

BAHRAIN

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

Opposition must remain vigilant, principled and determined

The opposition groups in Bahrain, and indeed in most countries, have now realised the futility of dependence on outside powers, especially the Western ones. The past few years, the "War on Terror" has transformed the geo-political alliances in a complicated fashion and has apparently, once again, convinced those powers that maintaining the status quo is preferable to unpredictable outcomes of regime changes especially in the Middle East. The new political dialectics go like this. The roles are played alternately by both the United States and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis would exercise influence through funding extremist and terrorist groups who would, ostensibly, target the US. Washington would then react furiously and threaten the Saudis with isolation and political changes unless they stopped funding the terrorist groups. The Saudis would not budge until the Americans have given undertakings to the effect that they would not get involved in domestic affairs of the kingdom. The Saudis would continue supporting the extremist ideologies but with extra manipulation of their aims and directions.

Al Qa'ida was formed in the eighties jointly by the CIA, Pakistan SIS and the Saudi intelligence. It was directed against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan until they were forced out in 1989. The US realised the dangers associated with the armed groups who were then called the "Arab Afghans" and moved swiftly to evict them from Afghanistan. The government of Burhanuddin Rabbani came under intense pressure to expel those unfortunate veterans of the Afghan conflict. The leadership of the Al Qa'ida then determined to target the US. The Saudis have never been dissociated from these terror networks, in the same way as they are entangled in the web of religious fanaticism linked to the Wahhabi school of thought. Following the Iraqi war in 2003, the apparent rift between Washington and Riyadh was soon overcome by re-directing the Al Qa'ida from being a fundamentalist anti-Western organisation to become one of the worst sectarian organisation that has ever existed. The fallouts of this ideological transformation have repelled throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds. Today, the situation has been so polarised on sectarian fault lines that disastrous outcomes cannot be excluded anywhere and anytime.

Where does the political opposition in the

Arab and Muslim world stand in this midst? The "War on Terror" stagnated soon after it started when it became evident that the among the most effective ways to contain it would be to force the Arab regimes to change their political systems and make way to political openness and democratisation.

The Saudis became so furious at the prospect of being forced to reform their antiquated political system that they could not disguise their anger and rift with the US. While President Bush flouted the idea of democratisation through several initiatives such as the Greater Middle East, the creation of a viable democratic regime in Iraq and the open calls to those regimes to adopt political reforms, the Saudis had already gone their own way to ensure the failure of the Iraqi political experiment. Towards the end of President Bush's presidency, it became clear that the US-initiated democratisation process was running out of steam. While many people welcomed his departure from the White House and the election of Barack Obama to replace him, it soon became clear that the new US administration would not be inclined towards the democratic project. Today, Washington is more interested in establishing a new balance of powers in the world, based on the status quo with less political hostilities, ambiguities, uncertainties or big political "adventures" associated with democratisation.

The political opposition in the Arab and Muslim world has thus completed a full circle in its quest to achieve some political reforms in their countries. They now find themselves confronting a stiffer international political system that is more inclined to the maintenance of the status quo rather than change. The success of the Maoists revolutionaries in Nepal was probably the last major political change that would be allowed to take place without intervention from the West to stop it. The world watched passively as the Tamil movement was mercilessly crushed. While the crisis in Darfur appears to contradict this assertion, International concern is not to save the Darfurians, but to get more oil, political and religious concessions from the regime of Al Bashir. The same is true about Yemen where President Ali Abdulla Saleh has been

propped up by the West as he is considered to be an ally in the "War on Terror". The Huthis, who are fighting to gain a fair share of the government and the country's wealth are left to be crushed by the ruler. The Saudis have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of Ali Abdullah Saleh and encouraged to crush the Huthis who are loathed for being Shia. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood movement is being persecuted at an unprecedented scale. Scores of its members are arrested on daily basis for their membership of the movement. No tears are shed by the Western leaders who are joyous to received Hosni Mubarak as "an ally" in the War on Terror.

In light of this reality what should the opposition movements do? Should they abandon their struggle and leave their tyrants to continue their heinous crimes? Or should they steadfast and remain solid on their ground, continue to combat the aggressors and pursue their legitimate goals of gaining their full rights? It is unlikely that an oppressed people would be enticed into giving up their struggle. It is also unlikely that the rulers would give up their positions without a fight. The Western intervention has not been sought by the pro-democracy movements, neither their logistical or political support. The real patriots and freedom-loving individuals or groups will, undoubtedly, carry on their struggle even at high human and material cost. History has taught us that no tyrant has remained forever and that dictatorships often crumble under the pressure of the brave men and women who stay their grounds.

