

# BAHRAIN

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

## Major uprising looming as political leaders detained

Once again the situation in the Gulf state of Bahrain has escalated in a way that could not be controlled by the ruling family. The arrest of prominent figures of the opposition for peaceful expression of their opinion has led to a spiral of reactions that could herald a new era of change. The hereditary dictatorship has come under new scrutiny for its absolute grip on power and persistence in violating the basic human rights of Bahrainis. What has amazed many political spectators is the failure of the Al Khalifa to merge with the natives of the country and their determination not to become part of the main stream citizens, but to change the nature of the citizenship through their heinous programme of demographic change. Moreover, the administration of torture as a tool against opponents has been condemned by most international human rights bodies. Its repression of opposition inside the country has infuriated the freedom-lovers and become fuel for more activism by its opponents. This is of course in addition to the policies of corruption, usurping of the land and oil wealth and total domination of the political and economic life of Bahrain. Out of 29 ministerial posts, the Al Khalifa occupy 17 of them. The prime minister who has been in his post for almost four decades is locally known as Mr 50 percent (as he always imposes a 50 percent share in any government contract).

Last month, Sheikh Hamad, the architect of the new institutionalised dictatorship ordered the arrest of four members of the opposition; two have since been released awaiting a show trial whose verdicts often comes from "the top". Two others, Mr Hassan Mushaime, the Secretary General of Haq Movement and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, a cleric and public orator, remain in the Al Khalifa torture chambers. Since their arrests in the early hours of Monday 26th January, the towns and villages of Bahrain have erupted in civil resistance, with daily protests, tyre-burning, slogan writings on the walls and active civil disobedience. The human cost is increasing. Many youth have been injured by the Death Squads, run and managed by the royal court, or arrested by the foreign-staffed security service. Since he usurped power following the death of his father in 1999, Sheikh Hamad has adopted new forms of treatment of Bahrainis who venture out to oppose his despotic rule. Youth are tortured publicly in

front of others in most cases. Those who "must be arrested" receive their torture inside purpose-built dungeons with sophisticated means of physical and psychological torture. In the process, limbs are amputated, eyes injured and bodies mutilated. In the course of his rule, Sheikh Hamad has directed public resources to ensure the silence of international human rights and media bodies. First class travel and accommodation have become the main "perks" to those who are ready to sell their conscience to the Al Khalifa tyranny. Several Members of Parliament and the House of Lords are beneficiaries of Bahrain's public money. Some of them have registered these freebies in the Register of Interest. Some active officers at major human rights bodies and media houses have also benefited from this "generosity". This may explain partly why there is reluctance to expose the Al Khalifa crimes by those in "active service" in political or human rights worlds. The public reaction to the arrests and abuse of Bahrainis has been enormous. Mothers would join their sons in civil resistance. Towns and villages have become the main domains of activism while the regime has tightened its grip on its media, partly financed by public money. It is only appropriate to mention that Sheikh Hamad and his clique never accepted the term "public money". The people of Bahrain have no part in ownership of the country's resources. Oil revenues go directly to the ruler who then decides how much to give to the treasury. One of Sheikh Hamad's sons now receive a sizeable portion of the Abu Sa'afa revenue in a recent deal with the Saudis. On the Saudi side, one of the sons of Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, receives a similar share. This explains partly the reason why the ruler has recently refused to attend the

extraordinary summit which was held in Qatar. The Saudi request to boycott the summit could not be refused. This blatant corruption has led to feelings among the majority of Bahrainis that their wealth is being usurped by a clan that had occupied their land by force and continues to resist calls for real reforms. Sheikh Hamad and his sons have become the main culprits in an empire of corruption, repressing any opposition and channelling part of the confiscated wealth on buying off outside influential bodies.

