

BAHRAIN

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Perilous times ahead as resistance to hereditary dictatorship intensifies

The attempts at finding local solutions to the political and human crisis in Bahrain appear to be reaching a dead end. The full might of the state has been mobilized to neutralize the pro-reform forces and trends. Instead of attending to the concerns and needs of people the ruling Al Khalifa family has engaged in policies aiming at passifying the continuing struggle by political and human rights activists. The recent briefing session at the US Congress had fundamentally altered the thinking of the ruling family. The session that was held on 15th October concentrated on discrimination against the majority Shia Muslim population of Bahrain, and was organized by Congressman Wolf. Three witnesses came from Bahrain and provided material evidence about the institutionalized discrimination that has created a de facto Apartheid situation. The ruling family has always relied on security and political support from Washington and London. It is rumoured that the demographic change and the ethnic cleansing against the Shia Muslim natives had a prior approval from these two capitals. The systematic eradication of the historic, cultural and religious character of Bahrain has become a nightmare to the natives who see their land swamped by foreigners who are granted Bahraini nationality, jobs and housing. The aim of the session was to gauge the extent of discrimination against the majority who are now represented by two ministers at the cabinet. Two other ministers of state are of no political value. There are 24 ministers in the cabinet in addition to five other posts with ministerial positions. The Al Khalifa occupy 17 out of these 29 posts, compared to the four (two real, two symbolic) posts for the Shia Muslim natives.

A media campaign has been waged against the sponsors of the Congressional briefing, and it is widely suggested that it signifies a total failure by the Bahraini Ambassador in Washington, Huda Nunu. The ruling family had hoped that being female and Jew, Miss Nunu would be better positioned to polish the image of the ruling family whose image has long been tainted by images of cruelty, torture, sectarianism and dictatorship. She had attempted to stop the Congressional briefing, assisted by two public relations companies on the pay of the ruling family, but her attempts had failed to stop the

event. The coverage of the event by the Al Hurra TV and the attendance by significant public and media figures had infuriated the regime in Bahrain and caused them to review their policies. Coupled with their recent attack against UK for granting political refugee status to three Bahraini dissidents, the Al Khalifa rulers are now acting outside the norms of dignity and self-esteem. Their efforts are likely to backfire as they target public figures of good reputation such as Lord Avebury and Senator Wolf. They are not serving their cause by these irresponsible onslaughts from their own media and public relations companies.

The coming weeks and months could witness an escalation in public fury against the regime as the Day of the Martyrs approaches. On 17th December last year, Ali Jassim, 22, was killed as he took part in pro-democracy demonstration on the Day of the Martyrs. This specific day was designated for the occasion following the murder by Death Squads of two young Bahrainis taking part in a peaceful demonstration on that day in 1994. Since then the Bahraini natives have commemorated this day with mourning and political fury. The ruling family and its agents have been attempting to move the Martyrs day to a different day, but the insistence of the activists have foiled their attempts. This year, the expectations are such that major demonstrations will take place on that day, coupled with activities in Washington and London. The initiative seems to be speedily slipping from the hands of the antiquated political regime that has built its glory on the bodies of the martyrs. The National Committee for the Martyrs and Victims of Torture has already called for massive turn out on that day with uncompromising messages that the people of Bahrain could not continue indefinitely waiting for a meaningful initiative by the government to rehabilitate torture victims and bring to justice those accused of grave mis-courage of justice.

The ruling family of Bahrain has always held different views from the world in relation to democracy, international obligations and human rights. They would arrest activists, repress non-conformist

political ideas, torture detainees and cleanse the country of the ethnic natives. When other countries offer the victims a refuge they would create an outcry hoping that they would persuade those countries to expel or silence anti-Al Khalifa voices. Their media has been waging attacks on the British government for offering political asylum to three people. But their senior members, including the ruler, cannot afford not to spend half of their time in London. Now that the case of native Bahrainis has reached the US Congress their mercenaries have waged personal attacks on the Congressmen and Senators who had agreed to listen to the grievances of the Al Khalifa victims. However, the senior figures in the regime would only speak in diplomatic terms for fear of antagonizing the Americans. These are clear symptoms of a regime in crisis. The crisis is likely not only to continue but to become worse for the regime as the people of Bahrain become more aware of the extent of treachery that had been committed against them. Ethnic cleansing has now become the main worry of Bahrainis and international human rights bodies. It is a strategic decision by the ruling family who has always suffered from lack of popular or constitutional legitimacy. This is a unique situation in today's world that is largely un-noticed by the international community. Bahrainis are now suffering in silence, their existence is in jeopardy while their rights are totally ignored. The pro-democracy movement is gathering momentum despite the various means of repression, co-option and containment of active opponents. Luckily the vast majority of the population is undergoing a serious re-think with regards to issues such as co-habitation with the Al Khalifa who have proven their disloyalty to the land and the people and their unlimited greed and willingness to rob the people of their land and wealth. The most viable option for the opposition is to upgrade its method of action, extend its international links and relations and urge people to sever their links with the hereditary dictatorship that is antiquated, repressive and corrupt. This is the way forward despite the enormous hurdles, challenges and perils.