This is also true in regards to Bahrain. The Al Khalifa rulers, who have occupied the land for the past two centuries are unlikely to survive the popular onslaught against their tyranny, dictatorship and human rights abuses. Representatives of the people have always felt victorious with clear minds, conscience and sense of purpose. Bahrainis will gain the upper hand in their struggle against the Al Khalifa black tyranny as their determination is second to none. The hope is that they will further their cause to include ridding the country of the rotten and antiquated regime of the Al Khalifa. They are a menace to Bahrain, a threat to human decency and an affront to human values and rights.

New wave of protests herald an autumn of fury

The protests that took place yesterday to demand the immediate and unconditional release of the prisoners of conscience has marked the beginning of a new season of civil resistance campaign against the Al Khalifa rulers. Yesterday, the activists went out in force near the Karzakkan roundabout, burnt some tyres and reminded the regime that the people have not forgotten their prisoners who are languishing in the Al Khalifa torture chambers. Many people marked the Eid Day visiting the graves of the Bahraini martyrs, their families and the families of the political detainees. During the holy month of Ramadhan several protests were held to demand their release in various parts of the country. The youth of Karzakkan, staged several demonstrations over the past two weeks. They were attacked by the foreign-staffed riot police, and several battles between the two sides ensued. Molotov cocktail bottles were hurled against the aggressors on several occasions as the enmity between the people of Bahrain and the ruling Al Khalifa became deeper. Some protests were held at night. The riot police attacked the villages at night as they searched for the peaceful protesters. The village of Malikiya was attacked by the mercenaries twice in Ramadhan who used tear gas, rubber bullets and sound bombs. One of the attacks lasted 45 minutes. The youth had earlier

written political slogans on the walls of the village. The aggressors used disproportional force, firing into the houses as they targeted the village in vengeance. The village was attacked twice during Ramadhan. On another level the attack by a member of the ruling family against an elected member of the local councils has created an atmosphere of fear among the Bahrainis. At the beginning September, Hamad bin Salman Al Khalifa, a military officer carried out a horrific attack on Fadhel Abbas, the elected members of Manama Council. Mr Abbas had parked his car behind the car of one of his colleagues at the ministry of municipalities and was on his way for an official meeting. Suddenly Hamad Al Khalifa attacked him, beating and wearing at him. As Mr Abbas made his way inside the ministry building, he was again attacked by the same person. Despite raising the case with the minister, no action was taken against the officer who, being a member of the ruling family, is immune from prosecution. The rule of law does not apply to members of the Al Khalifa. The elected member was left to lick his wounds and pride and forget his rights.

Today, a young Bahraini has been jailed for six months for taking part in a peaceful protest. Mr Hussain Ahmad, 26, from the town of Ma'amir, has been targeted for calling for democracy and respect of hu-

man rights. This barbaric ruling is yet another example of the arbitrary use of the Law not protect the people but to be a tool in the Al Khalifa war against the people of Bahrain. The sentence may be a prelude to the much-anticipated verdict by the ruling family on the plight of around 30 Bahrainis, some of whom are falsely accused of killing a foreign policeman who had died six months before he was attacked. The others were accused of confiscating a gun from a police care during one of the demonstrations last December. In neither of the cases did the Al Khalifa present credible evidence.

Last week another young man passed away after suffering a stroke in his head. He suffered partial paralysis five days earlier. An operation was carried out on him two days before his death. He has recently received a direct hit by a rubber bullet to the head which may have contributed to the fatal stroke. Ahmad was an active, healthy and happy young Bahraini who could not keep silent at what was being inflicted on his people by the Al Khalifa occupiers. He was destined to die. As usual, no inquiry would ever be held to investigate the conditions surrounding his illness, despite the affirmation by many that healthy young men do not just drop dead.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
23rd September 2009

Protest by the unemployed amid fears of harsh treatment of hostages

As the economic situation becomes more pressing, the Bahraini unemployed are, once again, taking action to highlight their plight in a country that, if properly ruled and managed, could ensure decent jobs to everyone. The Committee for the Unemployed Graduates is holding a peaceful picket on Sunday 6th September outside the Ministry of Education at Isa Town. The organisers hope that this action may help to focus the attention on their plight. Many graduates have been seeking jobs for long times, extending to several years, while the ruling family imports foreigners to take up the available jobs. Its main motives are both political and sectarian. It is part of its policy to force the natives, under the pressure of unemployment and lack of housing, out of the country. This, the Al Khalifa hope, would help to change the natural demographic balance in Bahrain.

