of demographic engineering against the native Baharna and the blundering of the country's land, coastlines and oil wealth can only cause more tension and instability. Those powers are facing moral bankruptcy as they continue their support of an absolute hereditary dictatorship. The people of Bahrain, however, are determined to resist the occupational policies of the ruling family and would not yield to their repression and oppression.

When the opposition decided to boycott the political regime by refusing to register their political bodies under the Al Khalifa laws, or take part in elections of ineffective and undemocratic bodies it had a clear vision. This vision is based on the rejection of Sheikh Hamad's "constitution" as it had been imposed on the people by force. The opposition has said and will continue to believe that it is an illegitimate compilation of rules designed to safeguard the interests of the hereditary dictatorship and ignore the people's real wishes. Bahrainis had not been consulted when designing the tailor-made code, nor had they been asked to vote in a referendum to approve it. It was imposed in a similar way to the constitution that the US occupational forces had intended to force on Iraq. The Iraqis, and especially the religious leadership in Najaf, refused to accept it, and an alternative constitution was subsequently written by Iraqi hands. The stand of the Bahraini opposition has since remained clear and final; no constitution would be endorsed unless it is written by the people of Bah-

rain along the lines of the 1973 constitution. They have refused to be drawn into the murky waters of dictatorship, corruption and hereditary rule. Protests were organised, demonstrations held and petition signed against this new form of institutionalised dictatorship supported by Washington and London. No power on earth will be able to dislodge the Bahraini opposition from its principles stand of rejecting any imposed law, rule or constitution. The past few years of "electioneering" politics have failed to address the real concerns of Bahrainis, but the steadfastness of the people has uncovered the reality of the situation to the world's public opinion. The failure of Sheikh Hamad's programme was subsequently highlighted by the notorious Al Bandar report which had uncovered one of the most bizarre tales of conspiring against the interests and being of the people. Neither the Al Khalifa nor their supporters in Washington and London has taken steps to remedy this fiasco. All stand accused of conspiring to commit genocidal policies against the natives of Bahrain.

The Bahraini opposition has defied all the odds over the past decade and emerged in a stronger position as the disastrous results of Sheikh Hamad's programme made their impact on the political, economic and social situation in the country. Today, international human rights bodies (except those who had been bribed the Al Khalifa) are clearer in their condemnation of the regime's dismal human rights records, and their support of the people's struggle to achieve freedom. On their part, the people are becoming more bold in their demands and voices have been raised calling for the right of self-determination of the natives of Bahrain. This is in response to the regime's ongoing policies targeting the native majority population. Its policies of hate and extermination have convinced many, including those who had originally been attracted by the regime's propaganda, that what Sheikh Hamad and his criminal clique are doing is inhumane, shameful, indecent and criminal. To this end, all efforts will be made to counter this criminal regime until the people regain their rights. This clear message from behind the cells containing the mutilated bodies of Bahraini freedom fighters.

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## Against the will of the people

In recent months, there have been a number of policies and decisions by Bahrain's ruling family, which were viewed by observers as an indication of a significant shift in the policies of the Government of Bahrain.

Few months ago, the Government spread rumours that it intended to bring back Jewish families who had left Bahrain during the last century. The families are settled in Europe with successful businesses. The Government justifies its intended move by saying that bringing them back will make a positive addition to the economy of Bahrain.

Few months later, the Government of Bahrain appointed a Jewish lady as the Ambassador of Bahrain to the United States of America, even though the Jews in Bahrain are a very small minority. The Government argued that this decision was not politically motivated claiming that Bahrain is a religiously "tolerant"

country which gives no consideration to affiliations when appointing individuals to Government posts.

Recently, leading newspapers in Bahrain showed the ruler of Bahrain meeting some members of Jewish community who had left Bahrain last century. Sheikh Hamad offered them dual nationality and welcomed them to Bahrain any time they wished.

Meanwhile, the policies of the Government of Bahrain towards the indigenous citizens are far from being that merciful. The people of Bahrain are suffering severe hardship, subjected to grave discrimination and are treated according to their sectarian affiliation. While the ruler of Bahrain is trying to portray the country as tolerant and accommodating to all religions, in reality, the indigenous citizens are being alienated and discriminated against at all times. They are now facing the prospect of total annihilation.

Such moves can only be interpreted as a direct prelude to the undeclared policies of normalising relations with the Israel. They are also intended to show a different face of the country, which conceals the agony, injustice and discriminations that characterize the unseen reality inside the country.

Meanwhile, the Bahraini opposition is participating in a seminar organised by Lord Avebury, the Vice-Chairman of the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August. The event is to coincide with the Independence anniversary of the country (15<sup>th</sup> August 1971) and the dissolution of the country's parliament and suspension of the constitution on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1975. Several speakers, Bahrainis and non-Bahrainis will take part in the debate. It will be held at 1 Abbey Gardens, London SW1.