The “victim” who had died five months before his killing

Among the significant events that happened over the past few weeks, two stand out as devastating to the image and reputation of the ruling Al Khalifa family in Bahrain.

First came the important discovery that Majed Asghar Baksh, the supposed “victim” of the “molotov-throwing Bahraini murderers” had died five months before the alleged crime that led to his “martyrdom” in the service of the ruling family. Then came the briefing at the US Congress about the institutionalised discrimination against the majority of Bahrain’s Shia Muslim population. Both developments had shaken the foundation of the hereditary dictatorship and led to serious questions about the legitimacy of the regime and its ability to rule in accordance to international standards of justice, transparency and popular consensus. Last December a group of Bahraini youth were arrested, tortured and falsely accused of killing an “armed policeman”. It was also claimed that they had confiscated some arms from other policemen. Among them were Hassan Abdul Nabi, Maitham Bader Al Sheikh, Naji Fateel

and Mohammad Al Singace. They were subjected to horrific torture including sexual attacks, electric shocks, beating and deprivation of sleep. Despite numerous protests by them at their brief court appearances, often presided over by a member of the ruling family, no independent inquiry has been formed to examine the allegations of torture. Last month, their lawyers came to the kangaroo court with documented evidence that their alleged victim, a Pakistani policeman, had died in July 2007, i.e. five months before he was “killed” by the protesters. These documents are papers from the ministry of the interior detailing his entitlement for compensation towards his years of service that must be given to his relatives. It was a real fiasco that the ruling family thought would not be discovered. Instead of heeding the calls for the immediate release of those prisoners of conscience the Al Khalifa are exacting more revenge against these hostages and their families. Several of their relatives have been threatened with grave consequences if they did not keep quiet about the suffering of their beloved ones. Many human rights activ-

ists, lawyers and observers have expressed shock, anger and disbelief that such a crime would be committed by a regime against their citizens. The ruling family has now registered another low moral grounds for the continued detention and torture of Bahrainis for a crime that never was. They are now waging a witch-hunt to know the source of the leaking of the documents of the deceased.

Meanwhile, the anger of the ruling family at the turn of events against their wishes could not be concealed. Attacks have been waged against human rights activists to the extent that Anwar Abdul Rahman, the editor of Akhbar Al Khaleej, became so angry that he used offensive language against respectable people like Lord Avebury. The personal attacks that are being waged on daily basis against the activists are a sign of desperation on the part of the regime and its mercenaries who have failed to contain the anger of the Bahrainis or to curtail their worldwide anti-regime activities. In the past three months several articles were written against the granting Bahraini victims the right to political asylum.

*Bahrain Freedom Movement
20th October 2008*

One man’s quest to fight corruption

He may be alone when he unfolds his banners outside the gates of Bapco or elsewhere, but Abbas Al Omran’s quest to fight the institutionalised corruption in the tiny state of Bahrain finds resonance in the hearts and minds of other citizens. The extent of corruption is far ahead of any other GCC state. The prime minister’s financial empire exhibits no signs of shrinking as his greed progresses with his age. Mr 10 percent (as he is commonly known for his insistence on receiving that amount on any government project before it is given to the successful bidder) owns the largest hotels in the country, the “financial harbour” tower in Manama, large estates, the island of Jida in addition to stakes in large companies operating in Bahrain. The ruler and his son are now competing with their uncle and have misappropriated large areas or reclaimed sea land. It is estimated that up to 90 percent of all coastline is owned by members of the ruling Al Khalifa family or their cronies. They have given lands to other GCC rulers while ordinary Bahrainis continue to suffer from severe shortage of housing.

