

# BAHRAIN

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

## Alkhalifa elections dealt fatal blow; people seize political initiative

The long awaited decision by the Bahraini political opposition to boycott the show elections has shocked the ruling clan and placed its entire political programme in disarray. Its exercise in public relations has stalled and the people have become more resolute in their demands and determination to end the era of Alkhalifa tribal rule. In the past few years the participation in the regime's political programmes has led to internal friction and gave the impression of internal feuding. That has now been ended and the political horizon looks brighter than it has ever been. The current commemorations of Ashura have entrenched the political polarisation as the people turned the occasion into a political platform to vent their anger and revolutionary zeal against the two century old tribal regime. The regime continued to use force against peaceful protests and detain human rights activists as well as the demonstrators and protesters. The regime's judiciary has also sent scores of Bahrainis to the torture dungeons for participating in anti-regime activities.

The detention of Nabeel Rajab upon his return from Europe led to angry reactions from the human rights world which has been incensed by the audacity of the Alkhalifa. More anger has also been vented on the British Government which is now widely seen as the main supporter and defender of the regime. Nabeel was detained for one of his tweets that accused the security and defence establishment of becoming incubators of ISIS. Several employees of these two bodies have travelled to Syria and participated in the terrorist activities of the extremist groups. Tweeting anti-regime slogans, sentiments and criticism has become a criminal offence. In fact most Bahraini prisoners are languishing behind bars for their anti-Alkhalifa attitudes and activities. Mr Rajab has been a vocal element in the human rights circles and gained his fame from his principled anti-repression stands. While in Europe he persistently exposed the crimes of the regime against Bahraini natives, attacked the political naturalisation process, called for bringing to justice those accused of torturing Bahrainis and promoted civil resistance to the regime's persistent repressive policies. He

has also been vocal in his opposition to the vast powers in the hands of the dictator who has become the most repressive ruler. One of his sons has been denied diplomatic immunity by the UK's High Court in a case involving allegation against him relating to torture. Nabeel Rajab's detention has thus added element of urgency to the Bahraini situation which is fast becoming a British issue.

David Cameron's government has granted these dictators blanket immunity and would not question their criminal records. Neither will it seek to end the absolute dictatorial rule of this regime. This British support has emboldened the Alkhalifa to continue their oppression. It is clear that they re-assured of unfaltering British protection whatever they did. When the political societies decided to boycott the show elections the UK led the way to produce a document against the boycott. They went further by telling those societies of political fallouts of their decision. These include refusal by London to meet with them. They also hinted that repression would increase. In the past four years the UK Government has not condemned any of Alkhalifa crimes. Bahrain's dictator saw this as an encouragement to pursue his policies of repression, torture, destruction of mosques and violating the rights of people. It is unfortunate that democracy is sacrificed cheaply by those who have always claimed to raise the banner of democracy and opposed dictatorship and human rights violations. Their support of Gulf regimes which have created, financed and armed extremist groups is immoral, suicidal and politically incorrect. It must not be continued any longer.

The regime has meanwhile has intensified its crimes against Bahraini natives. In addition to revoking citizenship of natives, it has systematically targeted human rights activists. In addition to Nabeel Rajab, Zainab Al Khawaja was arrested while on trial for an earlier trumpeted charge of attacking a police officer. She was eight months pregnant and there are fears that she may lose her baby behind bars. Another human rights defender, Nader Abdul Emam, was also arrested for allegedly tweeting a criticism of a military leader in early days of Islam. Yet the attacks on

native scholars, especially the most prominent religious figure, Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassim, have continued unabated. None of those who have abused the respected religious leaders of the majority natives has been charged or brought to account for these crimes which threaten the social order and harmony. In the past two weeks the regime's Death Squads have raided tens of houses as part of their intimidation of the natives with the intention of inducing fear in the hearts and minds of those peaceful original inhabitants. The religious symbols of those natives have been defaced. Many of the banners and flags that are usually prepared for commemoration of Muharram have been attacked, removed or destroyed. There is deeply-held conviction that the Shia Muslim natives which form more than 70 percent of the population are now subjected to eradication from the home of their fathers.

Despite those criminal acts by a lawless regime, the end is certain. Dictatorship will go and UK will not be able to prevent the downfall of the ageing antiquated system. The struggle of the people that has continued for almost four years has become entrenched in their memories and psyche. New field leaders have emerged from the ruins of homes, bereaved families and targeted political and human rights activists. To them the eventual end is certain; people's victory and collapse of the hereditary dictatorship. For the dictator and his family and supporters, the repression remains the only way to stop the pro-democracy movement. The regional developments such as the advance of the Houthis in Yemen and the gradual eradication of extremism and terrorism are worrying developments. The Saudi regional influence is waning while the people of Arabia and elsewhere have awoken to distasteful reality that must be challenged. The political movement has a forward trend and cannot be retarded by dictators using heavy-handed policies of repression, torture, collective punishment or genocidal policies. Dictators go, but the people who struggle for their legitimate rights always prevail. Bahrainis cannot be defeated by a regime proven by its own investigation commission to be involved in "systematic torture".