This may explain, in part, the ferocity of the opposition to Sheikh Hamad's policies. The people of Bahrain now feel that they have been betrayed. They were led to believe that they were heading for "a constitutional monarchy unrivalled by any other". What they have experienced over the past decade is an absolute monarchy that has extended its influence beyond any reasonable limits. The total domination by the Al Khalifa over the political and economic concerns, coupled with the institutionalised discrimination and the political naturalisation programme have transformed Bahrain into one of the most dictatorships in the world. It was not surprising that the Economist Democracy Index would classify the regime in Bahrain among the "authoritarian" systems, giving it the rank of 130 down the Index which starts with No 1 for the best performing democracy and 160 for the worst. The people of Bahrain have now decided to take action to change this state of affairs, and are ready to pay the cost needed to realise the ambition of turning their country into a transparent political entity that practices democracy, justice and respect of human rights. The arrest of some members of the leadership could not deter them, but has provided stronger impetus to achieve real reforms that go beyond propaganda or superficiality. The next few weeks could see real escalation of hostilities between the people of Bahrain and the hereditary dictatorship of the Al Khalifa. The friends of this corrupt clan are well-advised to take actions to curtail Sheikh Hamad's excesses now that he has failed to gain the love or respect of Bahrainis. Failing to undertake serious steps in this direction will undoubtedly lead to bleaker future not only for Bahrain but for the whole situation in the Gulf region.



## Popular uprising as Ocampo office contacted

The crackdown against the freedom of speech by the Al Khalifa ruling family has enraged almost all sectors of society, except its formidable allies. The extent of outrage especially after the illegal arrest of Mr Hassan Mushaime', the Secretary General of Haq Movement (the Movement for Democracy and Human Rights) and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, has been expressed in different ways. The spontaneous explosion of public anger has led to country-wide protests that are gathering momentum. From North to South and East to West, the towns and villages are witnessing riots and protests unseen since the early days of the popular uprising in 1994. Last night, for example, Duraz was the scene of persistent clashes between Bahrainis and foreign-staffed riot police. For three hours, the youth had waged running battles with the heavily-armed mercenaries, many of whom could not speak the local language. Bani Jamra, Sanabis, Daih, Al Dair, Al Malikiyah, Sitra, Karzakkan and other villages have continued their daily protests against the Al Khalifa repression. The walls in many areas have been painted with anti-regime slogans. Members of the Death Squads, run by the royal court are busy painting over those slogans, or hunting the youth who are taking courageous moves against the Al Khalifa establishment.

Some western expatriates have packed their luggage and left the country, fearing a bleak future. Financial institutions are reported to be extremely concerned by the upturn of events and some have already taken steps to cut down on their workforce. Some of the Al Khalifa traditional allies are reported to be "unhappy" about the turn of events and are cool in their dynamism in support of the regime, preferring a "wait-and-see" approach. Those who have been deceived by Sheikh Hamad's "programme of reforms" are now showing signs of regret and despair as the policies or repression return to the forefront. Some are bracing themselves for brave initiatives including defecting to the opposition. The next few weeks will be crucial in determining the future of the country as the public mood becomes more intent on achieving real change, not superficial promises and meaningless gestures.

Meanwhile the events of the past few days are creating their own momentum, forcing the "silent" quarters to take more active roles. The senior scholars have broken their silence and issued a statement (signed six of the most senior of them) calling on the regime to release the political prisoners with immediate effect. The statement has tilted the balance against the Al Khalifa, perhaps, decisively. The Ulama (Scholars) Council

has also issued a similar statement as everyone attempts to tune in with the public mood that is becoming more militant and uncompromising. A Western diplomat in Manama, in a meeting with a group of activists, said that the ruling family has played it wrong this time and could be made to pay high price for that. The ruling family has also suffered a serious setback with the failure of their move to block the electronic websites in advance of the crackdown. The people who have been logging onto these websites



(especially Bahrainonline.org) has exceeded any previous record. It is estimated that some of these sites have registered more than 100,000 hits each day, making them far ahead of all the official media put together.