It is not a common occurrence in any of the Gulf states for one person to defy the tribal “laws” and raise his concerns about corruption. That is exactly what 40 years-old Abbas Al Omran did. He has clearly placed himself at great risk. Over the past few years several opponents were murdered as they protested against

the excesses of the tribal regime. Starting with Nooh Khalil Al Nooh in 1998, the list of victims include Mohammad Jum’a Al Shakhouri, Mahdi Abdul Rahman, Abbas Al Shakhouri and Ali Jassim. All were murdered by “hidden hands” and none of the murderers has been caught. Most citizens believe that they had been hunted and killed by the “Death Squads” operating under the direct command of the royal court. Concerned voices have been raised expressing fear for the life of Mr Al Omran and calling on the international community to offer helping hands to Bahrainis who face the increasing prospect of annihilation at the hands of the murderous regime and his “Death Squads”. Abbas Al Omran, a senior Mechanical engineer with the Bahrain Petroleum Company, Bapco, is a distinctly sincere man. He has served his country well whether through his employment or his voluntary work as a trade unionist and a human rights activist. His misfortune probably began when he became a member of Bapco’s Trade Union. He came face to face with corruption of the highest degree. The ruling family would use the trade union to further its policies in exchange for bribes and favours. When he tried to question the forces working in the underworld of the company and the ruling establishment he was summarily persecuted, threatened and denied any promotion in his job.



He saw how his colleagues, who turned blind eyes on corruption, received favours and promotions while he remained a target for the hidden forces in the country, run by the royal court. His case came to the limelight last month when he started protesting openly against the widespread corruption in Bapco, administered and encouraged by senior members of the ruling Al Khalifa family. He started picketing outside the perimeter of Bapco, as he attempted to raise the awareness of the workers to the ongoing scam within the company’s management, their Al Khalifa superiors and some figures within the trade union. The establishment was so enraged that he was summarily dismissed. Now that he has taken his case to new highs, he is risking a serious revenge from the royal court, led by the notorious sectarian figure of Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. International NGOs are now reminded of their duty to intervene in order to protect the life of Mr Al Omran from the “hidden forces” especially the “Death Squads” run by the royal court. Appeals have been made to several parliaments and governments to provide a political asylum to Mr Al Omran, should he wish to apply for a safe haven. Other victims include more than thirty political prisoners and at least five Bahrainis detained from the village of Demestan for being pro-democracy and anti-regime. Among them are: Hussain Abdullah Khalil, 21 and Ibrahim Yousuf Ahmad, 23.

*Bahrain Freedom Movement
6th October 2008*

Washington: Protest at Bahrain's Embassy

On 15th October, Members of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain and Bahrain Center for Human Rights held an assembly outside the Bahraini Embassy where so many Bahraini-Americans attended and repeated slogans to support the indigenous movement in Bahrain to establish Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain; while the assembly was taking place many media sources came to interview the people who took place in the assembly and taped the event. At the end of the assembly Mr. Husain Abdulla gave the following speech:

My friends let me begin by thanking you for coming to this assembly. Once again we are standing in front of the Embassy of Bahrain; because the Bahraini government is continuing its policies of sectarianism, discrimination, suppression of freedom of speech, dictatorship, and Human Rights violations toward the people of Bahrain.

So many innocent Bahrainis who are freedom loving, democracy desiring, reformers are being tortured in the Bahraini prisons as we speak. We demand nothing short of their immediate release with full apology and complete compensation to them and to their families; because that is what an honorable and just government would do toward its citizens.

Furthermore, I have to make it clear that we are gathering today to show our unwavering support to the people of Bahrain and their peaceful demands toward justice and democracy. People of Bahrain: keep up your peaceful struggle and do not think for a moment that your voice did not reach the freedom loving people around the world. Your voice, your struggle, and your demands, have reached Washington DC; and because of your resiliency the officials at the United States Congress seen the true and ugly face of the Al-Khalifa ruling tribes.

Also, for the first time a Senate Resolution 619 was introduced in the United States Senate to support your effort to establish Democracy and justice for all in Bahrain.

That is not all, we are just coming from a fully fledged briefing on Religious Discrimination and Human Rights Violations that was held in the US House of Representative where nothing was discussed but the atrocities that were committed against you by the Al-Khalifa government; and soon we will be carrying this discussion on your behalf into the Oval office in the White House.

