

BAHRAIN

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

Beyond tribal rule; Bahrainis aspire for self-rule, freedom & liberty

As the political strife gathered pace on the 8th anniversary of the Revolution, it became clear to all that the future of Bahrain would not be a replication of the past, and that the people have much more zeal and resilience to see them through the forthcoming episodes of aggression and oppression. For eight years our people have defied all the odds including the Saudi-Emirati aggression on our sovereignty, the import of tens of thousands of mercenaries to kill natives, the unequivocal but immoral security and political support by the US and UK, the adoption of sectarianism to divide our people and the plundering of the country's wealth to sustain the heavy-handed security measures against men, women and children. Today, Bahrainis can stand up high-headed to claim the moral high grounds they have achieved through their steadfastness, perseverance and sacrifice. They have been faithful to their principles, values and slogans that they had adopted for almost 100 months, insisting on achieving fundamental regime change and establish a new political system based on "one-man-one-vote" principle.

In recent months several developments may prove decisive in the battle to gain freedom, self determination and sovereignty.

The first is the case of Hakeem Al Oraibi, a native Bahraini athlete who had been detained for more than 70 days by the Thai authorities. He had landed at Bangkok Airport on 27th November with his fiancé to celebrate their honeymoon. He was initially arrested on the basis of an Interpol red notice which was subsequently withdrawn. But the Khalifi dictators immediately asked the Thai authorities to hand him over to their torture operators. An international episode thus started. The Bahraini people viewed this as a make or break situation with the Alkhalifa occupiers. They succeeded in mobilising the athletic world into action to seek Hakeem's release and his return to Australia where he had been granted political asylum after his application in 2014. The Saudi-Emirati-Khalifi alliance adopted all possible means of financial inducement, threats and bigotry to force Thailand to hand Hakeem to the torturers. They failed. A prominent former Australian footballer, Craig Foster, championed Hakeem's case and mobilised athletes, NGOs and politicians to defend him. His efforts eventually paid off. Hakeem was released on February amid international relief and total defeat of those unholy evil alliance. It was one of the greatest victories for the people of Bahrain. The files of more

than 150 native athletes will now be re-opened by the newly formed alliance of athletes to examine the way they had been treated in 2011 by the khalifi torturers.

The second case is that of Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassim. This elderly religious and political leader has, over the past fifty years, been pivotal in the domestic politics, representing the overwhelming majority Shia Muslim native population. His popularity and massive support has angered Bahrain's dictator and his clique who have targeted him mercilessly. After placing him under house arrest and encircling his town, Duraz, for two years, regime forces used brutal force to end the people's presence in the vicinity of his house, killing at least five, injuring many and arresting more than 250 of the Sheikh's supporters. Six months ago Sheikh Qassim was forced out of the country under the pretext of medical treatment that he needed after years of neglect. He is now in exile like thousands others. The targeting of the most senior cleric in the country has angered the people whose anger is escalating against the hereditary dictators. The cleric is following events from his exile as the public anger sweeps through the towns and villages of Bahrain. This criminal behavior will most likely lead to deeper frustration and despair which will make the next round of revolutionary action more focused on exterminating the Khalifi reign of terror.

The third is continued repression of the activists spearheaded by the revolutionary groups. The past eight years have witnessed unparalleled attacks on people and property causing many injuries and deaths. The ideology of the regime has now moved from passive co-habitation with the natives to active confrontation with all. The ruling khalifi dictators have now reached the conclusion that co-habitation with the natives is not possible so they took many steps in preparation to the eventual showdown. The prisons have been so over-populated that inmates are kept in corridors. Cells that were prepared for four people have up to ten people. More natives are taken in than released. The treatment of the detainees has deteriorated sharply with torture becoming the main source of information. People are coerced into signing false "confessions" that are used to justify heavy sentences including death, citizenship revocation and banishment. Women have been particular-