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## Alkhalif freeze AlWefaq, order deportation of natives

On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October, Bahrain's dictator issued an order to freeze the activities of Al Wefaq Society for deciding to boycott the regime's hollow elections intended to deceive the world of non-existent political reforms. The Bahrainis insist on political change and the ending of the antiquated tribal rule. The regime had used all means of pressure on the political societies to take part in those elections, and had threatened them with dissolution if they decided to implement their boycott. At the end those societies had to decide whether to stand with the people or legitimize the illegitimate regime, and they chose the first option. The immediate angry reaction even from Alkhalifa Western allies forced them to delay implementation of their decision against Al Wefaq.

The dictator also sent another message that he was adamant on pursuing the natives with eradication as part of his policy of genocide. Yesterday he ordered the expulsion of several families whose breadwinners had their nationality revoked by the dictator two years ago. The regime had summoned them earlier and asked them to find local sponsors to remain in the country of their great grandfathers before the bloody Alkhalifa occupation. Amnesty International has called for quashing this decision: "Arbitrarily depriving these Bahrainis of their nationality and forcing them out of Bahrain renders them 'stateless' and goes contrary to Bahrain's international obligations," said Hassiba

Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director. "They have already been effectively stripped of basic rights such as access to work, health care and education simply for holding dissenting views and deporting them just adds insult to injury." She added: "The Bahraini authorities are running out of arguments to justify repression. They are now resorting to extreme measures such as jail sentences and revoking nationality to quell dissent in the country, rather than allowing people to peacefully express their views."

In Brussels more than 30 Members of the European Parliament signed an open statement calling for the release of Nabeel Rajab: It said: "We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab — President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights, FIDH Deputy Secretary General, and member of the Human Rights Watch's Advisory Board... We believe that his arrest, interrogation and arbitrary detention in relation to an offending tweet are meant as a form of reprisal against Mr. Rajab for his recent advocacy on behalf of HR in Bahrain.

In London a charity gala at the Savoy Hotel on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> October attended by Nasser bin Hamad Alkhalifa, was picketed by victims of Alkhalifa torture. They were protesting the presence of Nasser who was stripped earlier this month of diplomatic

immunity in a legal case in which he is accused of torture. On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> The Times Newspaper gave coverage of the picket and the case against Nasser.

At least 40 native Bahrainis were arrested in the past week, including three children. This was a pre-emptive measure as the Ashura season approached. At the same time members of Death Squads raided the towns and villages of the native Bahrainis, removing the black cladding used to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. This is yet another attack on the religious rights of the people by the tribal Alkhalifa rule. On 25<sup>th</sup> October, the family home of Martyr Mohammad Yaqoob in Sitra was raided and a member of the family was summoned to go to the torture chambers. This is the second attack in few days. Several youths were arrested from the neighbourhood. The town of Duraz was also raided and several of its youths arrested. Three of them are known athletes: Sayed Ali Moosa of Al Ittifaq Football Club, Sayed Hussain Majeed Abbas and Dhiyaa Slman, a member of Bahrain's National Football Team. Zahra Al Sheikh, a mother of a six months baby was arrested as she went to visit her detained husband at one of the torture centres. She had repeatedly been detained, tortured and abused. Photojournalist, Ammar Abdul Rasool, was sentenced yesterday to two years in jail for shooting images of repression.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
28<sup>th</sup> October 2014

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## Saudis pressed to release Sheikh Nimr, Alkhalifa must free Rajab

One week after the condemning by the Saudi royal family of Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr to death for criticizing its occupation of Bahrain and calling for serious political reforms, the angry reactions have continued against this barbaric sentence. Human rights bodies have called for the sentence to be repealed while religious bodies in Eastern Province and outside Arabia have warned of serious consequences if the cleric is killed. Demonstrations have erupted in several parts of the Province and the Bahraini protesters have adopted Sheikh Al Nimr's case. In London several protests were held both outside the Saudi Embassy in Mayfair and outside Downing Street calling for the UK Government to make a stand against this sham of justice in Saudi Arabia, a close ally of UK. In a BBC interview, Nimr said he backed "the roar of the world against authorities rather than weapons". The arrest of his brother and other relatives after sentencing has fuelled anger that is being ventilated on Twitter and other social media. "Saudi Arabia's harsh treatment of a prominent Shia cleric is only adding to existing sectarian discord and unrest," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Saudi Arabia's path to stability in the eastern province lies in ending systematic discrimination against Shia citizens, not in death

sentences." Amnesty International described Nimr's sentencing as part of a wider Saudi government crackdown on dissent.