The international political and human rights bodies have also reacted positively in support of the people of Bahrain's struggle. Several statements have been issued, especially as the news that Mr Mushaime's health was deteriorating as a result of mistreatment reportedly ordered by Sheikh Hamad himself. Attempts are now being made to contact the office of Luis Moreno-Ocampo, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) with the intention of reporting some senior members of the Al Khalifa to the ICC for what is perceived as war crimes being committed against the people of Bahrain. Similar steps are taken to communicate with the office of the UN Secretary General.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
29<sup>th</sup> January 2009

## Unlawful arrest of three opposition figures

Three prominent figures of the opposition have been arrested in the early hours of this morning. At around 3.00 am (12.00) scores of police vehicles and special armoured cars driven by the Death Squads surrounded the houses of Mr Hassan Mushaime' the Secretary General of Haq Movement, Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, a prominent religious figure and public orator and Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, a University Lecturer. The main doors of their houses were smashed as their families were deep asleep. Women were attacked, and children terrorized in these pre-dawn raids that have become symbols of state terror in the island of Bahrain.

The three had been targeted by the ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, who has transformed his rule into one of the most ruthless regimes in the Middle East. Since he came to power on what appeared to be a "reform ticket" following the death of his father in March 1999, the country has sunk into deeper troubles. At least four Bahrainis have been killed by members of the Death Squads, organized and managed by the minister of the royal court, Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa; Mohammad Juma Al Shakhouri, Mahdi Abdul Rahman, Abbas Al Shakhouri and Ali Jassim. Many young Bahrainis have been arrested and at least sixty political prisoners are languishing in jails for taking part in pro-democracy demonstrations, or expressing non-conforming views.

The arrest of the three notable figures is a serious development that could throw the country into deeper political turmoil. In December, the ruling family announced that it had "uncovered" a plot to overthrow the regime. This was given as excuse for

the arrest of 14 young Bahrainis. They were subjected to severe torture that led their lawyers to demand an independent investigation into their well-being behind bars. The request was turned down by the authorities. Some of the youth were then paraded on TV screens to "confess their crimes" in a stage-managed play that had been poorly presented. The aim was to implicate senior figures who had refused to be silenced by the threats issued by the ruling family that alleges that the "plot" was a result of the "incitement" by some members of the opposition including the three persons arrested this morning.

Bahrain has finally descended into chaos. The situation is on the brink of an all-out rebellion against the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship that has failed to reform the political system. The self-styled king rules by a tailor-made constitution that has been rejected by the majority of the Bahrainis. The country is undergoing a serious demographic transformation, engineered by the ruling family to alter the historical religious and ethnic balance. In the past two weeks, many websites have been banned and all providers have been warned not to provide proxies to those websites. This was a prelude to the forthcoming arrests and crackdown against Bahrainis.

The people of Bahrain appeal to the outside world to intervene to protect them from the wrath from the Al Khalifa who have wreaked political, human and environmental havoc on the country. The three leaders must be released immediately and unconditionally.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
26<sup>th</sup> January 2009



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## Senior human rights activist interrogated for calling for change

The political crisis in Bahrain is taking new dimensions as the situation becomes more polarised between the people and the Al Khalifa rulers. As the number of political prisoners increases, the spectre of more serious encounters between the two sides becomes more probable, especially as the news of severe torture on detainees become widespread. Moreover, the frustration among the people has led to a new generation of Bahrainis who express openly their hope that the Al Khalifa rule would come to an end. On Tuesday night (5<sup>th</sup> January), Mr Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, a leading human rights activist in Bahrain, delivered a speech to a large crowd in the capital, Manama in which he called for fundamental political changes in the country including the removal of the present regime which had become more despotic, reactionary and corrupt. On Thursday, he was interrogated by Al Khalifa agents who fabricated charges against him alleging that he had incited violence and called for using force to remove the dictatorial hereditary regime. He refused to answer their question, insisting that he would continue his calls for peaceful political change to prevent the country slipping into anarchy and violence. He had been targeted by the regime for the past three years for his human rights activities but he has refused to back down in his calls for reforms.