ly targeted. Thirteen innocent native Bahraini ladies are languishing at the torture dungeons. Three of them have had their citizenship revoked. What makes these revocations more painful is the fact that those who issue them are not natives. It is a known fact that the international laws do not allow any government to become stateless through the revocation of citizenship. Yet this is exactly what khalifi dictators are doing to native Bahrainis. The intensification of repression is intended to break the will of the activists, but it has not worked. The more they torture and abuse the more steadfast are the people. The mothers of the martyrs have been particularly patient and presented brave faces considering their sons as martyrs for the noble cause of freedom, liberty and sovereignty. The revolutionary groups have taken upon themselves not to accept any solution that grants the khalifis new lease in power. They are adamant that the dictator and his clique must go immediately and unconditionally.

Finally the policy of persecuting the natives is another major grievance that has been acknowledged by international human rights bodies including the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Zaid bin Ra'ad Al Hussain has repeatedly described the treatment of the native population by the khalifi clan as "persecution", a term that was used for the first time by an international official. The central policy of the regime that aims at eradicating the idea of "native" population as opposed to those who have become "Bahrainis" by virtue of an order by the head of state who, himself, has foreign roots, must not be allowed to work. The need for international protection of native Bahrainis increases by the day. The UN must take interest in this matter and force the dictator to stop his illegal steps of making 840 natives "stateless". This is disdain of international law and basic ethical values. The defenders of the regime in Washington and London must lean heavily on the dictator to stop wreaking havoc on Bahrain whose native population face all kinds of ill-treatment, abuse and citizenship revocation. His policies amount to virtual "genocide". Those defenders are participating in the khalifi criminal behavior and policies. The American and British people deserve to be made aware of the ill-conceived policies of their leaders that have sheltered a murderous regime that adopts genocide as a weapon of mass human destruction.

Campaign to free Saudi, Bahraini women; Hakeem's freedom haunts regime

The plight of women in at least three GCC states is causing alarm among international human rights bodies. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are viewed as most repressive in terms of women rights. There are currently 13 women activists behind bars in Bahrain and similar number in Saudi Arabia. The UAE's human rights records are being exposed as one of its female citizens seeks asylum in the West. Hind Albolooki is currently at a detention centre in Macedonia after she fled her country. Friends and human rights groups fear for the safety of Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed al-Maktoum, 33, daughter of Dubai's ruler who was seized from a yacht off the coast of India in March 2018 and has not been heard from since. Last month a Saudi young girl, Rahaf Al Qanun fled Saudi Arabia and was granted asylum in Canada. While these women have personal issues with their society, religion or family, the most pressing cases relate to imprisoned women activists whose numbers are increasing. This issue has tarnished the image of Saudi crown prince who had promised political reforms but whose record is smeared by killing Jamal Khashoggi.

Yesterday native Bahraini woman activist, Hadeer Abdulla Abadi had her detention extended by thirty more days. She has languished at the Khalifi torture dungeons since 14th January 2019. Twelve other women are behind bars. Fears are growing for three of them after telling the outer world of their ordeal. On Monday 11th February Hajer Mansoor, Najah Yousuf and Medina Ali addressed a Press conference at the UK's Parliament organised by SNP MP Chris Law and addressed by Labour MP Lloyd Russell. The women presented harrowing details of the torture they

had endured at the hands of the Khalifi torturers who are widely believed to be "trained" by British officers from HM Prison Inspection Directorate. The audience were shocked to hear that sexual abuse is widely used as a weapon against native Bahraini women. On 6th February another woman native was sentenced to five years in jail and revocation of citizenship for opposing Khalifi hereditary dictatorship. Zakiya Al Barbouri had been subjected to harrowing torture to sign false confessions. She is the third woman to be stripped of nationality at the hands of the Khalifi foreign occupiers of Bahrain. Zainab Marhoon and Maryam Al Mousawi had their citizenship revoked last year.

