

BAHRAIN

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The way forward begins when Al Khalifs reign of terror ends

As the time approaches for the election of the powerless shura council, the ruling family is waging yet another campaign of deception and misinformation to justify its policies and present the regime as democratic and progressive. However, it has now become clear that the election experiment has remained on the periphery of the political life. The past four years have polarized the political reality into two distinctive camps; the ruling family which is increasingly becoming anti-people, especially the natives the majority of whom are Shia Muslims. The two camps have adopted two diverging approaches, lifestyles, discourse and political agendas that would lead only to one result; the total and comprehensive divorce between the two camps. Unlike his predecessors, Sheikh Hamad, the present ruler, has become a symbol of everything the Bahrainis hate; dictatorship, building personality cult, employing iron-fist policy against the opposition and imposing an ugly sectarian Apartheid regime. The experience of those who had taken part in earlier elections to choose half the members of the shura council, has not been encouraging at all. Their anticipation that they would be able to introduce political reforms from within has proved to be a pure fantasy.

So what has gone wrong? And what are the consequences of participating in an illegitimate political experiment devoid of either constitutional or public legitimacy?

The living conditions of the people have deteriorated rapidly, with public debts rising to record levels as consumerism replaced productivity and competition to live beyond the personal means of the individual became fashionable. What has made the living conditions of the citizens more depressing is the rising cost of land and housing ownership. Few years ago every citizen would dream of owning a home once he or she started work. Today, this ownership has become far-fetched as the ruling family grabbed the land and made it easier for her wealthy allies from other Gulf countries to own land in Bahrain.

Sectarianism has been promoted as official policy by the Al Khalifa. The ruler installed the most notorious sectarian official in the country as his chief lieutenant in charge of his royal court. Khalid bin Ahmad al Khalifa who is the minister of the royal court has sponsored sectarianism at every level of the society and sowed the seeds of dis-

cord among the citizens of the land. He is hated by both the Shia and Sunni patriots who see him as the source of the sectarian evil in Bahrain. This evil man has his own lieutenants even in the half elected shura council. Senior Shia jurisprudents have been attacked openly by Jassim Al Saeedi, who is shielded by the Al Khalifa. He repeatedly attacked Shia Muslims who are the natives of Bahrain, as he feared no retribution for his stands and policies.

The participation by some individuals in the political project of hate and discrimination imposed by the ruler, has turned them into tools of the oppressive regime. Some of them have even been utilized to give false witness to outside bodies that Bahrain did not suffer sectarianism, torture or political oppression.

The political naturalization process has claimed newer and more destructive proportions. Thousands of foreigners have been granted Bahraini citizenship in the past four years, thus further threatening the fabrics of the Bahraini society. Those who had participated in the political project of sheikh Hamad have achieved nothing, and some of whom has been recruited to work against his own people in return for some material and political privileges. Dictatorships have never been honest with the people they dominate; and their interests have always been mutually exclusive with those of the people.

The experience has clearly led to a clear split within what was once a unified opposition. There are now two distinct identities; those who have joined the Al Khalifa political project on the belief that they would be able to "changer from within", and those who have opted out and declared their clear intention of bringing down that destructive project. These are serious people who have challenged bravely the hereditary dictatorship and are determined to bring a bout a change in the way the country is being held ransom by the Al Khalifa occupation.

The political experiment of the past few years has encouraged the rulers to adoption of torture against the pro-democracy activists. Hundreds of Bahrainis have been subjected to ill-treatment in detention and during street protests. The ruling family has failed to bring even of those torturers to justice. They continued to deny the use of torture by their hench-

men. However, international bodies have repeatedly condemned the Al Khalifa for torturing Bahrainis. Human Rights Watch's report "Torture Redux" published earlier this year has provided detailed testimonies by victims of torture. Other reports by international bodies are expected to emerge in the next few months. These are damning testimonies that have embarrassed the allies of the regime.

The Bahraini opposition has, over the past few years, succeeded in directing the attention of the world to the atrocities committed by the Al Khalifa occupiers who are increasingly becoming more brutal and lawless. The opposition has succeeded in maintaining the pressure on the regime with dailly protests, consistent discourse and political agenda, ability to withstand the regime's pressures, intimidation and threats and mobilizing a wide section of the society to take a stand in the struggle for freedom and liberty.