Meanwhile the plight of 30 political prisoners is causing concern among their families, the human rights activists and the public. Most of them have been languishing in Al Khalifa torture chambers for almost two years for protesting peacefully against the tyranny and oppression of the ruling family. Some of them are facing serious charges including killing one of the foreign mercenaries in clashes during a demonstration in December

2007. Others are accused of taking a gun from one of the police cars in the same period. In neither case could the ruling family prove its case. In the case of the dead mercenary, the defence lawyers had obtained irrefutable documentary evidence that he had died seven months before the alleged incident, including a death certificate from the hospital. As for the gun, the ruling family has failed to produce the gun. It could not retrieve it, neither could it get confessions from the Bahrainis that they had it. These baseless charges will still be used against the victims as the judiciary is in the hands of the ruling family. The prosecution and judges are controlled by them and their verdicts and evidence are provided by the oppressive regime. It is expected that harsh sentences will be issued possibly including execution. The Al Khalifa will then enter into a bargaining exercise to change the verdict in return for concessions from the opposition. This is among the worst human rights violations as the life and death of citizens are subject to political bargaining.

Meanwhile, several groups have joined their efforts to try to save the Bahrainis who are being held hostage by the Al Khalifa under trumpeted charges. They include Haq Movement, the Wafaa National Trend, Bahrain Freedom Movement and others. They will hold several activities in support of the hostages for one week from 7-13th October.

Among these hostages is Hassan Salman who is accused of publishing the names of torturers working with the ministry of the interior. He has been targeted for harsh revenge as the regime's spies and torturers are exposed to the public.

The situation has been made more grim by the insistence of the ruling family to persecute Mohammad Al Masqati, for his human rights activities. He is accused of defending human rights without the agreement of the ruling family. This has caused an outrage within the international human rights bodies who reject the nationalisations of such activities by the Al Khalifa.

This case comes against the backdrop of the arrest of Mr Nabil Rajab, the President of Bahrain Human Rights Centre for supporting a Bahraini family as it protested the continued detention of Abdul Rahim Al Merbati by the Saudi government. The protest took place two weeks ago outside the Saudi Embassy in Manama. The protesters were arrested by the police, taken to the police station and warned against participating in any future protest against the Saudis.

A new group against the political naturalisation has been launched on Facebook, under the title "No to Political Naturalisation in Bahrain". The address is: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=54988688264>

Bahrain struggles to honor the dead while serving (or Ignoring?) the living

September 18, 2009

By MICHAEL SLACKMAN

MANAMA, Bahrain — There is a great clash of values taking place here, as it has throughout a region where fabulous oil wealth and the intoxicating influence of globalization have often overwhelmed heritage and tradition.

The question confronting this small archipelago kingdom in the Persian Gulf is this: Can Bahrain protect the heaviest concentration of graves dating from the Bronze Age found anywhere in the world and still meet the contemporary needs of its people? Can it preserve its past while accommodating its present?

"People are demanding housing, they want development," said Al-Sayed Abdullah Ala'ali, a member of Parliament. "They want everything relevant to their lives today."

In just a few decades petrodollars and modernity have whipsawed Arab states in the Persian Gulf, elevating living standards while eroding practices that have defined identity for generations. Fishing and pearl diving have been replaced by petrochemicals and financial services. English has challenged Arabic as the language of business. Traditional crafts have become novelties. What little architecture of the past existed has often been bulldozed to make way for the glass and steel skylines of the present.

"It is a struggle between old and new, between cultural identity and recent developments that confront it, between authenticity and modernity," said Ahmad Deyain, a writer and publisher from a regional neighbor, Kuwait.

Bahrain is a collection of 36 islands in the Persian Gulf, though most of its 730,000 residents live clustered around the capital, Manama. Half a century ago, there were tens of thousands of burial mounds that linked Bahrain's citizens to the islands' ancient past. The graves rolled out under a baking hot sun, most about the height of a car, covered in small jagged slate-gray stones. Bahrainis commonly say there were as many as 300,000. Karim Hendili, a Unesco adviser to the culture minister, said the number was closer to 85,000.

He said that at most there were about 6,000 left in 35 burial fields. That is a figure everyone seems to agree on. And those remaining sites, he said, "are under severe, severe threat." Built by inhabitants of the island from about 2,500 B.C. to A.D. 500, they offer a window into what Mr. Hendili called "a lost civilization of the Bronze Age." Bahrain is believed to have been the capital of Dilmun, which lay along a trade route linking the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia.