In a landmark decision, Thailand has released the Bahraini athlete Hakeem Al Oraibi after almost three months of detention. It was one of the major political and public relations defeats of the Khalifi tribal regime which has sought Hakeem's extradition to face more torture at their notorious dungeons. The Saudis and Khalifis had promised Thailand large amounts of financial incentives for the extradition of the Bahraini athlete who had spent two years in prison for standing with his people when they rose against the Khalifi enemy in 2011. Bahraini people have thanked those who have campaigned relentlessly to get Hakeem freed especially Craig Foster and almost all Australian athletic bodies.

Political crisis is looming between Gulf dictators and Australia as its prime minister and foreign minister plan to meet Hakeem and probably grant him citizenship. The crisis will be compounded by new initiatives by Bahraini opposition to isolate Bahrain's dictators. The International Police apparatus (Interpol) will be urged to take action against them for persistent attempts

to exploit it for political aims and feeding it with false information about Bahraini activists. International sports bodies will also be lobbied to sanction the Khalifi regime for its attacks on athletes and attempts to discredit these bodies through various means. Of particular concern is the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) which has failed in its duty to call for immediate and unconditional release of Hakeem. Its president is a member of the Khalifi tribe and is widely accused of placing his loyalty to the tribe above the AFC.

The 2018 Freedom House has given Bahrain the rank of 168 out of 182 in the international freedom index. Bahrain is given 12 percent only for freedoms, no political rights (7/7, where 7 is the least free) and 6/7 in civil liberties (where 7 is the least liberal). This classification has routed the image of the Khalifa rule and its backers as a modern system. In the first week of February there were at least 19 protests against the regime in various towns and villages. There were at least nine illegal raids on people's homes, six arbitrary detentions and three jail sentences including one citizenship revocation.

On the eve of the 8th anniversary of the 14th February Revolution, the people are more keen than ever to pursue their political demands and ending the black era of Khalifi dictatorship. The regime is extremely worried by the prospect of more protests by people emboldened by their victory over the Khalifis in the case of Hakeem. There is no going back no going back or retreating given the enormous sacrifices endured by the people. The past few days have seen activities inside and outside Bahrain with strong resolve and determination

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strations, protests, road closures and visits to martyrs graveyards. Homes were raided in the towns of Daih, Karbabad, Karranah, Abu Saiba and Malikiya. The Khalifi hereditary dictators have detained two children aged 13 after being charged with "illegal gathering". They were remanded in custody after they were severely beaten and abused. Hussain Radhi Abualla and Ali Hussain Abdul Wahab, from Al Musalla town had taken part in the anti-regime protests marking the 8th anniversary of the 14th February Revolution.

There were active events including protests at Alkhalifa embassies in several countries, including London, Berlin and Dublin. There were hearing sessions at several parliaments including those of UK, Ireland, Italy, The European Parliament in Brussels and the US Congress.

In the aftermath of the Hakeem Al Oraibi's saga, there is now a new mood of activism in the

athletic world against the Khalifi regime. The ordeal of the native Bahraini athlete has opened the file of the ill-treatment of Bahraini athletes in 2011. A global coalition of athletes, rights activists and fans, including Australian football star Craig Foster, mobilized alongside FIFA, football's governing body, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to urge Bahrain to drop its case and Thailand to let al-Araibi return to Australia. Both bodies issued strong statements publicly calling

for al-Araibi's release, and FIFA's head of sustainability and diversity, Federico Addiechi, even attended al-Araibi's extradition hearing in Bangkok. These bodies have now vowed to take up the case of more than 150 Bahraini athletes who had been subjected to horrific treatment including torture. Tomorrow Bahrain's case will be taken to the European Parliament at Luxemburg. Several MEPs will protest the detention of Abdulhadi Al Khawaja and all jailed human rights defenders in Bahrain.

Yesterday regime's courts issued oppressive judgments of jail sentences ranging between 5 years and life, and revocation of citizenship of 25 natives. These include three from Al Ekr Town and one from Daih: Fadhel Jaffar Rabe'i. This is one of the highest number of this distasteful and shameful revenge.