At the home front, Ali Essa Al Safi has been sentenced to three years imprisonment for taking part in anti-regime peaceful protest. His father, was shot dead at a peaceful protest in 1995. In the past few days the Alkhalifa rulers have reacted angrily to the decision by the Bahraini people to boycott their elections resorting to their policy of revenge. More than 25 native Bahrainis were detained in the past few days at the torture dungeons. In the early hours of this morning many houses in Sitra were raided in vicious ways. These attacks continued for four hours creating fear and cries among their inhabitants. Four youths were snatched from their beds; two from Iskan Mhazza and two from Markoban. Among the houses raided was that of the family of Martyr Mohammad Yaqoob. It sustained ferocious attack and its contents were destroyed. The Martyr's brother, Khalil, has been asked to hand himself to the torturers. Among those detained in those raids is Karim Al Stiri. Two days ago, Adnan Habib, 22, from Hamad Town, was snatched from his home by members of the regime's Death Squads. Nothing has been heard of him since.

On Monday 20th October, Habib Ahmed Salman, Hussain AlOwainati, Ahmed Abdul

Ameer and Fadhel Abbas AlQattan were sentenced to six months imprisonment. An under-aged boy, Mahmood Naji, 15, was sentenced to 3 years on charges of illegal gathering and arson.

On 15th October Amnesty International (AI) and leading trade unionists raised the case of the jailed president of the Bahrain Teachers Association Mahdi Abu Dheeb at the Bahrain embassy in London. AI UK's Director Kate Allen - along with Owen Tudor, Head of European Union and International Relations at the TUC, Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT, and Patrick Roach, Deputy General Secretary of NASUWT met with Alkhalifa ambassador and called for releasing Mr Abu Dheeb who is serving a five-year jail sentence. Among other things, Abu Dheeb was accused of using his position to call for a strike by teachers, of halting the educational process, and of "inciting hatred of the regime" and "attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force".

On 19th October Human Rights First expressed deep concern at a Bahraini court's decision to continue the imprisonment of prominent human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, whose trial opened today and was quickly adjourned until October 29.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
22nd October 2014

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## Saudis decide to kill Scholar, Opposition to boycott elections & Spyware

The Saudi ruling family has decided to kill Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr for speaking out against their absolute rule and hereditary dictatorship. Their court today confirmed the death sentence that had been passed on him last year. In 2012 Sheikh Al Nimr had openly supported the Bahraini Revolution and opposed the Saudi occupation of Bahrain. He also criticised the antiquated regime of Al Saud. The confirmation of his death sentence is likely to ignite more local and regional protests and international condemnation. The situation in Bahrain has been much polarised in the past few days following the official and final decision by the four main political societies to boycott Alkhalifa elections. On Sunday 12th October, Sheikh Ali Salman, the Secretary General of Al Wafaq Society, the largest political block, announced the decision not to take part in the proposed elections of the powerless "parliament" which had, in the past 12 years, proven to be a tool in the hands of the ruling family, rubber-stamping the decisions imposed by the regime on the people. The stage has now been set for serious political activities to end the tribal dictatorship that has ruled native Bahrainis with coercion and repression. On Monday 13th October, Privacy Inter-

national, held a Press Conference to announce that it was taking legal action against a British company that had it accuses of helping Alkhalifa regime to spy on its opponents. Adriana Edmeades, for Privacy International said the action was necessary following the confirmation of earlier reports that the Gamma Group, based in Andover, Hampshire, had supplied the regime with FinFisher spyware which was implanted in the computers of several Bahraini exiles. Last year Gamma denied that it had supplied the spyware to Bahrain, but in July new information became available on the internet. It confirmed that Bahrain's security staff and the company's technical assistants had been discussing matters relating to the operation and problems of the spyware. It provided with irrefutable evidence that Gamma had sold the spyware to Bahrain despite its initial denial. On the basis of this new information, Privacy International has decided to take the matter to the police and possibly to the courts. Meanwhile the regime has intensified its repression against native Bahrainis. Yesterday Zainab AlKhwaja was arrested again for expressing her opinion during a court session she had been asked to attend on trumpeted charges. During the session, Ms AlKhwaja (who tweets with the name