The way forward, from the viewpoint of the opposition could only be made through clear vision, focused direction and clarity of purpose. The next few months will be crucial, as all attempts will be made to prevent the imposition of more draconian laws by the occupiers on the natives through the half-elected shura council that has been moulded in a way that makes it capable to issue any law demanded by the Al Khalifa without much resistance. The Al Khalifa are seeking to legitimize their occupation through what appear to be "democratic tools" but are devoid of the necessary elements of democracy. Elections on their own do not constitute democracy, especially if the bodies whose members are elected are powerless, ineffective and marginalized. There is a slow movement forward on the path to modern statehood based on the free choice of the natives, their real partnership in government and their commitment to the rights and choices of the people. The Al Khalifa occupiers will remain marginalized, hated by the natives and insecure in the land they had occupied. No solution is anticipated before the occupiers give up their claim to own the land, the people and the wealth. Occupiers must be resisted, and that the source of legitimacy of the opposition and civil resistance movement.

Crown Prince's secret war to consolidate the Sectarian Apartheid

In a serious escalation, Bahrain's Crown Prince (C) has championed the attack on the native Shia of Bahrain, directed the sectarian campaign being waged by the Embassy in Washington and London and dedicated abundant material resources to carry this campaign forward. In his recent visits to the United States, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad has continued his campaign of hatred against the majority of the natives during his meetings with American officials, Congressmen and think tanks intellectuals. The document that was distributed among the guests to the Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC) reception meeting at Bahrain Embassy in Washington, highlights the depth of the anti-Shia campaign undertaken by Huda Nunu, the Al Khalifa Ambassador to Washington, under the direction of the CP. The two-pages document is a wholesale outright attack on the Shia Muslims with accusations that they are foreigners, financed by Iran and seeking to impose a foreign agenda on the country. The document was distributed by one of the officials at the embassy, Khalid Al Jalahma, while the ambassador claimed to her guests that some of the victims of torture had "tortured themselves". To date the ruling family has failed to present one case of self-inflicted wounds, contrary to the claims by Nunu. In continuation of the anti-Shia Muslim policies, the Al Khalifa occupiers have

refused to allow the building of a mosque and cultural centre by the family of the late Hajj Hassan Al Aali, despite the approval by the various committees of the Municipality councils. Both the royal court and the prime minister's offices have taken close interest in the project and are adamant on refusing it. They have viewed it from purely sectarian angle arguing that Shia Muslim natives must not have prominent cultural or religious presence in the capital, especially the Diplomatic Area where the project would have been located. The Al Khalifa occupiers have suggested a remote area off Budayya for the proposed cultural centre, at a much reduced size.

Meanwhile the political unrest has continued unabated. On Friday 11th June, hundreds of the citizens staged a demonstration near the Duraz roundabout to demand the immediate release of the political prisoners. The demonstrators called for an immediate halt by the riot police and Death Squads of the use of banned weapons against unarmed civilians. Women also took part in this charged protest which ended shortly before sunset. At the same time the people of Karzakkan went on protest near the round of Buri Town to call for the release of their children whose royal "pardon" has been revoked by the ruler. Al the 19 of them have been ordered to serve three years for allegedly taking part in the killing of a foreign mer-

cenary. Earlier this year they were acquitted of the any wrongdoing. Since then they testified to Human Rights Watch (HRW) about the horrific torture they had endured during their detention. These testimonies have angered the Al Khalifa occupiers who rushed to order their re-arrest in revenge for the damning report by HRW. In another serious human rights violation, three Bahrainis have been sentenced to three years imprisonment, for allegedly burning a gas cylinder during a protes. Yesterday, the High Court issued the decision decreed by the royal court against Majid Hussain Sulail and Hassan Abdul Amir Radhi.

In another development, the review of the case of Hassan Salman, who had been convicted of exposing the names of torturers, has been adjourned until 7th November. All evidence point to his innocence, and the Al Khalifa occupiers have decided to delay the review in order to avoid embarrassment of early release. All the procedures employed in the case have been proven to be illegal by the lawyers. First, there is no legal evidence that the alleged information leaked by the victim ought to remain secret. Second there was no legal order to allow the monitoring of the victim. He was subjected by the torture apparatus run by the former ambassador to UK, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, illegally.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
14th June 2010

Anti-Israel protests call for an end of naturalization with Zionists

The people of Bahrain responded angrily to the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla last week. In addition to the articles, sermons at Friday prayers and statements, the people participated in marches against the Israeli aggression. On Friday, thousands of Bahrainis took part in processions in various parts of the country, especially the one that started from the Duraz roundabout, and was headed by religious scholars and political figures. The ruling family was furious at the public expression of anger against the Zionist state, fearing a backlash from the Israeli advisors at the ministry of the interior, some of whom have passports of European countries. There have been strong calls for an immediate halt to the normalization of relations between the ruling family and the Zionist officials, and the activation of the Boycott Office that was closed down three years ago by a decree from the ruler.