The situation is becoming more volatile as the news from behind bars speak of serious violations of human rights. As the number of political prisoners accumulate, there is a disturbing pattern of torture that aims at breaking the will of the brave men and women who insist on resisting dictatorship, despotism and corruption. It has now been established that the latest group of Bahrainis who had been taken hostage by the ruling family have been subjected to various forms of maltreatment. Their daily ordeals often start with swearing and humiliation to undermine their psychological steadfastness. Then they are made to remain standing blindfolded for hours, with their hands in chains and their feet in shackles. Among the widely used method of torture is the deprivation of sleep and denying them the use of toilets or bathrooms. Many of the political prisoners have been hanged from the ceiling for hours. They are subjected to regular beating on all parts of the body especially the sensitive parts. Among the most common method of torture is the insertion of (in what is called the chicken position in which a wooden pole is inserted behind the two knees and the two chained hands and raising the body between two desks or chairs. The victims are left in this position for hours while

the torturers take turns to beat the victims on their bodies. Some of them have been held in incommunicado detention for long periods. Electric shocks have also been used against the detainees while blindfolded and shackled. The electric shocks are often directed at armpits, the lower part of the back and the men's genitals.

As the repression policies take hold in the country, the ruling family has taken many steps to criminalise civil activities that do not conform to its policies. Last week, three young men (aged 19 and 20 years) who had been in jail since 16<sup>th</sup> December had their detention extended for another two weeks for "writing graffiti" on the walls. The Bahraini youth have, in recent years, resorted to writing their slogans and demands on the walls as the media are totally nationalised and directed by officials at the royal court.

The three were accused of writing slogans and sticking posters on the walls in their neighbourhood of Ras Rumman in Manama. The posters had the pictures of the martyrs who had been killed by the death squads run by the royal court.

The public fury is deepening as the ruling family started targeting the places of worship of the majority Shia Muslims, and attempting to scrutinize the imams and prayer leaders such as Hassan Mushaime. He has now officially been "banned" in the same way the Apartheid regime of South Africa had imposed banning orders on anti-Apartheid activists. Mr Mushaime is now officially "banned", i.e. he cannot lead prayers or deliver lectures.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
11<sup>th</sup> January 2009

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## More repression and aggression against Bahrainis

The minister of information, Mai bin Mohammad Al Khalifa, has asked the internet providers and the telecommunication companies to abide by "the decision to prevent access to websites" whose names had been mentioned in the Banning List. This list contains the names of the sites that do not conform to the rules and regulations of the ruling family. This is the first executive decision from the minister and aims at "stop all the classical means of access to the banned sites, including the proxy services provided by other services. This blatant decision comes at the backdrop of increased activity by the people against the continued domination, corruption and despotism of the ruling family. Human rights activists, especially those in the field of freedom of expression, have expressed their disgust at the decision and called on the government of Bahrain to refrain from these heinous acts. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights has called for the amendment of the Press Law of 2002 so that it conforms to the international standards.

Meanwhile the wave of arrests is gathering momentum following a relative lull in the confrontations between the ruling family and the people of Bahrain. In the past few days several houses were raided, their doors smashed and inhabitants terrorised. In the early hours of Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January, members of the Death Squads attacked the house of Sayyed Shubbar Sayyed Hussain near Jidhafs, looking for his son, Sayyed Ali, 30. The doors were smashed and the occupants of the house were subjected to horrific ordeal at the hands of the aggressors. The young Bahraini man was arrested and led away in handcuffs. Later in the day, a child of 15 years of age from the village of Daih was arrested. Hussain Ali Juma was led away from the second home of the family at Hamad Town. Sayyed Jaffar Sayyed Majid Sayyed Isa Al marzooq was arrested

from his workplace and led away by the Death Squads to an unknown destination. The 22 years old Bahraini is married with no children and lives at Al Zahra City. The Al Khalifa aggression against Bahrainis also targeted the house of Ali Abdul Hadi Mushaime, who was arrested in an aggressive by members of the Death Squads with their faces covered.