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20th February 2019



Saudis blacklisted by Europe, Khalifis decide to kill more Bahrainis

The European Commission has added Saudi Arabia, Panama and four U.S. territories to a blacklist of nations it considers a threat because of lax controls on terrorism financing and money laundering, the EU executive said on 20th February. Britain that is worried about its economic relations with Saudi Arabia has criticised the move. The United States has also disapproved. The Saudi government said it regretted the decision in a statement published by the Saudi Press Agency, adding: "Saudi Arabia's commitment to combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism is a strategic priority". In another snub to the Saudis, the Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives on 20th February approved a resolution that would end U.S. support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in the war in Yemen, as many lawmakers sought to push President Donald Trump to toughen his policy towards the kingdom. It was the first time the House of Representatives has ever supported a war powers resolution, but the 248-177 vote - almost entirely along party lines - would not be enough, however, to overcome Trump's promise to issue what would likely be his first veto.

On 25th February U.S. senators said a Trump administration briefing had not changed opinions on the need to push back at Saudi Arabia over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and its conduct in the war in Yemen, and predicted a Senate vote on whether to end U.S. involvement in Yemen as soon as next week. Officials from the U.S. State and Defence Departments met with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee behind closed doors on Monday to discuss the situation in Yemen, amid a months-long outcry in Congress about

Saudi Arabia. "I don't think they won any hearts and minds," Democratic Senator Chris Murphy told reporters as he left the briefing.

Following Germany's decision to halt its exports to Saudi Arabia, UK's foreign minister has written to Germany's foreign minister expressing concern about the effect of that decision on both the British and European defense industry. "I am very concerned about the impact of the German government's decision on the British and European defense industry and the consequences for Europe's ability to fulfil its NATO commitments," Jeremy Hunt wrote in a letter, *Der Spiegel* reported. Hunt said British defense firms would not be able to fulfil several contracts with Saudi Arabia such as the Eurofighter model called Typhoon or the Tornado fighter jet, both of which are made with parts affected by the stop in deliveries to Saudi.

The Danish Foreign Minister, Andres Samwilson has called for the release of Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja who has spent eight years behind bars for calling for democratic transformation in Bahrain. He was speaking at the opening of the 40th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Danish minister also condemned the Saudi executions. Several other officials criticised Saudi human rights records in the session.

On 20th February Amnesty International issued a statement about one of the jailed Saudi women. Nassima al-Sada, has been placed in solitary confinement since early February 2019, in al-Mabahith Prison in Dammam. Nassima has been detained since July 2018 without charge or trial. Nassima's detention was part of a recent wave of arrests that targeted Saudi human rights activists. Since May 2018, at least

15 human rights activists, including several women human rights defenders have been detained without charge. Amnesty International calls on the Saudi authorities to release Nassima al-Sada and all other human rights activists immediately and unconditionally.

Bahrain's dictator has instructed his courts to confirm the death sentences on seven native Bahrainis for opposing his dictatorship. The seven: Hussain Marhoon, Ahmad Zain Al Din, Hussain Dawood, Zuahair Ibrahim, Mohammad Fadel, Mohammad Tawq and Mohammad Radhi also had their nationality revoked. These young men have now exhausted all avenues to have their sentences quashed. There are 23 native Bahrainis sentenced to death by Khalifi occupiers. Khalifi courts have also passed life sentences and revocation of citizenship on three citizens from Al Ekr Town. Two others were given ten years jail sentence. These courts also passed a five year jail sentence and revocation of citizenship on Fadel Jaffar Rabi' from Daih Town.

In revenge for its humiliating defeat in the case of native Bahraini athlete, Hakeem AlOraibi, the Khalifi regime has intensified its repression against native women activists. Yesterday the dictator ordered his court of Cassation to confirm the three years jail term he had ordered earlier on the Hajer Mansoor Hassan, Sayed Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor, all relatives of outspoken critic Sayed Ahmad Al Wadaei. The court also confirmed the ten years sentence on Sheikh Hassan Isa, a senior cleric who had helped the families of martyrs. Any charitable act to those families is criminalised by Khalifi occupiers.