Now, I want to turn my attention for a minute to the Bahraini Ambassador Mrs. Hoda Nonoo. The Bahraini Jewish Community is outraged because you are representing and serving the same Al-

Khalifa ruling family that one day forced the Bahraini Jewish Community to leave their country Bahrain; when they were living side by side of their other fellow Bahrainis. Mrs. Nonoo how dare you to serve an anti semantic Al-Khalifa family which committed many atrocities toward the Jewish community in Bahrain. Your act is unacceptable.

Finally, People of Bahrain you control your future and I mean by that your political future. Do not think for a moment that you are weak or a lone; because you are not; and the reason behind that is your demands are just and peaceful. Because your believes and your demands are like the believes of Thomas Jefferson when he said "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed

by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness." Change and waves of reforms and democracy are certain and there is no way that these waves are going to miss Bahrain; and the dream is no longer going to be a dream. The reality is very close and within reach. Our salute and respect to our friends in Bahrain in their peaceful struggle toward Democracy and Religious Freedom in their country.

Husain Abdulla



Missing detainee in CIB amid continued hunger strike

Karzakan Detainees are ill-treated and tortured after voiding case against them. Since three days and as to the time of this report, Sayed Omran Sayed Hameed, an activist from the village of Karzakan has been reported missing among the 28 detainees in the Bahraini Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB). Sayed Omran was among 10 detainees who collapsed as a result of continued hunger strike by the detainees which started on 3rd October 2008. The ten detainees were reported to be temporarily hospitalized after collapsing in the torture chamber of the CIB, all were returned except for Sayed Omran.

The ten detainees who were reported to have shown severe exhaustion and collapse are: Sayed Omran Sayed Hameed, Sadiq Jawad, Habib Ahmed, Hamed Al-Fardan, Sayed Jawad Sayed Hameed, Husain Khatam, Fadhel Abbas Ashoor, Abdulla Juma, Ahmed Ali Hasan, Mohamed Abbas. These are only detainees among the twenty eight who were not available to speak with their family, indicating their ill-condition.

The detainees were transferred to the CIB immediately after the last court session on October 6th, where they were ill-treated, beaten and held individually in cells containing indicted persons and sick with transmitted diseases, like AIDS, Hepatitis and skin infection syndromes. The act of the CIB is to punish the detainees who started a hunger while in Dry Dock prison, on October 3rd, in protest for the ill-treatment, deprivation from basic rights as prisoners under prosecution which include family visits and communications, proper nutrition, and respect for their beliefs and theological prac-

tices.

The detainees have sent many communications (written and verbal) to the prison administration, the public prosecution and the Court Judge, but they were all ignored. The situation of the detainees in the Dry Dock prison deteriorated, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, when they were deprived from proper iftar and fasting meals, and above all their practice and beliefs as Shia were ridiculed and not respected by the CIB officers who were running the prison cells in the Dry Dock.

The 28 detainees were charged in two different cases, but amalgamated in common court session in the Higher Criminal Court, Seated by Shaikh Ali Bin Mohamed Al-Khalifa, a member of the ruling family. The first case is the blaze of Shaikh Atteyatalla's Farm in the village of Krazakan which allegedly occurred in the March 2008, and 15 house arrested detainees, among them well known activists, were charged with the criminal arson fire resulting in damaging private property of Shaikh Atteyatalla. The Second case was the alleged attack in early April 2008 on State militia Patrol which resulted in blazing the vehicle and death of one of its members, of Pakistani origin. Nineteen, among them human rights defenders, were house arrested, and exposed to ill-treatment while in the CIB. Four detainees were charged in the two cases, while two did not turn themselves.

Impact of Political Reform on Religious Freedom in Bahrain

The session was chaired by Congressman Frank Wolf who is chair of the Congressional Human Rights Commission at the United States House of representative. Congressman Wolf is a champion of Human Rights causes and long time advocate for Human Rights around the world. Congressman Wolf opened the session with strong and powerful remarks about the political situation in the country. The Congressmen refer that reforms in Bahrain were nothing but a campaign of deceptions and disappointment especially the new imposed constitution that put all the powers in the hand of the King. In addition, United States has a strong relationship with Bahrain and Congressman Wolf stated that such relationship should be used to influence issues of Religious Freedom and Human Rights. In addition, he personally is very disturbed by numerous reports that comes of credible organizations about the Religious Freedom situation in Bahrain and how the Al-Khalifa led government marginalize and systematically discriminate against the Shia in the country although they are the majority of the populations. Finally Congressman Wolf stated that when Congress returns in November the issues of Human Rights and Religious Freedom will be on the top of his agenda and he will be closely following the situation in Bahrain. Furthermore, this briefing will be the first of many others that are coming in the near future as issues of Bahrain going to be on the top of his agenda. A note that need to be mention that a session that is chaired by Congressman Wolf is something that should not be taken seriously because he only chair issues that are important.