Meanwhile, Sajida Ali bin Ahmad Al jidhafs, was summoned by the secret security service, to visit the torture centre at Al Khamis police station, where Saeed Al Eskafi had been tortured to death in 1995. This Bahraini young lady had been attacked last year by members of the Death Squads while walking in the road. She was told not to tell anyone about her ordeal. She is being targeted in revenge for her father's continued opposition to the hereditary dictatorship.

The encirclement of the Al Sadiq Mosque in Manama has become a symbol of state aggression against the largest community in the country. It has confirmed what the UN Committee Against Religious Discrimination has accused the Al Khalifa regime of committing against the people. Mr Hassan Mushaime' has become a "banned" citizen, in the same way as the defunct Apartheid regime in South Africa had done against black activists. Other Bahraini activists are being subjected to nightmarish attacks by the regime's media, supported by the Death Squads operated by the royal court. The banning of prayers at the Al Sadiq Mosque has infuriated the people who have now realised that their existence and identity are under serious threat from the ruler occupiers.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
20<sup>th</sup> January 2009

# Authorities Wage Offensive and Derogatory Measures Against Shia Citizens

## ***Hindering Religious Practices, and Stigmatization of Shia in Friday Sermons and TV-broadcasted Preaching***

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) is gravely alarmed to the escalation of the local Authorities in waging offensive measures against Shia citizens, especially during the month of Muharram, a holy and mourning month for Shia. The measures were not exhaustive to:

### **Stigmatization**

#### **using media and Friday sermons:**

On that Friday when heavily armed Special Forces besieged Al-Sadeq Shia Mosque in the Capital Manama preventing its Shia prayers from coming closer to its proximity, Jasim Al-Saeedi, a Salafi MP in Friday Prayer sermon publicly denounced Shia of Bahrain being "Zionist, monkeys, pegs, and stooges to world Zionist Movement".

In prayer' sermon of Friday January 2, 2009 (The fifth out of tenth day of the Hijri Month of Muharram commemorated by Shia), Al-Seedi stated that: "*We should not lose sight of the sons of Zion, apes and pigs, as described by the Prophet peace be upon him. The sons of Zion, in different tongues, forms and sects, profaned Muslims with killings, destruction and burning their homes. The people of Zion are in Palestine, in Iraq and in Bahrain. We must be aware that Zion not only Jewish but takes many forms; a Christian, a Jew, a Zoroastrian, a hooded Sikh, a Safavid, or a Rafiqi (A derogatory term for the Shia)*".

Jasim Al-Saeedi's name was mentioned in what was locally dubbed "Al-Bandergate", a secret organization managed and financed by the Royal Court, having executive programs aiming at disfranchising Shia, marginalizing them in all aspect of life, coordinating the political naturalization to convert them into minority citizen by 2010, suppressing and controlling their religious centers and societal organizations, as well as introducing sectarian sedition and fomenting segregation between Shia and Sunni citizens. Without being prosecuted or silenced in any way, Jassim Al-Saeedi has been famed in publically attacking Shia beliefs and figures and inciting Authorities against activists and dissidents. Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the Bahrain only Prime Minister since 1970, once visited Al-Saidi's house few months back and stated that "*Whoever with Al-Saidi, he is with us, and whoever likes him, he likes us*", giving indications of moral support to Al-Saidi's acts and stances.

After his fomenting sermon, there was popular row and resentment to what Al-Saidi said when stigmatized the majority of citizens using abusive terms, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (MOJIA)

first stated, Al-Saidi will be stopped from group prayer and publically addressing people in sermons. At the end of the same week, another statement from MOJIA officials assured that the stoppage of Al-Saidi is temporary and that they would investigate the matter.