AngryArabiya) tore a picture of Bahrain's tyrant, Hamad Alkhalifa, prompting an immediate arrest and abuse. She is eight months pregnant and concern is growing for her safety and that of her unborn baby. Freedom House has ranked Bahrain among the worst in the world in terms of press freedom. Alkhalifa regime has been ranked 188 among 197 countries, almost at the bottom of the league. Many journalists are behind bars and thousands of native Bahrainis are imprisoned for expressing their political opinion and calling for fundamental political change. Meanwhile Nabeel Rajab will be tried, once again, for speaking out against the regime in peaceful way. Since his detention the human rights world has reacted angrily to his arrest and demanded his immediate release. He is accused of undermining the interior ministry by suggesting that it was grooming terrorism and extremism. A native Bahraini artist has also been arrested and is danger of persecution. Mahmood Suroor, 24, a famous painter, was snatched on Friday 10th October in a dawn raid on his father's house. Nothing has been heard of him since his arrest.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
15th October 2014

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## Prince accused of torture ignores protesters on London visit

### Bahraini opposition held a press conference in front of the Embassy of Al Khalifa in London

tions will inspire people to proceed with the revolution.

Mr. Ahmed Wadaei spoke, saying that "the regime seeks through these elections to show that situation in the country is normal," adding that the defenders are languishing in prisons and there are thousands of detainees and victims of torture.

[B]SHAFQA ( Exclusive) - [/B]Bahraini opposition held a press conference in front of the Embassy of Al Khalifa in the British capital London. The conference opened with a speech of Bahraini prominent opposition leader Dr. Saeed Shihabi, who stressed that the people decided to boycott Al Khalifa regime which one of these aspects not to participate in coming elections. The former parliamentary member Jalal Fairuz said in his speech that this council does not have the ability to bring about change in the country, as it was in the past sessions.

Fairuz added saying that (Regime Under the popular boycott , they seek to falsify the popularity through fraud election). Then, the political activist Ali Faiz delivered his speech in which he said that the regime launched a campaign of arrests against women and there are thousands of detainees in the prison and wants to hold elections in such atmosphere. He added that these elec-

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## Bahrain: The Islamic State threat within

*Bill Law, Tuesday 14 October 2014*

Bahrain is facing a dangerous moment in history as the Islamic State threat is lurking within its own security apparatus and has made direct threats to the ruling family. A recently released IS video underscores the internal threat Bahrain's ruling al-Khalifa family face from the Gulf kingdom's own security services.

On first appearance, the video is not particularly remarkable, just another in a long string of clever propaganda exercises by the Islamic State (IS). This one opens with four young jihadists striding purposefully up a desert hill, Kalashnikovs in hand. But it is the nationality of these jihadists that tells the story. They are all Bahrainis.

It was posted in late September and it shows a former Bahraini ministry of interior officer calling on other officers in the police and military to defect. Another Bahraini sitting beside the ex-officer denounces the al-Khalifas, the rulers of this troubled Gulf island kingdom.

In the wake of a popular uprising that was ruthlessly crushed in 2011, the kingdom remains bitterly divided along sectarian lines, with the Shia at odds with their Sunni masters.

A largely peaceful movement that had occupied a central roundabout in the capital Manama in February, 2011, was put down with force. Dozens were killed, thousands imprisoned, and thousands more sacked from their jobs. The vast majority were Shia. But in the eyes of the IS fanatics, the al-Khalifas are now as bad as the Shia they rule over. The video calls on Bahraini Sunnis to "defect from the al-Khalifas. They are not ruling by Sharia which means they have inserted themselves as gods next to Allah."

That is tantamount to calling the royal family "kafir", unbelievers. According to the Islamic State, the fate of kafirs is death, preferably by the sword.

The video was a response to Bahrain's decision to join the coalition against IS.

Bahrain is said to be "participating in airstrikes" but when pressed, the foreign minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa was cagey about what the Bahrainis are actually doing - as little as possible while currying favour with its western allies might be one way of putting it. Or to put it another, the Bahrainis are keeping a low profile.

And the video, too, has had a very low profile in Bahrain's largely supine local media, despite or perhaps because of the fact that it voices a direct threat to the ruling family and marks the first public acknowledgement that a serving officer in Bahrain has gone over to IS.

But that doesn't mean that the al-Khalifas are not feeling more than a little uneasy. A government source told me that "the threat is real, the issue is very serious. These are people from within the security services, from the police and the mili-

tary. We have people who want to turn Bahrain into part of the new caliphate. And they see the al-Khalifas as the enemy."