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Saudis censored internationally, Khalifis continue citizenship revocation

On 14th February the European Parliament issued a damning statement against Saudi Arabia for its treatment of women. MEPs condemned the situation of Saudi women and expressed their concern over the government web services used by men to track women. By using these internet-based applications, male guardians can specify when and how women can cross Saudi borders and receive an SMS update when they travel. Despite a reform agenda to transform the country economically and socially also through women's empowerment, and the lifting of the driving ban for women inside the Kingdom, the Saudi political and social system remains discriminatory, effectively making women second-class citizens. MEPs noted that male guardians still need to authorise women's international travel, access to healthcare services, choice of residence and marriage. MEPs urge the Saudi government to immediately abolish the male guardianship system.

MEPs also called for a moratorium on the death penalty.

On Wednesday 13th February The European Commission added Saudi Arabia, Panama and four U.S. territories to a blacklist of nations it considers a threat because of lax controls on terrorism financing and money laundering. The move is part of a crackdown on money laundering after several scandals at EU banks, but it has been criticised by several EU countries, including Britain, that are worried about their economic relations with the listed states, notably Saudi Arabia. The United States has also disapproved. London has led a pushback against the EU list in past days, and at closed-door meetings urged the exclusion of Saudi Arabia.

On 13th February the Democratic-led U.S. House of Representatives approved a resolution that would end U.S. support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in the war in Yemen, as many lawmakers sought to push President Donald Trump to toughen

his policy towards the kingdom. Democrats and Republicans reintroduced the war powers resolution three weeks ago as a way to send a strong message to Riyadh about the humanitarian disaster in Yemen and condemn the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Yemen's almost four-year war has killed tens of thousands of people, collapsed the economy and brought millions of people to the brink of famine. The United States has supported the Saudi-led air campaign against the people of Yemen with mid-air refuelling support, intelligence and targeting assistance.

To pre-empt the people's preparations to mark the eighth anniversary of the 14th February Revolution, the Khalifi regime escalated its repression, arrests and intimidation. During the two days of these protests more than 50 native Bahrainis were detained and taken to unknown torture chambers. Most areas witnessed demon-



Hakeem's case shows limits of football as PR tool for repressive regimes

(CNN)Hakeem al-Araibi's 76-day prison ordeal ended Tuesday when the former Bahrain international footballer was flown from Thailand to Australia, where he has refugee status.

Al-Araibi had been jailed in the Southeast Asian country after an erroneous Interpol "red notice" -- an international arrest warrant -- was issued following an extradition request from Bahrain.

The country of his birth had sentenced him in absentia to 10 years' imprisonment during a 2014 trial on vandalism charges dating back to the ill-fated Arab Spring. He had also been arrested and tortured in November 2012, allegedly for his brother's political activities, according to Human Rights Watch.

Speaking to CNN from prison last month, al-Araibi said that he believed Bahrain targeted him because of a 2016 interview he gave to German TV channel ARD, when he said that Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president and Bahraini national Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa was not fit for the presidency of FIFA.

Former Australian national football team captain Craig Foster, who spearheaded the campaign to release Al-Araibi, said on Twitter that the case was a "win for humanity, for the power of citizens of the world demanding that human rights be protected ... and the beginning of a broader fight for the values of sport."

Bahrain's Foreign Ministry said in a statement carried by local media Tuesday that al-Araibi's guilty verdict would remain in place despite its decision to drop the extradition case. "The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its right to pursue all necessary legal actions against Mr. Al-Araibi," the statement read.

Acting with impunity

The young player's ordeal is among a number of football-related PR disasters for Middle Eastern countries. Some human rights organizations and campaigners view it as another example of some acting as if with impunity in the face of the international sporting community.

As al-Araibi was being processed following his arrest at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport on November 27, Bahrain's neighbor, the United Arab Emirates, was preparing to hold the AFC's flagship tournament, the Asian Cup.