### **Deployment of Special Forces to hinder religious practices:**

For two weeks in a row on Friday (2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> January), Al-Sadeq Shia mosque in Manama -the Capital- was besieged by heavy armed forces to prevent the mosque from being opened for prayers to perform evening prayer. More over, the Authorities said that their act was to prevent Mr Hasan Mushaima, Secretary General of Movement of Civil Liberties and Democracy from leading the prayer and addressing the public. It is expected that the presence of the foreign forces in the region of the mosque and preventing Shia from prayer will lead to physical clashes and confrontations.

During the first ten days of the holy Muharram, preventing Shia from prayer and remove black fabric pasted on walls of village as sign of sadness and grieve. This also includes detaching portraits of Shia figures with their slogans commemorating Imam Husain. These incidents occurred at Hamad town and Shia villages of Karzakan, Dair and Al-Musalla,

### **Ridiculing Shia beliefs and history in State-sponsored public forums:**

It is well known to the Authorities that the first ten days of Muharram, Shia in Bahrain, and the rest of the world, are holy days during which they mourn the martyrdom of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, who was killed in a brutal massacre in Karbala of Iraq over 1350 years ago. During this period, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (MOJIA) sponsored what it called the "Fifth Da'awa (Call) Forum in the Love of Prophet Family and His Companions, in which ten Wahabis and Salafis were hosted to speak on the official Bahrain TV Satellite Channel. During their public talk and specially that on the ninth of Muharram (was shown on 5<sup>th</sup> and repeated early morning of 6<sup>th</sup> January 2009), representing utmost sad moment for Shia citizens, the MOJIA guests speakers were ridiculing Shia beliefs, books, writers and historians, considering it blasphemous and undermining Imam Husain and what Shia think of him.

### **Prosecuting Shia for having Matams in their homes.**

Shia are well known for dedicating part of their houses to hold public veneration, locally dubbed as Matams. This tradition is more customary in areas where Shia do not have or are banned from having an official Matam like Hamad Town. This

practice has been socially accepted and respected, even in areas of mixed sects of Islam. During the holy month of Muharram this year and unlike the previous years, some of Shia residents in Hamad Town, received sermons to attend police stations and were threatened of prosecution if their Matam is not closed.

### **Inciting hatred against Shia religious centers**

On the eve of Monday of last December 28<sup>th</sup>, the National Security Agency (NSA) showed a pre-recorded TV show on "Bahrain Satellite Channel" in which a group of Shia youth, who were house arrested over a week ago, were casting "confessions" of being involved in a "Terror Cell". The NSA held dawn arrests on some activists and then alleged uncovering the group aiming at carrying out some terror acts, as per the agency. Among the confession statements, which was also posted on the next morning newspapers, that "Shia mosques and Matams are hubs for terrorism".

BCHR learned from the lawyers, after visiting the detainees, that those youth not only were subjected to torture and ill-treatment which include electrocution in their gentiles to coerce them to confession, they were not aware of the camera recording and the fact that they were on TV. The NSA deceived them by asking them to repeat the confessions obtained under torture in front of a "Shiekh" to arrange for a pardon. The detainees agreed, to end their agony and torture, without knowing that they were, individually, filmed while being dictated what to say.

### **Comments and posture:**

The BCHR rings the bell of warning to the measures pursued and encouraged by the local Authorities in antagonizing Shia, provoking others against them while suppressing their religious freedom. The BCHR calls for:

- 1) End the defamatory and derogatory campaign against Shia, and prosecute those involved in it.
- 2) Treat Shia equally well as other citizens and stop hindering their practices and suppressing their religious freedom.
- 3) Cease all forms of discrimination and marginalization against Shia. This will include removal of all practices and introduction of legislative protection.
- 4) Stop executing "Al-Bandergate" plot aiming at minoritizing Shia by importing tens of thousands of nationalities and granting them Bahraini nationalities. This involves removing the repercussions of the plot and publicly prosecuting those involved.