

BAHRAIN

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Democratic transformation is inevitable; it must be supported

What makes despots fall? Their stupidity, ignorance and arrogance. The basis of their thinking is that they have absolute powers that no power on earth can take from them. They ignore the natural laws, history lessons and basic logic. The more they are immersed in this state of total isolation from reality the less likely that they will recover or that any of their cronies will have the courage to tell them that they are simply marching to eventual oblivion. This is what happened to absolute dictators who ignored the aspirations and plight of their people; Saddam Hussain, Mo'ammr Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak and the rest of dictators. Some will point out that all these were presidents of republics not monarchs. That is wrong. History tells us that kings were overthrown by their people in many countries, including UK where King Charles was overthrown and beheaded. The Shah of Iran was an emperor. The king of Nepal was also overthrown few years ago. It is the nature of the system of government, not the name that matters. Dictatorship often relies on repression. In the Bahrain case, friendly governments in London and Washington have helped Bahrain's dictator to hide his human rights crimes through different means. Torture is now administered in farms and secret houses. Victims are severely tortured but not allowed to die. News of torture are suppressed. Victims are not allowed family visits if their torture marks are visible. Special Rapporteur on Torture is not allowed to visit the country. In Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the rulers have become so ruthless, despotic and arrogant that nothing can save them from the fate that had met their likes before them. When a large country, like Saudi Arabia stretches its muscles against much smaller neighbor whose people are hardly able to sustain their life requirement the political and natural dynamics combine to produce circumstances that lead to the downfall of their leaders. The aerial bombardment of Yemen for more than three months has shaken humanity to its core and created silent anger among millions of voiceless people around the world. These people are disgusted by the deafening silence of the World's community that has refused to stand up to its human re-

sponsibility of challenging aggression openly and bravely. The Saudis will surely face similar fate to other aggressors especially when their people are unhappy about their rule. The hundreds of billions of dollars that they have amassed over the past few years may sustain their aggression for a while, but it cannot negate the natural laws and divine powers. The Saudis are being gradually exposed as the main creator, financier and defender of terrorist groups for the past two decades. They chose terrorism as a weapon of mass destruction against the world which is now paying hefty price for its years of silence. The latest episode of the aggression on Yemen is an opportunity to catch the Saudi alliance in an act of war, aggression and countless crimes against humanity. That is the opportunity to surprise the Saudis and make them pay for their criminal activities including aggression and support of international terrorism. The world will not be a peaceful place without ending the current wave of terrorism created, financed and directed by rulers like the Al Saud and Al Khalifa.

The internal, regional and international balance of power is gradually shifting away from them and people's anger at their oppression will surely lead to momentous upheavals against their despotic rule. The present situation in the Arab world is unsustainable with dictatorship propped up by massive Saudi petrodollars, ideological re-alignment that embraces sectarianism and unprecedented levels of violence. These Saudi-inspired and financed strategies have inflicted enormous damage on the Arab and Muslim community and threatened the fabrics of the region, but can only work for a short term. There are natural correction mechanisms within the human nature and this has now started to work. The fallouts from the use of these strategies have now reached those who had planned them. Their reverberations are echoing in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Turkey is now feeling the heat three years after it helped ISIS to expand in Northern Syria and Iraq. The Saudis themselves are gradually being targeted by the groups they had helped to establish. The recent bombings in the Eastern Province of Arabia and Kuwait have served grim reminder of the

vulnerability of those countries which depend on foreign help in the fields of security. The Saudi war on Yemen could not have lasted almost four months if it was not for the British involvement in supplying guided weapons, intelligence and personnel. This is what Earl Howe, Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, confirmed last month. This has placed UK as a leading player in the intra-Arab affairs with its role in Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain.

These facts of life can have two conflicting implications; The first is that they may point to the political and military domination by the forces of counter-revolution over the affairs and future of the main Arab countries. The implication is that there is no hope for the people whose actions often lead to more misery and sacrifice. The other implication is that the regimes have become so weak that their disintegration and downfall cannot be avoided if the people are serious about their willingness for change. The people of Bahrain have shown unrestricted appetite for political change and have sacrificed greatly in material and human terms.