The Bahraini natives have always made comparisons between the ruling Al Khalifa regime and the occupiers of Palestine. In recent weeks, the ruling family has increased its hostility towards the expression of opinion in the open and

has sought various means to stop this. The most worrying development has been the legalization of the use of lethal weapons against peaceful demonstrators calling for an end to the dictatorship, torture and repression. Activists have now started an international campaign against the use of shotguns against people taking part in peaceful protests. They have urged the youth to highlight the plight of the victims of these weapons of their Facebook Twitter, websites and other blogs. They have always urged natives to send news to the international news organizations to shed light on the plight of the natives who are being dominated by naturalized foreigners who have been granted Bahraini IDs and Passports by royal decrees. The various bodies created by the ruling family to enhance its reputation have become either dormant or mouthpieces of the repressive regime. Those who have refused to be exploited to serve the hereditary dictatorship have been severely and unjustly persecuted.

Meanwhile, the Americans friends of Bahraini natives have organized a protest at the gates of the Al Khalifa embassy in Washington. On Friday 4th June, scores of Bahrainis and their friends picketed the embas-

sy as it received guests to a reception organized for the Anti Discrimination Committee, a US-based body whose aim is to combat discrimination. Officials of this body have been informed that holding their reception at the Al Khalifa embassy had given the wrong impression to others. The US Foreign Ministry has repeatedly recorded anti-Shia Muslim discrimination by the ruling Al Khalifa family as a routine policy and urged the regime to change its policies. Upon learning the extent of discrimination, the ADC officials expressed regret at their decision to attend the function at the Al Khalifa embassy as it would give the wrong impression about the aims and nature of their organization. It is illogical to combat discrimination, on religious or racial grounds, using the tools of those who exercise discrimination as a systematic policy. The guests of the reception have been informed of the extent of human rights abuses in Bahrain, and the whole meeting became a focal point for debating the political, human and cultural crisis in the small enclave of Bahrain that is gradually threatening to become a regional crisis.

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Use of lead-based buck shots to inflict pain and seize protestors

Dear Mr. Nowak,
(*Special Rapporteur on Torture*)

The Human Rights Bureau of the Movement of Civil Liberties and Democracy, expresses its grave concerns about the recent excessive use of lead-based buck shots (BS) by members of the Bahraini Special Forces (SF) against any person thought to be involved in public protests. The rampant attitude was accompanied by official directions to private and governmental hospitals to deny medical treatment to any BS victim, without the permission of the security authorities. This has compelled many victims, whether participant in a protest or not, except in severe cases, to evade professional treatment in hospitals, as they are usually detained and later accused of rioting and illegal gathering. It is the belief that the excessive use of the live ammunition (Buck shots) was for the apparent purpose of quelling daily protests, mostly in villages, calling for rights and social justice as well as to induce corporal punishment to protestors if not leading, eventually, to their seizure and detention.

Buck shots are considered lethal as the size, range of fire and material of the pellets are selected to ensure they reach the target with enough energy to penetrate to a depth sufficient to kill the game[1] (Game is any animal hunted for food or not normally domesticated. Game animals are also hunted for sport[2]). Due to environmental restriction, buck shot pellets made of lead[3] are restricted and non-toxic shots are used.

In Bahrain, the use of live ammunition (lead-based buck shots) was used during the protests in the nineties and resulted in numerous casualties and injuries. Injured civilians donot report to hospitals then as this would be a proof of their involvement in protests and cause their detention and prosecutin under the then State security law and courts. The use of the buck shots by Bahraini forces to suppress protestors resurrected again in March 2009[4], when it was used against four children in Sanabis village, allegedly participating in a protest, inflicting them with injuries in different parts of their bodies. After hospitalization, medical doctors decided to leave 23 splinters in the body of one of the boys, as their removal will endanger his life[5]. After a distinguished media coverage of the issue, the use of the buck shots subsided until it resurfaced in November 2009, when it was used against a youngster (High School boy) in Dair village[6]. He was partially treated in a house, and was later arrested with the treating medic and detained for few weeks, before being released, on charges of rioting and illegal gathering[7]. Since then and due to the increasing level of protests in villages, it has been customary for Bahraini Special Forces (Composed of foreign mercenar-

ies) to heavily use buck shots to quell and suppress protestors.