*Bahrain Freedom Movement  
18<sup>th</sup> August 2008*

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## Injustice in detention and release

The media in Bahrain has tried to make a drama out of a crisis when it proclaimed that the pardon issued by the King to the prisoners was a great step towards restoring the one family spirit and backing security in the kingdom.

Many young men were unfairly detained during the past months either for taking part in demonstrations against the Government policies or for being accused of committing violence against security forces, a claim that could not be corroborated. The tens of young men remained in custody under very poor conditions and without enjoying fair trials.

Many citizens, once recovered from the illusive happiness of being reunited with their imprisoned relatives and sons, soon realized the inhumane practices of the security forces during the detention and the injustice that surrounded their release. The released prisoners confirmed previous reports that the security forces used excessive force against them in an attempt to secure fake confessions.

Several of them had described in some details their ordeal during detention, and described in horrific details the torture techniques used against them from the moment of their arrest. Once inside the torture chambers, the torturers observed no limits to the injuries and pain they inflicted on these powerless Bahrainis. Among the means of torture is severe beating, sexual assault, deprivation of sleep, forced standing and electrocution. Several detainees have described their ordeals openly in Al Wasat newspaper, today's edition.

As part of Sheikh Hamad's pardon package, the prisoners were released after

being forced to sign confessions that they had committed violence and violated the laws of the country. Those who refused to sign were kept in custody and were not released like others.

The case of the recent so-called pardon reinforces the belief that the Government of Bahrain is determined to continue its

### Annual Seminar on Bahrain

The annual seminar on to mark the Independence Day (15th August 1971) and the dissolution of the only legitimate Parliament in Bahrain's history (26th August 1975) was held on Thursday 21st August at an annexe to the House of Lords. It was organised by Lord Avebury, the Vice-President of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. Several speakers alongside Lord Avebury, took part including Mr Ali Raiba, former Bahraini MP, Mr Hassan Mushaime', Chairman of Haq Movement, Dr Abdul Hadi Khalaf, former Bahraini MP, Kevin Lau from Redress and Hussain Abdulla from the American Committee for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain. The event was covered by TV satellites and was attended by representatives of several embassies and political and human rights institutions. Pictures of torture were displayed on the walls, while the audience showed keen interest in the affairs of Bahrain by their comments and questions. A compilation of several reports by international human rights bodies was distributed. Lord Avebury's introductory speech is published on Page 4. Other speeches are available on BFM website on: vob.org

illegal and repressive measures against all those who attempt to propagate and/or encourage democratic values. The event also shows that injustice goes along all Government's approaches to sorting out difficulties and crises that arise between now and then in Bahrain.

On the other hand, the ruling family is moving rapidly to re-habilitate former torturers despite local and international calls to bring them to justice for their crimes against humanity. The most notorious are Ian Henderson and Adel Flaifel. Two weeks ago, one of the agents of the ruling family proposed that Henderson be "honoured" for his role in suppressing the active opposition elements over the past three decades. He had been scrutinized by the British police who had gathered evidence against him over the years. The agent is a member of Sheikh Hamad's council and has infuriated thousands of Bahraini victims when he presented his proposals. Another serious threat to national accord and harmony came in the past few days when banners were raised on main roads calling for "honouring" the notorious Adel Flaifel. Anonymous names were used as sponsors of these calls. The ruling family has hitherto failed to address the issue of torture, bring to justice those involved in administering it, or rehabilitate or compensate the victims. Meanwhile, the citizens have organized another week of action to protest the increasing despotism of the ruling family. The activities include visiting graves of the martyrs, raising banners with the people's demands and calling for justice against torturers and ending the process of making new Bahrainis.

*Bahrain Freedom Movement  
11 August 2008*

# Who is right? The Al Khalifa agents or the British Ambassador?

The programme of deception adopted by the ruling family of Bahrain as pressures intensify against its illegitimate rule has assumed new dimensions. In the following two press reports from local media indicate clearly how their policies have become victim to their irrational approach to international relations and conventions. The first shows the irritation of the ruling family (expressed by one its stooges) against the UK government for granting political asylum to few opponents of the regime. The second is the response by the British Ambassador in Manama to these allegations. The problem of the Al Khalifa is that they have no respect to international laws governing the rights of activists and political asylum. To them, other governments have to act against their international obligations in order to become "friendly". Democratic governments simply cannot do that. It is clear that the various comments and criticisms are always attributed to low key figures, while senior members of the ruling family do not have the courage to express their views openly. They are angry that Bahrainis are sheltered by other countries, but they can do little about it.