Most of the graves contain a death chamber shaped like a boot on its side. The body was placed in the fetal position while personal items, ceramic pots, personal seals and knives were stored in the

toe. The value of the graves is not, necessarily, in what they contain but in what they tell about the lives, values and funerary practices of an ancient civilization. "There is a saying here: 'You cannot give priority to the dead. You must give housing to the living,'" said Mr. Hendili, who calls the graves "burial ensembles of Dilmun and Tylos," which was Bahrain's old name. Bahrain gained independence from Britain in 1971. Soon after, the price of oil spiked during the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. Bahrain's oil reserves were small compared to its neighbors', but provided fuel for rapid development. However, the leaders chose not to use that wealth to define Bahrain, to mark its place and people as distinct in time and history, experts here said. Islamic history was taught in schools, for example, but little of Bahrain's own ancient history was taught.

"There is a value that can't be touched," said Hassan Hujairi, 27, a local blogger who traveled to Japan to earn a graduate degree in regional economics and economic his-

tory. "It has to do with our identity, our heritage. If we lose these things, we'd just be like any other place."

The minister of culture and information, Mai Bint Mohammed al-Khalifa, has been the driving force behind trying to preserve and promote Bahrain's past. She was instrumental in the first World Heritage designation in Bahrain and is working with Mr. Hendili to try to have 11 of the 35 remaining burial fields listed as a World Heritage site, too. (*For her Bahrain's past is that that had preceded Islam. The 1200 years after Islam is sidelined and erased because it is linked to the Shia Muslims*)

But with graves she confronts not only the existential push and pull of building versus preservation, but also the challenge of vested interests. In essence, it boils down to this: Bahrain's most disenfranchised have been asked to bear most of the burden of preservation, local officials said, because the rich and connected have often been allowed to build on their lands.

Even those who support preservation acknowledge that it has made it hard to convince lower-income communities of the value of such graves when they see, right next door, the houses of the rich and connected rise where graves once stood.

"The problem is, it's a game of interest," said Yousif al-Bouri, president of the Northern Municipal Council, a body that represents more than 30 villages. "There are all these signs that say 'You cannot do this, you cannot do that,' and all of a sudden the signs are taken down and the mounds are taken out. These were government lands given to connected people who sold them."

Mr. Bouri represents the village of Bouri, about 10 miles from the capital. Directly across a modern highway is another village, A'ali. Both are majority Shiite villages and both are bordered by large fields of graves that remain untouched.


There are much larger grave sites in A'ali, too, called Royal Tombs, mountains of sand and rock often taller than the two- and three-story cinder-block homes people live in. It appears that all of the Royal Tombs have been looted, turned to trash heaps years ago. The village has grown up around them. "The village of A'ali is a unique place in the world where you have the interaction of contemporary life and funerary elements from the Bronze Age," Mr. Hendili said. But, he added, "Their protection now is not guaranteed."

The issue of the graves adds to the perception among Shiites that they are second-class citizens, discriminated against by the ruling Sunni elite. "They say it's historic, and that we can't remove them. But in other places, where there are people with power, they can remove them," said Abbas Hamid Ali, 32, who lives next to one of the Royal Tombs. "If we remove them, we can make space for cars," said his neighbor, Ali Hassan, 30. *Continued on Page 4*

Congressman condemns HR abuses

Thank you for contacting my office regarding human rights in Bahrain. Your correspondence is highly valuable and I appreciate your sentiments. Throughout my tenure in Congress I have been committed to fighting for human rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion around the world. Like you, I have been outraged at the political oppression and human rights violations of Bahraini citizens. The Bahraini government has demonstrated widespread harassment, detention, oppression, censorship, and torture of its citizens solely on the basis of their religion and political beliefs. The country continues to crackdown on political dissidents criticizing the government and peacefully assembling while restricting access to Internet sites discussing religious and political topics. Additionally, Bahraini women and girls face widespread domestic abuse and discrimination by their government and in the workplace. Improving protections for fundamental human rights requires bold and immediate leadership, and the U.S. must work with other nations to take the important steps necessary to halt the deterioration of human rights in Bahrain. Again, thank you for your opinion and letter. I am most appreciative. Should you have additional comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. My door is always open.

Sincerely,



MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Elected or not, Bahrainis are victimised

15 September 2009

The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights is highly concerned for the assault by a military officer, Brigadier-General Shiekh Hamad Bin Salman AlKhalifa, who is a member of the ruling family, against Fadhel Abbass (Mr.), an elected member of the Manama Municipal Council who represent the largest political group in the country, Al-Wefaq . The attack took place at 11 am on September 2, 2009 at the entrance of Ministry of Municipalities following an argument on a minor issue which was the place where Fadhel Abbass parked his car. The attack was repeated few minutes later at the office of the Minister of Municipalities. One hour after the attack, Fadhel Abbass submitted a complaint to the police. The complaint could be referred to the military court, procedures of which are not public and which is unlikely to take any action against the assaulter.