We would like to take the opportunity of the 44th meeting of the Committee against Torture (CAT) scheduled from 26 April to 14 May 2010 to file four allegations of torture due to use of buck shots and excessive use of law enforcement (rubber bullets) as well as clear corporal punishment and denial of treatment for the following: (See attached documents):

1- Husain Ali Al-Sahlawi, from Al-Sehla village, who was shot by buck shots on March 14, 2010.

2- Ali Ebrahim Al-Jufairy, from Al-Jufair village, who was shot by rubber bullets on March 28, 2010.

3- Abdalla Hasan Abdalla, from Malikeyya village, who was injured by buck shots on April 13, 2010.

4- Sadeq Ali Al-Motawa, from Malikeyya village, who was injured by buck shots on April 13, 2010.

We express concerns about what appears to be signs of the Authorities frustrations and failure to contain the almost daily protesting event in Bahrain. The use, and excessive use, of buck shots as well as rubber bullets, as law enforcement means is yielding more casualties and increasing more resentment and anger among people. Such sentiment will lead to a wider scale protest and unrest as well as fuel violence and counter violence in the relationship between the Authorities and the people of Bahrain, specially the villagers. Moreover, the widespread use of buck shots to include even those who are not involved in any form of protests, deny their treatment in hospitals and later seize them and incarcerate them are serious measures which require immediate attention and intervention of the international community. We therefore, seek your assistance in the following:

1- Communicating with the Bahraini Authorities urging the Government to:

a. Stop using buck shots and other harmful law enforcement means against protestors to inflict punishment and later deny treatment to those injured, causing them indirect torture.

b. Ensure the physical and mental integrity of the four persons mentioned above. This includes providing them with full professional treatment to ensure their well being.

c. Immediately release the above individuals without any reprisals or any form of incrimination.

2- Considering the State of Bahrain on the Special Rapporteur on Torture list of visits bearing in mind the numerous complaints and allegations of systematic torture (Refer to latest Human Rights Report about: Torture Redux- The Revival of Physical Coercion during Interrogations in Bahrain[8])

3- Reminding the Authorities of its commitment to the CAT as well as the consequences of failing to meet its conclusions and recommendations for Bahrain on last periodic CAT report, which was in 2005 [9].

Thank you and look forward to the UN initiatives and effective means to ensure that the Bahrain Government ceases the use of torture measures against protestors, which involve the use of live ammunition (Buck shots). Please donot hesitate to approach for further information.

Kind Regards

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A demonstration outside Bahrain's Embassy in Washington on 4th June against torture, political naturalisation and lack of democracy i

Bahrain Faces Uncertain Future

By Robert Bailey, 27 May 2010

Bahrain is often portrayed as an oasis of stability and moderation in a volatile area. Long established as a regional financial centre. Promoters have successfully branded the island as a place for business placing it on the international conference circuit and exhibition centre long before others in the region.

In the last decade, Bahrain has sought to accelerate development and enhance its credentials as a reliable location for modern commerce and a five-star destination hosting Formula One and recently an international air show. An index of economic freedom published annually by the Wall Street Journal and US Heritage Foundation, ranks the island as the 16th freest world economy out of 179 countries and the leading one in the GCC.

However, Bahrain's economy remains stubbornly dependent on a small number of key areas particularly on its financial and downstream hydrocarbons sectors. More than 60 per cent of Bahrain's export earnings come from refined products and the bulk of its crude supplies are dependent on the goodwill of Saudi Arabia.

When new refinery capacity comes on stream elsewhere in the Gulf over the next few years, much more competition will follow. Others too are seeking to establish themselves as regional banking centres. The need for Bahrain's economy to diversify has never been more apparent. Since it is marginal oil producer, Bahrain has never had the opportunity to hoard petrodollars to compensate for oil price troughs. As a result, unlike the rest of the GCC, Bahrain relies heavily on accessing debt markets, both from a corporate and sovereign perspective.

This means that Bahrain has the most fragile fiscal position of all the GCC states, and regularly has to issue sovereign bonds to try and plug any fiscal deficits. The implicit support that the island continues to enjoy from Saudi Arabia has up to now been seen to compensate for Bahrain's relatively low foreign exchange reserve in the minds of global market analysts. In the in the aftermath of the Dubai saga the quality of such implicit support assumptions is now subject to serious review, according to a report in January published by Royal Bank of Scotland Group.

Costs of international debt issuance are dependent on perception of risk and that continues to be linked to Dubai's problems and other regional concerns. The challenges for Bahrain are compounded by the government efforts to push forward further economic reforms.

Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa, who chairs the Economic Development Board, is at the forefront of these efforts to liberalise the economy. His desire to accelerate ideas nurtured during his tuition in public administration at the American University in Washington are

not met with universal approval by more conservative elements.

In 2008, an open letter to King Hamad from his son the Crown Prince Sheikh Salan bin Hamad al-Khalifah was published in the local press stressing the country's reform programme. The move was interpreted as the start of a process to wrest control of economic policy making from Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa. The latter has served as Bahrain's only Prime Minister since the country's independence in 1971. The pursuit of change to make the economy more diverse and competitive has raised alarm that the result will be a growing disparity in wealth between the kingdom's business elite and the rest of the population.

Underlying tensions resulted in serious street disturbances in the mid 1990s resulting in long term detention for hundreds alleged of dissidents. Economic inequalities are exacerbated by perceptions held by the Shia population of sectarian discrimination.

There is said to be widespread belief among Shia Bahrainis that the government is fast tracking citizenship applications for Sunni expatriates in order to alter the country's demographic balance.

The job market is not expanding fast enough and still favours imported "indentured" labour from the Indian sub-continent even though a monthly levy is imposed on each expatriate employee by the government.

Unemployment is rising 6 per cent year on year and over the last few months, a sharp increase in layoffs across several industries has resulted in demonstrations by the unemployed and labour strikes have become a regular occurrence.

Suggestions that the government is considering moves towards a more targeted food and fuel subsidy system have also occasioned protests. Much of the protest is also fuelled by a lack of affordable accommodation.

Nearly 50,000 local citizens are reportedly waiting for a house to be allocated to them by the government. According to regulations those earning less than BD900 a month are entitled to be provided with accommodation under the country's constitution but most have been waiting decades. Some are eligible for low-cost loans or a free plot, though plots have to be developed within ten years.

There is evidence that the government intends to make some progress and has issued a request for proposals to three locally led consortiums for the construction of 5,000 homes to include "social housing" and "affordable homes." The strategy aims to develop a model for public-private partnerships for the construction of low-cost housing. Pilot schemes are planned to take place in three locations, Al-Buhari east Riffa area and on a slice of reclaimed known as North Bahrain Newtown andat Al Luzil. It is anticipated that the land will be given as a grant to the winning consortium and state guarantees given to bank finance for the schemes.

The government urgently needs to demonstrate results unless simmering discontent explodes. The traditional consultative type

of public participation adopted by Bahrain is under severe pressure and compounded by a lack of confidence in the kingdom's parliamentary system.

The elected National Assembly (Majlis Al Nawab) is vested with little real power and can be outvoted by the Majlis Al Shura whose members are appointed directly by the King. As a result, observers expect turnout to be low during elections for the National Assembly at the end of 2010. In any event only political societies rather than parties can exist. Bahrain has about 15 such societies, the largest of which is al-Wafaq, the National Islamic Society with 17 out of 40 seats in the assembly.

Even with the levers of power resting firmly in the hands of the ruling family the governing elite is highly sensitive to criticism particularly when Al-Wafaq, the largest opposition group in parliament, calling for greater participation and a "real" constitutional monarchy.

The authorities in Bahrain recently banned Al-Jazeera television from operating in the kingdom. According to the Ministry of Culture and Information the measure was in response to "violations of professional norms and the Qastari-owned channel's failure to abide by the laws and rules that regulate press and publishing.

Earlier this year the British ambassador Jamie Bowden was also heavily criticised and accused of interfering in Bahraini politics after he met members of al-Wafaq.

The growing sensitivity may be a sign of an internal discussion within the ruling family about the pace of economic and social reform in the Kingdom. However, when foreign media and diplomats are hauled over the coals it perhaps an indication that discussion is also leading to discord and that Bahrain is struggling to decide a way ahead.

Global Arab Network

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Anti-Israel protest

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The ongoing strife in the country has continued unabated in the past two weeks. The youth of Sitra, Al Dair and Karzakkan have continued their struggle against the Al Khalifa dictatorship demanding an immediate end to the ordeal of those who have been taken hostages by the regime on the backdrop of allegations that they had participated in a an anti-Al Khalifa demonstration that led to the violence against the security forces. These moves are intended to cover up the international outcry against the regime for using banned weapons and tools of repression as they sought to cripple the popular movement and end the strife. The demonstrators raised their demands for freedom and democracy and urged the international community to make a stand against this unique form of despotism.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
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