## Britain's Asylum, Foreign Policy Criticized By Bahraini Lawmaker

*Sandeep Singh Grewal - AHN Middle East Correspondent, August 4, 2008*

Manama, Bahrain (AHN) - Britain has been accused by a lawmaker here of double standards against Bahraini citizens and of sheltering groups which incite hatred against the country. Parliament member Shaikh Jassim Al Saidi lashed out at the British authorities regarding their foreign policy for Arab states and relaxed asylum procedures.

"The government run by Prime Minister Gordon Brown is sheltering lawbreakers who promote terrorism in Bahrain. It is strange that people who are convicted of crimes are granted asylum and financial support in Britain," the MP told AHN.

The Independent Salafist MP claimed he possessed pertinent documents and leaflets of some unregistered organizations operating in the United Kingdom which were against the political reforms initiated by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Several political activists who left Bahrain operate in the U.K. The London-based Freedom Movement is one such Islamist group which has anti-government articles on their website, which is blocked by the Bahrain authorities. Last year, members of the Ameri-

cans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) staged a protest outside the Bahrain Embassy in Washington D.C. It reportedly included some people who received political amnesty and did not return to Bahrain.

"How would British people feel if Bahrain starts granting asylum to members of the Irish Republican Army? They should understand that these political groups incite hatred against our country which also violates the U.K. laws," the lawmaker questioned.

Abdulnabi Al Ekry, the head of Transparency International, Bahrain and a former political prisoner, took exception with the legislator's criticism. Al Ekry told AHN, "There is an independent body in the UK responsible for asylum policy and not the government. But with the same token, the Bahrain government should also study why some people left the country and refused to return."

The activist cited the examples of two Bahrainis who had taken asylum in UK: they were the heads of the Committees of Unemployment and Victims of Torture. "It is clear that these individuals must have faced some problems. They need to review the cases of these dissidents to reach a conclusion," Al Ekry said.

Earlier this year, Interior Minister Lt. General Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa met with the British Ambassador to Bahrain, James Bowden. The minister discussed some people who were given the right of asylum. He also explained their motives to influence home security, shifting to countries such as Iran and Lebanon and the fear of considering the U.K. a shelter for groups that harm the security of Britain and Bahrain.

The Minister confirmed that those people were not politically wanted and were not prevented from coming back home.

## UK denies 'political campaign' claim

*By GEOFFREY BEW, The Gulf Daily News, 5th August 2008*

BRITISH officials have hit back at allegations that the UK is being used as a launch pad for a political campaign against the Bahrain government.

MP Jassim Al Saeedi claimed on Sunday that a number of Bahrainis in the UK had acquired British nationality and were waging a propaganda war to undermine the country's development.

The allegations come less than two weeks after His Majesty King Hamad warned Bahraini societies, associations and indi-

viduals against forming external alliances.

But British Embassy officials yesterday described Mr Al Saeedi's comments as "inaccurate" and a "gross distortion of the UK-Bahrain relationship".

"The UK does not offer support to committees and organisations that are against Bahrain and its leadership," the embassy said in a statement.

"Nor does it support violent groups that cause public disruption by terrorist acts. "The UK does not tolerate incitement of violence and will act according to the law against those who do so." The statement also rejected Mr Al Saeedi's claims that a number of Bahrainis in the UK alleged "political persecution", saying all applications for asylum, regardless of nationality, were handled on a case-by-case basis. Officials said they would welcome a meeting with the MP, from the pro-government Al Asala bloc, and would be interested to see if he has any documentary evidence to support his claims. "There is a long history of mutual cooperation and friendship from which both our countries have benefited," the statement added.

"Such a meeting would reflect this and the growing relationships between the Bahraini and UK parliaments, which are strongly supported by the British Embassy.

"The strength of our relationship with Bahrain is also seen in areas of commerce, travel and tourism, study and cooperation in facing the challenges of the 21st century.

"The UK government will continue working to ensure that this relationship remains a success."

Mr Al Saeedi was unable to say how many people were using the UK to stage anti-government activities.

However, it is not the first time Bahraini officials have sought a meeting with British Ambassador Jamie Bowden regarding opposition activists in the UK. Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa summoned the envoy for a similar meeting in March - accusing Bahrainis of using the UK as a platform from which to orchestrate unrest at home.

It was also alleged that some could have forged illegal contacts with compatriots in Lebanon and Iran.

The embassy's former Deputy Head of Mission Stephen Harrison later said colleagues had taken the accusations seriously and informed security officials in the UK. He added the embassy had listened to the concerns of the Interior Minister and reported them to the UK, including to the Home Office. geoff@gdn.com.bh



## Bahrain; failed political experiment, serious HR violations

A seminar was organised by Lord Avebury, the Vice-Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group on Thursday 21st July.

