

BAHRAIN

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After 50-year PM: Bahrain aspires to freedom from khalifi clan

Amidst the most controversial new political approach to the Palestinian intractable crisis, the Emirati-khalifi rapprochement with Israel has caused more divisions and discord in the Arab world. Those who condemned what is commonly viewed as a treachery by the governments of UAE and Bahrain were swiftly attacked by their media. The Palestinians have been left speechless as they saw their brethren abandoning them to their fate. The Israelis have not ceased their attacks on several Arab countries. Syria is sustaining most attacks that have continued unabated after the signing of the dubious "peace deals". Gaza was targeted several times last month while under one of the most formidable blockades by the Israelis. Lebanese airspace has been repeatedly violated as the Israelis escalate their psychological war on the resistance movements in the region. They have never changed their attitude towards the other states in the region; they continue to be belligerent and hostile. Their warmongering has continued with their military aircrafts prepared to attack others. This is at a time when no violent attack have been reported against the occupiers of Palestine for a long time.

The UAE and khalifi new policy of friendship with Israel has shocked most Arab people. The issues of war and peace are often presented within the collective Arab framework. When Egypt broke rank with the rest of the Arab world and signed the 1979 Camp David accord with Israel it was swiftly removed from the Arab ranks. The Arab League headquarters were moved from Cairo to Tunisia. President Sadat who had ventured on the first visit by the head of an Arab state to Israel was subsequently assassinated in 1981 during a military parade. So what is it that led the two Gulf countries to break ranks with other Arab countries and sign a peace treaty with Israel? It is known that the US president, Donald Trump had worked hard to impose the new approach on these dictatorial regimes. He has done nothing to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians. He had pretended to be pulling America from wars but towards the end of tenure he behaved as a warmonger and bully. He withdrew the US from the nuclear deal with Iran and pushed the situation to the brink of war. Last month, having lost the

election to Joe Biden, he wanted to attack Iran but he was talked out of it by his lieutenants. He is seen as a dangerous man. The American people have punished him severely by voting him out of the White House despite his persistent clinging to the presidency. He is leaving it with a broken heart and subdued pride.

At this juncture the leaders of UAE and Bahrain ventured out to sign a peace deal that could easily backfire given the sensitive situation in the Gulf region. Those monarchies do not possess solid political regimes that can stand up to the challenges of their own people.

The people of Bahrain, for example have long opposed the khalifi hereditary dictatorship. Last month their prime minister who had held tight to his post for fifty years died and was succeeded by another member of the khalifi clan. Salman bin Hamad, the son of the most hated dictator took over at a time when the native Bahrainis were preparing to mark the tenth anniversary of their momentous revolution. Although he is hailed by the West as a reformist, he has failed to live up to this reputation. First he has failed to exhibit a strong character, having been a loyal follower of his father. Second he has not undertaken any reformist agenda or act. For the past ten years he has been as hawkish as any one else in this dictatorship. Since his rise to the post scores of Bahrainis have been rounded up including children for peacefully expression of an opinion. Among them was 14-year old Yousuf Zayer Ali and 16 years Hoor al-Ajami. As the situation of the political prisoners deteriorated Salman did not act to help any of them. 72-year old Hassan Mushaima who has spent ten years behind bars for taking part in the Revolution suffered health scares and was transferred to hospital as his condition worsened. In the eyes of the international human rights bodies such as Amnesty International, he is a prisoner of conscience and should not have been jailed in the first place. Yet the new PM failed to undertake any step to alleviate Mr Mushaima's suffering.

Furthermore, Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa is seen as a Zionist by the people. His image has been polished by outside forces who want to impose him on the people while he lacks the charisma, the

reform agenda or the willing to uphold the rule of law. To many he is one of the hardline members of the khalifi clan who will follow in his father's steps. He has failed to show any sign of reformist attitude. Many believe he will be a loser who came to power at the wrong time when people have become fed up with the khalifi clan and want it to go. There is no appetite any more for these dictators and believe they deserve to enjoy the right to self-determination. The past fifty years were the bleakest in the country's history. The deceased khalifa bin Salman left behind a legacy of human, political and economic destruction. His right hand man was the British colonial officer, Ian Henderson who died in 2013 who brutalized the native Bahrainis for 35 years. He had been brought to Bahrain in April 1966 where he organized the Special Branch and directed it until his retirement in 2001. Many political prisoners were tortured under his command. Khalifa granted him free hand to deal in his own ways with the opponents of the regime.