It is now clear that the coup against the democratic transformation demanded by the millions of Arab people who demonstrated in the streets of Tunis, Cairo and Manama in 2011 had temporarily halted the people's march to freedom and democracy. This social and political engineering will undoubtedly lead to recriminations among the people who were aspiring to freedom and democracy but were subjected to most horrific treatment. The Bahrainis have managed to guard themselves against the evils of the counter revolution forces. They defied the odds and succeeded in pursuing their most peaceful revolution that has continued for over four years. The regime continued its crackdown on the people and pursued its policy of genocide including its attempts to wipe out their history, culture and identity. That is one of the main reasons why Bahrainis insist on regime change and refuse any settlement that re-imposes Al Khalifa to their position of absolute power. The struggle will continue until total liberation is achieved.

UK admits supporting Saudis, World outraged by Alkhalifa repression

Despite initial fear and speculation about foreign support to AlSaud's offensive aggression on Yemen, UK has now confirmed that it is providing precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia to use in airstrikes against targets in Yemen, according to The Times Newspaper (17th July). In a written response to a House of Lords question, the defence minister, Earl Howe, said: "We are providing technical support, precision-guided weapons and exchanging information with the Saudi Arabian armed forces through pre-existing arrangements." He conceded that "In addition to the personnel who continue to provide support for equipment supplied, we have a small number of liaison personnel in Saudi and coalition air and maritime headquarters. This includes personnel in the Maritime Coalition Co-ordination Centre in the region, supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid into Yemen." Defence News, an online magazine said that the weapons are understood to be Paveway IV precision-guided bombs originally destined for the RAF. This is the first official admission by a Western country of involvement in the Saudi aggression on Yemen's people. Lord Howe's admission has sent shock waves and added new dimensions to the illegitimate war. Saudi Arabia, like Britain, flies Typhoon and Tornado fast jets, which carry the 500lb munitions. The Saudis have been using the weapons for strike missions against ISIS targets in Syria and against Yemeni people, Defence News reported. In the week between 13-19th July at least 29 native Bahrainis including six children were arrested by the Alkhalifa regime. More people were arrested in the past two

days. Yesterday four people were detained from the Sanabis Town; Hussain Al Sami'e, Taha Hakim AlSheikh, Murtada Adwin and Mohammad Jassim Al Awainati. A female prisoner of conscience, Taiba Darwish, has been remanded in custody for two more weeks for taking part in anti-regime protests. The release of another female political detainee, Zahra Al Sheikh and her 15 months baby only happened after she had served her full sentence of one year in jail for being involved in anti-regime protests.

As the Revolutionary groups declared preparation to mark what they call "Bahraini Hostage Day" on 24th July, many inmates at Jaw Central Prison started hunger strike to protest the deteriorating conditions in the notorious torture centre. The situation there is described as "appallingly overcrowded and unfit for human habitation".

It's the time of the year when high school students graduate and prepare to go to the universities of their choice. But for some students in Bahrain, specifically Shiites, activists and government opponents, the path that awaits them is not so bright. One of these ill-fated students is Mustafa Mohammed Ismael who is in jail instead of pursuing his dream of studying medicine. Mustafa graduated top of his class from high school with grades averaging 98.8 percent. On August 15, 2013, Mustafa, who is now 18, was walking out of his grandfather's house in Nuwaidrat when he was stopped by security patrol. He was charged with illegal gathering and initially sentenced to six months. The court of appeal later reduced the sentence to three months and released him on bail 24

days later. This year the regime has committed what is termed "scholarships massacre", denying bright students of native origin the chance to pursue their studies while granting pro-regime loyalists grants and scholarships. This is one of the most outrageous Apartheid policies of Bahrain's dictator.