The source, who agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity, claimed that the penetration of IS ideology into Bahrain's security organisations has been made easier by an ongoing government policy to recruit Sunni police officers from Yemen, Syria, Jordan and Pakistan, many of whom the source said shared the same belief system as IS. Fast tracked to citizenship, the so-called "New Bahrainis" are paid much better than they would be in their home countries and are provided with housing ahead of locals. They are in effect mercenaries, hired to protect the interests of the royals.

And when the 2011 uprising was crushed, many of the worst police atrocities, including three beating deaths in detention, were carried out by the New Bahrainis. "They don't know our culture, some of them don't even speak Arabic and yet they are allowed to beat us, kill us, throw us in jail," a pro-democracy activist bitterly remarked to me at the time.

But mercenaries can be swayed and the source posed an intriguing question:

"What guarantees do the al-Khalifas have of protection from the police if the police are not Bahraini but Syrian, Jordanian, Yemeni? What guarantee (is there) that the police are not themselves extremists?"

When asked if the al-Khalifas were facing a direct threat, the source replied: "Everything is possible. This is the first time in the history of Bahrain that the al-Khalifas have openly been called kafirs." Now, a new layer of uncertainty has been added to an already complex and volatile situation. In the IS video, the officer is identified as Mohamed Isa al-Binali.

On 5 September, the ministry of the interior tweeted that he had been dismissed for unauthorised absences. This was nearly three months after he had gone over to the Islamic State. The authorities should not have been surprised by his defection. His cousin Turki is a senior IS cleric who last year in an article widely distributed online called on true believers to acknowledge Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of IS, as their caliph.

Another member of the tribe Ali Yousif al-Binali was killed fighting in Syria in May of this year. The al-Binalis are a large and influential family with extensive commercial holdings and close ties to the al-Khalifas.

This may explain why just last year a demonstration in front of the American embassy in the capital Manama featured a hectoring Turki al-Binali with black Islamist flags fluttering prominently behind him went unchallenged by the government and the police.

The cleric has tapped into a feeling held by many in the Sunni community that they have been betrayed by the ruling family. They believe that their support for the al-Khalifas during the 2011 uprising has gone largely unrecognised and unrewarded. They think the government in making hesitant reforms has gone easy on Shia Bahrainis.

Their frustration is evident on the streets of

Manama where IS flags are frequently seen flying from cars.

It is a measure of just how sensitive the issue is that the drivers are not stopped or otherwise challenged by the police.

Only last year, Major General Tariq al-Hassan, the country's chief of public security, tweeted an image of a bullet burnished with the extremist logo together with a quote from Islam's third caliph Omar.

The tweet was quickly taken down, but an anti-government activist who has been jailed several times and asked not to be named described the police chief as "a pragmatist [who] doesn't support IS directly but likes to appear sympathetic because a lot [of IS supporters] are members of the police and security forces. He was trying to win allies."

The activist said that the police chief has "turned a blind eye, let them [Sunni extremists] gather, leave the country, preach, produce and distribute literature."

And, indeed, in the heart of Manama, I have been told that at the al-Farouk bookstore it is still possible to purchase tracts by Turki al-Binali, who has been described as "the imam of the Islamic State." The cleric left Bahrain in the summer of 2013.

In July of this year, Major General al-Hassan did warn Bahrainis not to support terror groups and vowed "zero tolerance against violations which would endanger Bahrain's security." But this came only after a string of tweets including some from influential politicians who viewed IS victories in Iraq not as terrorism but as part of a Sunni insurgency against a repressive Shia regime.

What sets Bahrain apart are the "New Bahraini" police recruits. The government does not release figures on the number of foreign Sunni officers in the security services, but it is believed to be in the several thousands. And should their loyalties be tested by the utterances of the IS imam Turki al-Binali, it is an open question how some of these officers would respond - one reason why the al-Khalifas are treading so cautiously.

Another reason is the al-Binali tribe. They have for decades been seen as the friends and allies of the al-Khalifas. Now amongst some members of the family, that allegiance has shifted to the jihadists.

As the source said "This is a very dangerous time for Bahrain."

- Bill Law is a Sony award-winning journalist. He joined the BBC in 1995 and since 2002 has reported extensively from the Middle East. He has travelled to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia many times. In 2003 he was one of the first journalists to cover the beginnings of the insurgency that engulfed Iraq. His documentary *The Gulf: Armed & Dangerous* which aired in late 2010 anticipated the revolutions that became the Arab Spring. He then covered the uprisings in Egypt, Libya and Bahrain. He has also reported from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Before leaving the BBC in April 2014, Mr Law was the corporation's Gulf analyst. He now works as a freelance journalist focusing on the Gulf.