That tournament, won by Gulf pariah Qatar, ended up a bad-tempered affair, with Emiratis furious that their great rivals and neighbors won the tournament -- and at their expense, no less, with Qatar beating the UAE 4-0 in the semifinals, prompting outrage in the stands. Reports that Ali Issa Ahmad, a British football fan, was arrested in the UAE and subsequently beaten by authorities, telling friends he was accused of pro-

moting Qatar by wearing a football shirt bearing the country's football crest, have only added to the sense that some Gulf countries pay little heed to the sporting world's accepted human rights standards.

The UAE government has denied that Ahmad was arrested because of his outfit, even though the country's laws against promoting Qatar can mandate fines and an extended prison sentence.

The AFC released a statement saying that it was "not made aware of this alleged incident" and had requested more information from the country's footballing authorities.

Sport as PR capital

Some of these countries, principally Qatar and the UAE, have used football extensively as a PR tool, building championship-winning teams in Europe's top leagues, sponsoring others and -- in Qatar's case -- winning the right to stage the granddaddy of them all, the World Cup in 2022.

Stephen Cockburn, deputy director of global issues at Amnesty International, said the examples of Gulf countries using the power of football are "not the first time sport has been used to clean images and hide abuses." He pointed to the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, which was used to whitewash the image of the military junta then in charge.

"What's happened has been more overt in the last few years, and there's been a shift in the scale of money and profile involved. We're seeing new actors, new regions, especially the Middle East.

"Football has been caught up in the projects of these nations, as a way to project themselves internationally, (through their ownership of clubs like) Manchester City and PSG (Paris Saint Germain) -- and the biggest one, the World Cup."

Nick McGeehan, a human rights researcher focused on the Gulf nations, told CNN the embrace of football is a timeworn way of using sport to burnish a country's image, particularly to help mitigate the impact of cases like that of al-Araibi, the rights of migrant workers in Qatar, and the purported politically motivated arrest of Ahmad.

"What the sport does is give you an excellent platform to gloss over these human rights abuses," he said. "It's entirely consistent with their model of governance."

McGeehan said that while the cases of mistreatment of fans and footballers by coun-

tries like Bahrain and the UAE "shines a terrible light" on these countries, its impact is outweighed by the soft power of their massive sporting investments.

"For a massive chunk of other people, they don't read this stuff, they see that the (Gulf rulers) are the people who support and finance successful teams. There is a cost to this and they would weigh it up very carefully and the cost-benefit analysis weighs out."

Power for good

But the PR battle can work both ways. Some have suggested that the withdrawal of hosting rights for existing tournaments, and the threat of withholding the award of new tournaments on the basis of human rights abuses should be a potent weapon in advancing human rights.

"Taking an event away has to be an option available to FIFA and all major sports bodies should it become apparent that an event cannot be conducted without causing human rights harm," says Brendan Schwab, executive director of the World Players Association.

Following the award of the 2022 tournament both Qatar and FIFA came in for intense criticism, because of allegations of corruption in the bid, and for how its migrant workers building the stadiums were treated. The debacle "became a tipping point," in the way tournaments were awarded, he said.

Organizers need to "make sure there's a cost to holding a tournament," Cockburn adds.

"After all the scandal (of the 2022 tournament award), FIFA introduced a new bidding process that has human rights and sustainability as part of the process. It'd be interesting to see how that's used going forward as a guide for the Olympics and for regional games. It'd be good if other sporting bodies followed FIFA in that."

Sport's responsibility?

Mary Harvey, chief executive for Center for Sport and Human Rights, said it was a chance for sport to build ethics into its fabric.

"The integrity of sport is something sport needs to protect," she said. "When it comes to events that are sports related, sport is saying that we have an obligation to ensure that where human rights are impacted, they have an obligation to act, and they're starting to do that."

"Sports governing bodies [are] doing things that seem riskier than they would three years ago," she added, pointing to the pressure that al-Araibi's case brought to bear.

"People are starting to do things publicly that say that's not OK. We're finding out what the limits are. Fourteen governments showed up to (Al-Araibi's) hearing. That didn't just happen."