Then, the President of Bahrain center for Human Rights, Mr. Nabeel Rajab, talked about the systematic governmental policies of discrimination that is taking place in Bahrain under the Al-Khlifa ruling family. Mr. rajab gave several example of those policies and these are some of the highlights:

- Shia only holds 13% of the high official post in the country
- Shia citizens are not allowed to work in the Bahraini Army
- Shia citizens are not allowed to work in the intelligence agency
- Shia citizens are not allowed to work in the in police force
- Shia in Bahrain are not allowed to include their religious believes in the school curriculum
- Shia attendance in the University of Bahrain is above 70% while the majority of them are unemployed as a specific policy of the government.

- The government is made it so difficult for the Shia youth to live in Bahrain where they are forcing them to leave Bahrain to neighboring countries for employment.

In Conclusion Mr. Rajab stated that Bahrain is important to the United; thus, a peaceful Bahrain where the rights of the majority are protected and respected is very crucial to the United States. Therefore, he urged the member of Congress to use all the available tools to convince the US administration to put pressure on the Bahraini government and include Human Rights and Religious Freedom within it is Foreign Policy agenda toward Bahrain.

After that, Dr. Abdul Jaleel Alsingace took the podium where he discussed different aspects of religious discrimination toward the Shia population in the country. This is in summary what Dr. Singace discussed:

- There are 5 ministers out of 25 in the government cabinet.
- The Shia mosques are neglected by the Bahraini government and it is almost impossible to get a permit to build a Shia mosque in the country.
- Shia citizens cannot buy land or house in 48% of the country because the government refuses to allow Shia citizens to purchase land and houses on those areas; like East and West Riffa.
- Shia are not allowed to study Islam according to their sect in the government schools.
- Shia Friday sermons are completely neglected by the government media while Sunni sermons are aired live.
- When it comes to religious program on the Television; Shia scholars are rarely invited and the government act if the Shia does not exist in the country.

Then, Dr. Singace suggested the following recommendations:

- Bahraini Shia should be treated as citizens of equal rights and not discriminated against in any form.
- The right to exercise, teach and disseminate their theology should be respected and maintained.
- Criminalizing all forms of discrimination. Issue and enforce a law
- Establishing the basis of true representation and equality among citizens by involving them fairly in the Government. Re-plot electoral constituencies based on one-man-one vote system.

- Shia children should be able to receive formal education to learn Shia jurisprudence and theology.

- Pass a resolution in the House same like the one that was introduced in the Senate.

- Open direct and clear communication channel with Bahraini government where issues of Human Rights and Religious Freedom are discussed more often.

The last speaker was activist, Ms. Maryam AlKhawaja who brought her personal story and what does it mean to be a Shia young lady in Bahrain. She started by saying "I am here today not only for myself, but to speak for my brothers and sisters back in Bahrain who did not have the privilege of being in your company today. I am here to speak for my many friends who are easily classified as Shiite because of how they speak, their names, or how they look. I am here today, ladies and gentlemen, to speak for those who could not be here to speak for themselves." Maryam was very effective in connecting to the audience as her speech was full of examples of a daily life of a young Shia Bahraini. At her conclusion she suggested that "It is you, ladies and gentlemen, members of the congress of the most influential country in the world, who are able to assist in bringing about times like these. These times will come when the administration of the United States of America decides to impose demands whenever signing agreements with the government of Bahrain, demands that call for the equality between the different religious sects in Bahrain and making it clear that there will be no collaboration between the two countries until the government in Bahrain instills a system which guarantees this equality. Your failure to act, ladies and gentlemen, will result in your assisting the government of Bahrain in perpetuating the inequality of their system and rule of law. The consequence of neglecting my request today will result in severe loss to US interests tomorrow."

The turnout was great especially this time of the year in Washington DC and the number of people who attended and the quality of discussion was great. Over 60 to 70 people came to the event and so many were standing because they were not enough chairs in the room. Many people asked questions and engaged in serious discussion about the topic. The Bahraini Ambassador, Hoda Nonoo, was among the attendance; she sat in the back seats and was quiet and surprised by the how well the event turned out. In addition,