The ferocious and systematic attack on freedom of speech has outraged even the supporters of the regime. The arrest of Ibrahim Sharif has deprived the dictator of any praise for the release of Nabeel Rajab. There are strong demands that all charges against him, Mr Sharif, Sheikh Ali Salman and Bahrain 13, be dropped. The United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, criticized the Bahraini "government's crackdown on three opposition figures," referring to the arrest of Wa'ad leader "Ebrahim Sharif," prosecution of the Al-Wefaq figure Majeed Milad and retrial of the leader of the opposition in Bahrain, Sheikh Ali Salman. Index on Censorship calls on King Hamad to release all the political prisoners currently serving sentences on spurious charges," Index on Censorship CEO Jodie Ginsberg said. UN experts have also called for releasing all political prisoners and dropping charges relating to freedom of expression levelled against most of them. In London 39 MPs have signed Petition 241 calling on the Government of Bahrain to allow free speech and stop persecution of people for speaking out, protesting or calling for their rights. It also calls on the UK Government to list Bahrain as a "country of concern".

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Saudis continue Qatif, Yemen killings, Crimes Against Humanity in Bahrain

On 27th July young citizen from Qatif in the Eastern Province of Arabia was cold-bloodedly shot and killed by regime forces. Mohammad Al Faraj was added to the list of victims of Saudi regime's terror campaign against activists seeking political change.

A public statement was issued on 27th July by Amnesty International calling on the Bahraini authorities to make public investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of prisoners during a riot in Jaw prison, south of the capital Manama, on 10 March and other abuses that continued for several weeks afterwards and to bring to justice any officials responsible for ordering or committing such acts. The call came after the trial of 57 individuals, including on charges of assault on public officials and destruction of public property, started on 23 July. It was postponed to 17 September. Many people were severely tortured as the regime sent Jordanian troops to attack jailed Bahrainis. The wave of arrests and detentions has continued unabated. In the week 20-26th July at least 38 people were arrested including six children. Last night four

people from Sitra-Wadyan were detained from their homes. Hussain Taqi and his brother, Sadiq, Khalil Ibrahim AlTawq and Abdulla Essa Khudayyer were snatched from their homes. They were arrested within hours after an "explosion" that killed two Pakistani mercenaries attacking native Bahrainis in the area. The circumstances of their death are not clear.

On 27th July Salah Saeed was kidnapped from Satra-Wadyan by masked members of the regime's Death Squads. Another youth, Sadiq Jaffar Al Asfoor from Sitra was detained on 21st July. Concern is rising for the safety of two native Bahrainis; Sadiq Thamer, Jaffar Sultan and Abdul Hamid Nasser who had been kidnapped by regime's Death Squads on 8th June, but their families haven't heard from them. Reports of systematic torture have continued. It is now established that the under-aged Ahmad Al Arab has been repeatedly tortured at the toilet facilities, while other private houses and farms have become the new torture centres, away from the main prisons.

On 25th July Ali Abdulla AlAradi, 50, was kidnapped from his home, tortured with

heavy tools before being drowned in the pool of a house, several miles from his town of Arad. The torture included the use of blunt instrument that split his head with deep wound. It is now almost a week but the regime has failed to catch the killers while claiming to have caught the alleged perpetrators of the Sitra explosion within hours. The general belief is that Mr AlAradi has been liquidated by regime's Death Squads to send a message to the native Bahrainis that Alkhalifa, Saudi occupiers will stop at nothing in their war on the natives.

On 24th July, The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) declared an additional eight Bahraini prisoners of conscience to be arbitrarily detained. Last week, the group of experts issued a series of official decisions on the Bahrain government's detention of Jassim al-Hulaibi, Mohamed Sudaif, Abdulaziz Mousa, Ebrahim al-Sharqi, Ahmed Abdulla Ebrahim, Taleb Ali Mohammed, and two unnamed minors.

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My husband, prisoner of conscience in Bahrain

My husband, Sheikh Ali Salman, is the Secretary General of Al-Wefaq, the largest political opposition bloc in the Kingdom of Bahrain. For peacefully critiquing our repressive government, the Higher Criminal Court recently sentenced him to four years imprisonment.

The authorities interrogated my husband for many hours before officially arresting him. He was originally summoned for questioning about "violating certain aspects of law" and was later charged with "publicly inciting hatred and insulting public institutions".

The accusations are a little ironic, because Ali is the least hate-filled person I've ever known.