*Speakers and commentators presented their views on the failed political programme, people's demands and the regime's inability to address the crisis*

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2008

**Introductory remarks: Lord Avebury:** For the last few years, we have held this event to review the human rights situation in Bahrain, to coincide with the two most important events in the state's recent history: independence on August 15, 1971, and the dissolution of the Parliament and suspension of the constitution on August 26, 1975. And every year we have to acknowledge that in spite of the paper commitments to human rights by the hereditary dictatorship, there has been no real improvement on the ground.

This year, we have the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain, like the rest of them so far a low-key affair but all the same pointing to the main areas of concern. The High Commissioner's Office, for instance, takes up a theme which has been highlighted every year at these meetings: that although Bahrain has signed the Convention Against Torture, Decree Law 56 of 2002 extended a blanket amnesty to the perpetrators of torture before that date, and denied access to redress to the victims. The Committee Against Torture expressed concern in the same report about extended periods of incommunicado detention after the Convention was ratified; inadequate safeguards for detainees including access to legal advice, medical assistance and visits by family members, and the absence of any mechanism for allowing independent monitors to visit places of detention without prior notice, despite assurances by the government. In the UN compilation of stakeholders' reports, the Asian Center for Human Rights say that security forces continue to practice torture, an allegation repeated separately by Frontline Defenders. Indeed the US State Department reports allegations of torture by Human Rights Watch and the newspaper Al Wasat, which are not included in the UN summary.

In these circumstances, it was alarming to read the king's threats against human rights defenders, who are being targeted for their alleged loyalty to 'foreign agendas'. The agendas in question are those of the UN Human Rights Council, the Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures, established by the General Assembly without dissent, and if Bahrain doesn't endorse these agendas, it should resign its seat on the Council.

The king's menaces were particularly directed towards "those whom we par-

doned after being in exile", implying that the exiles had committed criminal offences. If that had been the case, they wouldn't have qualified for refugee status under the Convention, and their offence in the eyes of the régime was to stand up for human rights and democracy. When the reforms were instituted in 2001 that led to the recall of the exiles, the king used the language of human rights and democracy, so it was his late father who might have been pardoned, not the exiles. But its when we turn to what the High Commissioner's report says on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly that we see the hollowness of the 2001 settlement, and the strenuous efforts made to stifle criticism of it. The Committee Against Torture recommends that inappropriate restrictions on human rights NGOs be lifted, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination criticises particularly the banning of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, as also does the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The Special Representative expresses concern about what appears to be a pattern of arrests by human rights defenders, all too likely to continue in the light of the fact that some of the most prominent human rights activists, like Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, President of the banned BCHR, are amongst the returnees. Mr Al-Khawaja and Mr Hassan Mushaima, the Secretary-General of the Haq Democracy Movement, had already been arbitrarily arrested by the security services for their legitimate and peaceful activities, and their case was highlighted in the report to the UN General Assembly in March 2008 by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on human rights defenders, Hina Jilani.

Another case taken up by the Special Representative, together with the Rapporteurs on freedom of expression and on violence against women was that of Mrs Ghada Jamsheer, against whom a ban

was imposed from being reported by either the print or broadcasting media after she had called for the dissolution of the Supreme Council for Women, which is headed by the king's wife, on the grounds that after the Council spent \$660,000 on the empowerment of women, not a single woman was elected to the Parliament or municipal councils. Ms Jamsheer also committed the unforgivable sin of listing the women members of the ruling family and their hangers-on who had been appointed to prestigious jobs, albeit without real power, such as members of the Shura Council.

Finally, in these brief introductory remarks, I have to mention the régime's stealthy but inexorable policy of demographic engineering, not adequately covered by the UPR because it doesn't fit neatly into any of the categories of human rights violations covered by the Treaty Bodies or the Special Procedures. All the same, it is covered in the submissions by the Islamic Human Rights Commission and the Asian Commission for Human Rights. The IHRC point out that thousands of foreign Sunni Muslims in the military and security services are allowed to vote, and ACHR report on the granting of citizenship to Sunni Arabs from elsewhere in the region to reduce and in the end reverse the Shi'a majority. We have had evidence of this practice over several years, and apart from the dilution and ultimate elimination of cultural identity, which Haq proposes should be examined by a UN commission of inquiry, it leads to the impoverishment of the original population, by the preference granted to Sunni immigrants in jobs and housing. Dr Salah al-Bander was expelled from Bahrain in 2006 for his detailed exposure of high level corruption and discrimination against the Shi'a, and before that the International Crisis Group reported in May 2005 on Bahrain's Sectarian Challenge. But since the UN are not going to examine the grievances of the majority community and the government's plan to make them into a minority in their own land, perhaps we should solicit the detailed evidence that would be needed to build on the ICG report and Banderate. If this meeting agreed, we could establish a web address to which people could email facts about immigration, the granting of citizenship to newcomers, and their own experience of discrimination, in confidence. Lets see if we can do something more than talk about these issues, valuable though it is to send a message to the masses who are silenced in Bahrain.