A week later, when the incident was reported in a local semi-official newspaper, the Prime Minister, who is also a member of the ruling family, asked the Minister of Municipalities to make reconciliation between the two parties. Fadhel Abbass and the Al-Wafaq society, to which he belongs, have been calling only for a public apology by the military officer. Fadhel Abbass expressed fears of retaliation and has already been threaten by the military officer to take action against him and his family.

Worth noting that it is not unusual that members of the ruling family commit abuses against other citizens, without being held accountable for their deeds. On Sunday 2nd March 2008, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Transportation hit with his car a young worker near the ministry building. The worker was standing to direct drivers not to pass through because of road constructions. The undersecretary hit the worker with his car and continued his way through, while many people were watching. The worker was injured in the right leg and was taken to hospital by an ambulance. A member of BCHR advice the victim to press charges against the undersecretary but the young man was reluctant knowing the influence of the undersecretary who is a member of the ruling family. On an "advice" by an employee at the same ministry, the young worker went to the police and canceled the case.

As for Al-Wefaq society, it is not an isolated incident against its members. Although it is supported by 62% of total votes in the last 2006 election, the society was subjected to harassments and defamation campaigns by semi official media. On 30th march 2004, the organization was threatened publicly by the Minister of Labor and social affairs to be closed down if they continue with their campaign calling for constitutional reforms. In April 2004, members of the society were arrested for

collecting signature on a petition related to the same issue.

On 21st May 2004, the two main spiritual leaders of Al-Wefaq society and many of its senior members were among hundreds of people who were physically attacked when the Special Police Force suddenly attacked an authorized peaceful demonstration. The king took advantage of the incident to assign a new minister of interior in replacement for the former sick minister and advised the victims to complaint to the court. No investigation was conducted in the incident, and members of Al-Wefaq Society who complained to court lost their cases . To date, no answer has been given for why the demonstration was attacked and the whey the prominent religious and political figures were assaulted and humiliated, leaving a sore feeling of oppression and humiliation. On 6th October 2005, the society reluctantly decided to re register itself in accordance with the restrictive low on Political societies avoiding its closure, the decision lead to a split in the organization.

In 2006 the society decided to end its boycott to the election despite their continued disagreement to the amendments to the constitution and election system declared by the new King, hoping for gradual reforms. However, in the council which was manipulated by the ruling family, Al-Wefaq was marginalized as



Honouring the dead not the living, *Cont from Page 3*

Mr. Hendili and the culture minister, Ms. Khalifa, have some support in the vil-lages. But it may just be that the confluence of interests — the rich who want to sell their land, and the poor who need to build on their land — may be the force that prevails, some experts said. Those in favor of preservation say the government's strategy appears to be to do nothing, and hope that the problem will just go away.

"The government has turned a blind eye to this because of personal interests," said Mr. Ala'ali, the member of Parliament. But that, he said, misses the much larger point, that the conflict should never have been defined as either-or.

Preservation and advancement are, in fact, dependent on each other, he said. "Anyone who has no past," he said, "has no future."

Mona el-Naggar, The New York Times

minority despite that they are the largest block in the elected council. Furthermore, defamation and threats against the society top leaders continued. Loyal members of the Royal court, such as Shaikh Al-Saedi occasionally attacked the society spiritual leaders using the press and mosque prayers. During 2008, two representatives of the society were threatened by the Minister of Interior, who is a member of the ruling family, to be imprisoned after delivering critical interventions at a UN conference on discrimination in Geneva and at press conference on sectarian discrimination at the US Congress in Washington.

The government used to put pressure on Al-Wefaq society to use its religious and political influence to suppress other shia' groups, by blaming the society for any unrest in the Shia' areas or any activities that does not comply with the restrictive laws.

The Bahrain center for Human rights calls for:

1. Implementing the rule of just law rather than the rule of tribal system, where members of the Ruling family abuse their unjust privileges and enjoy impunity
2. An independent and neutral investigation in the physical assault against Fadhel Abbass making the results public, bringing the perpetrator to a affair trial and redressing the victim
3. Amending the political system; in text, institutions and practices to reflect the well of the people by implanting the equal right of citizens to elect their representatives in a fair election and real democratic system where checks and balance are maintained.
4. Securing freedom of association and the ability for political groups to operate freely without restrictions or intimidation as this is a main pillar of a real democracy.

As stipulated in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

- The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Finally, as stated in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law"