Over the past three decades, Ali has worked peacefully for political, social, and economic reform in our country. Though many people now know Bahrain as the site of mass uprisings since 2011, which has seen dozens killed and thousands imprisoned, the mid to late 1990s was also a period of intense revolt on our island.

The uprising lasted from 1994 to 2000. From the beginning, Ali was an outspoken voice for reform, citing government corruption, human rights violations, and authoritarianism in his public speeches as a local politician.

After he called for the restoration of parliament, which the government had disbanded decades prior, the authorities arrested him amidst a widespread crackdown on 5 December 1994.

He was removed from the country just one month later, initially to Dubai before moving to London, and remained outside Bahrain for 7 years.

Since returning home, Ali has continued his fight for democracy in Bahrain, ultimately becoming the leader of our largest opposition movement. Under his leadership, Al-Wefaq has fought for fair distribution of voting districts, an elected government, a transparent judiciary and accountability for crimes committed by government security forces against the Bahraini people since the crackdown in 2011.

For four years, I have watched him and members of Bahrain's civil society struggle to provide people with legitimate, peaceful ways of voicing their opinions, in the face of a regime dead-set against reform and intent on punishing those who demand it. The government routinely denies Al-Wefaq's requests for peaceful assemblies and marches; more than once authorities have completely banned demonstrations for months at a time.

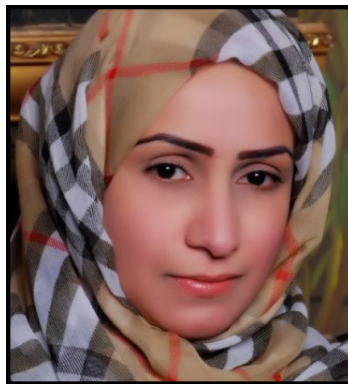
Many of our youth have become frustrated with the lack of reform, the high levels of corruption, and the continuing impunity for perpetrators of state violence. When clashes have broken out between riot police and youth in our village – a weekly and sometimes nightly occurrence in Bah-

rain – Ali would stay awake until he heard news that no youth were injured that night. If they were, he'd be with their families within hours. My husband is a Bahraini first, and a politician second.

Many news outlets have called his prosecution an "escalation" in repressive tactics used by the regime. Amnesty International called the judgment "shocking".

I understand why people would say this.

They used to call my husband a "red line" – a person so crucial to the stability of the country, so valued by its people, that even an authoritarian dictatorship would know better than to target him. But then again, we used to say the same of Nabeel Rajab, a prominent human rights defender now in prison, and Sheikh Isa Qasim, the country's foremost Shia cleric who has had his home attacked more than once.



There is no red line in Bahrain. While my husband's arrest, interrogation, detention, and unjust conviction made headlines, it is not unique. For those of us living under Bahrain's repressive government it is far from shocking.

We are witness first hand to our friends and loved ones disappearing in the night and returning home days later with torture marks on their bodies after "questioning" at the Criminal Investigations Directorate, all because they wrote a blog or walked in a peaceful march.

My husband's conviction is, of course, an attempt by the regime to silence one of its most prominent critics. But it also mirrors the persecution endured by hundreds of outspoken politicians, journalists, and human rights defenders in Bahrain.

Said Boumedouha, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty, said my husband's conviction

is "yet another clear example of Bahrain's flagrant disregard for its international obligations. Sheikh Ali Salman has been sentenced solely for peacefully expressing his opinion".

This is true. And I'm sure my husband would add: "I am but one of hundreds of other Bahrainis suffering the same punishment."

- Reema Shallan is the wife of jailed Bahraini opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman.

Iran's Nuclear Agreement welcomed as Saudis, Alkha-

The signing of the Nuclear Agreement by Iran and the 5+1 countries has been welcomed by the people of Bahrain who have always hoped for peace and stability in the region under democratic practices. The regional dictatorships such as those of Al-Saud and Alkhalifa have exploited the rift between Iran and the West to maintain iron fist policy on the people, denying them democratic and human rights. It is hoped that a new era would reign and dictatorships would gradually be eliminated from the GCC countries. While the Iranians were negotiating the nuclear deal with the six big powers, the Saudis were engaged in meaningless war on Yemen, obliterating people's existence, occupying other people's land, supporting terrorist groups, grooming extremism and exclusionism and destroying mosques, heritage sites and detaining human rights activists. The Alkhalifa are following their steps and committing severe human rights abuses.

In the early hours of this morning a young native Bahraini has been martyred at the town of El-Ekr. An explosion was heard but it is not yet clear how Qassim Mohsin Al Mughanni, 16, died. In the past regime's security forces had planted booby-trapped devices to kill activists, liquidated opponents in "car accidents" (the case of Sayed Ahmad Al Ghuraifi, 1986, and that of the six young Bahraini girls killed on

26th February 2012) and destroyed people's homes killing occupants (the case of Salman Al Taitoon and his family, Sanabis 1996). In all these cases no formal investigation had been conducted.

The human rights world has reacted with fury to the realisation that Bahrain's dictator has the absolute power of ordering the detention or release of native Bahrainis. The rule of law has totally disappeared and replaced by the personal dictatorship of Hamad Alkhalifa who rules the country with royal decrees. On Monday night he issued a decree to release Nabeel Rajab, the most-respected human rights activist whose repeated arrest on royal orders has angered international human rights bodies. Two weeks ago the European Parliament issued a resolution calling for the release of all political prisoners including Nabeel Rajab. There were hidden threats of military and political sanctions if he did not heed the calls to release prisoners. Mr Rajab's release is seen as a result of several developments in addition to the European Parliament's call. The Saudi/Alkhalifa aggression on Yemen is turning into a military and political fiasco for the two regimes. Then came the Nuclear agreement between Iran and the six major world powers. With the Bahrain's Revolution continuing unabated... *Continued on Page 4*

US arms sales to Bahraini regime undermines Obama's commitment to HR

By Husain Abdulla , July 21, 2015

"The government of Bahrain has made some meaningful progress on human rights reform and reconciliation."

With this flexible formulation, the US justified the decision to lift the hold on arms transfers to the Bahrain Defence Force and National Guard, which had been in a place in an effort to pressure the Bahraini regime to reform its violent tactics towards protesters.

As part of this process, Bahrain was supposed to accept reforms proposed by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), a body that tracked and publicised the violent tactics employed by the government against Arab Spring protesters. America's 29 June announcement of the resumption of arms sales suggests that the Bahraini government's climbdown from the nadir of violence in February and March 2011 was satisfactory, if, in the words of the State Department: not quite "adequate". But even as State Department employees were drafting and editing the arms-release statement, the government of Bahrain was disabusing the Obama Administration of the notion that it had the slightest interest in human rights protection or political reconciliation.

Two weeks before the decision, a court sentenced Sheikh Ali Salman, head of the opposition society al-Wafaq, to four years in prison for "inciting hatred" and "insulting public institutions" charges which Amnesty International dismissed outright. The day before the U.S. dropped its hold, the government sentenced another opposition leader, Fadhel Abbas, to five years in prison for tweeting his condemnation of the war in Yemen.

Not three days after the statement, authorities arrested Majeed Milad, another participant in the erstwhile National Dialogue, on charges of "instigating hatred of the regime." Lest a casual observer think this to be all party politics, Nabeel Rajab, the prominent nonviolent and nonpartisan human rights defender, was only just released for unspecified "health reasons" after languishing in prison since 2 April. Authorities also targeted him for unwelcome criticism of the Yemeni conflict.

This, even as the State Department declared that Bahraini officials were "contribut[ing] to an environment more conducive to reconciliation and progress." The unkindest cut of all for the State Department, however, came on June 11, when the Bahrain Interior Ministry arrested Ebrahim Sharif. On that day, authorities arrested the former leader of the secular opposition society Wa'ad ("Promise"), for "incitement to overthrow the government".

As evidence, officials cited a twenty-minute speech Sharif had delivered on 10 July. An examination of Sharif's words reveals nothing in the way of incitement or coup-plotting, but rather the nonviolent dissidence to which the members of Bahrain's democratic movement have held for

years. His calls for equal rights and a constitutional monarchy, and his remark that state authorities, and not opposition members, were practising violence, proved a bridge too far for the ruling family.

Sharif's arrest, coming three weeks after his early release from a five-year prison sentence, should prove deeply embarrassing to U.S. government officials. After all, "the recent release of a number of prisoners charged with crimes related to their political association and expression," was a step that Bahrain had supposedly taken to make reconciliation and progress more conducive.

Nevermind that "prisoners," plural, was a misnomer, that human rights activists like Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Naji Fateel are still imprisoned. Nevermind that American citizen Taqi al-Maidan remains behind bars, suffering torture and maltreatment on unsubstantiated charges.

Ibrahim Sharif, apparently, was meant to stand in for the thousands of political prisoners that security forces have corralled into overcrowded, under-resourced jails, inmates who wait for an international intervention that seemingly will never come. By re-arresting Sharif, the Bahraini government has aborted its lone reconciliatory move in recent months. The justification for the arms release has been totally undermined, the US government's commitment to human rights reform brought into serious doubt.

Obama administration officials, unfortunately, may only realize their error now that Sharif is once again detained. They must know that they have lost their surest leverage for pushing the Bahraini government toward adopting changes that will arrest the political crisis and bring stability to an island kingdom whose disarray would shake the region. In order to regain this lost leverage, DoS would do well to look to the European Parliament. On 9 July 2015, the body adopted a comprehensive resolution condemning the human rights situation in Bahrain, demanding that the government follow through on its extensive reform commitments. Additionally, the resolution calls for the EU to prohibit exports of tear gas and crowd control equipment, which security forces employ to lethal effect.

The EU does not stop there, however; its resolution cites the litany of broken reform promises and long-standing abuses that Bahraini officials continue to perpetuate. It rightfully states that the government has failed to implement the BICI's core recommendations while highlighting the cases of long-imprisoned activists, many of whom were sentenced under the provisions of the government's catch-all anti-terrorism law.

What the European Parliament lacks, which the US government has, are the bilateral tools to make Bahrain's rulers take such condemnation seriously. Instead of settling for the occasional prisoner swap, the US should hold Bahrain to its extensive international promises.

While this round of arms transfers is already underway, a re-commitment to the implementation of the BICI core recommenda-

tions should preface any future security agreement between the two countries. Otherwise, failure to truly press Bahraini officials with all available tools will undercut both Bahrain's long-term political stability and America's global commitment to protecting human rights.

Iran's Nuclear Agreement

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the regime is gradually being squeezed into submission and gradual disrespect even among its supporters in Washington and London. In the first demand of its Resolution the European Parliament "*Calls for the dropping of charges and immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders, political activists and other individuals detained and charged with alleged violations related to the rights of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including Nabeel Rajab, Sheikh Ali Salman and the 'Bahrain 13'*"

Anger is also amounting following the re-arrest of Ibrahim Sharif whose arrest last week has convinced the Europeans that Bahrain's dictator is bluffing. Mr Sharif's release last month was used by Washington to announce the resumption of arms to Alkhalifa regime which is notorious for its "systematic torture". His re-arrest followed a speech to a group of activists insisting that the revolution was continuing and that the political demands of the people would not be abandoned by the opposition. These assertions were presented by the regime's system of deception as "a plot to overthrow the regime by force". Today Amnesty International issued a Public Statement calling on the Bahraini authorities to release political activist Ebrahim Sharif and end his ongoing prosecution on charges brought solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression following a speech he gave last Friday. It added: "The re-arrest of Ebrahim Sharif and the continuing imprisonment and prosecution of peaceful critics and leaders of the political opposition indicates that the Bahraini government intends to continue to silence dissident voices. The authorities must start by releasing all prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to show they are serious about reform."

Meanwhile the spate of arrests and torture has continued. Yesterday Hussain Jaffar from Saar Town was arrested at one of the shopping malls. On Monday 13th July under-aged Bahraini boy was arrested. Jassim Mohammad Jassim was taken from the airport to one of the torture houses. His fate is not yet known. A bright student who achieved 99 percent in this year's Secondary School exams was arrested on 10th July. Mustafa Mohammad Ali Isma'il , 18 was taken to the torture houses instead of being honoured with a grant to pursue his studies.

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