The rivalries between Khalifa and his nephew, Hamad, jumped to the surface soon after his brother, Essa died in March 1999. When Hamad succeeded his father as the Emir he gradually sidelined his uncle, the prime minister and started promoting his sons to take over the government. He installed his cronies as ministers under his uncle. Gradually Khalifa became powerless as the royal court took control of the country. The new premier, Hamad's eldest son Salman who lacks an independent personality will be given a free hand to rule, but he will be rivalled by his half-brothers who are notorious for their lavish lifestyles and cowboy-ish behaviour. The people lost faith in Salman especially when he failed to stop the military invasion of the country by the Saudi-Emirati forces in mid-March 2011. He deceived Al Wefaq Society who were negotiating with him an end to the political crisis resulting from the Revolution one month earlier. Few hours after the last meeting between them, the invaders crossed the border, occupied the country and wreaked havoc on the people. Salman is seen as an incapable, weak and lacking political and reformist vision. People want him and his clan to go.

MPs call on F1 to take up HR in Bahrain, Saudis persecute women activists

As Formula 1 (blood race) prepares to stage yet another shameful race in Bahrain calls have been made to cancel it unless the khalifi regime releases thousands of political prisoners. Shortly after winning his seventh Formula One world championship last week in Turkey, Lewis Hamilton issued a warning to the sport he loves. It was time it faced up to its responsibilities, to confront and deal with the human rights issues that blight some of the countries it visits, and do it now, he said. In London 30 MPs have called on F1 management to put pressure on the khalifi dynasty to stop persecuting and torturing activists. The new prime minister, Salman bin Hamad is closely linked to F1 race in Bahrain. He has failed to address the catastrophic human rights situation in the country. Since he inherited his post two weeks ago more native Bahrainis, as young as 14 have been detained and tortured. One of them is Moosa Saeed who was detained for five days for posting a Quranic verse that says: Think not that Allah doth not heed the deeds of those who do wrong. He but giveth them respite against a Day when the eyes will fixedly stare in horror. He was abused and his poor family was forced to pay BD500 (\$1400).

Former political prisoner, Mrs Najah Yousuf who was released last year after spending two years at the torture chambers said: Every moment I spend in prison in Bahrain stains the reputation of F1. Najah's son, Kumail Hasan, has been imprisoned in what Amnesty International called "a reprisal against his mother." He was only 16 years old when he was arrested last year, in December 2019. "My son is targeted because of the international pressure that my case has received and his imprisonment is a reprisal," said Yusuf. "This is something F1 should have a moral duty to enquire about. The government has made good on their

promise to go after my son if I refused to keep my mouth shut. While my family is being torn apart, F1 has chosen to reward Bahrain with more opportunities to sports-wash their abusive reputation."

The fast pace at which the khalifi regime is progressing with its normalization with Israel is causing anxiety among the natives and the neighbours alike. Few days ago their foreign minister led a 25-man delegation to Tel Aviv to enforce the newly established love between the two sides. The new khalifi prime minister is known for his pro-Israel inclination and has invited Benjamin Netanyahu to visit Bahrain. He is said to be planning to take his guest to the F1 race as a guest of honour to the khalifi clan. These steps have infuriated the Palestinians who have attacked the khalifis for their outrageous advances towards the occupiers.

On 19th November the khalifi Lower Court in Bahrain issued a six-month prison sentence against the religious scholar Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ansari. He has been in detention since 8th September for expressing aspects of his religious ideas.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Josep Borell responded to a letter signed by scores of Members of the European Parliament on the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain. He said: I would like to thank you for your letter of 2 October 2020, in which you refer to the human rights situation in Bahrain, including to two Bahraini death row inmates, Mr Ramadhan and Mr Moosa. The promotion and the protection of human rights remain a core dimension of the EU's engagement with Bahrain. During the last EU – Bahrain human rights dialogue on 7 November 2019, in Brussels, the discussions focused on the death penalty, as well as on right to fair trial, prison conditions, arbitrary detentions, allegations of torture and ill treatment. The EEAS intends to revert to

those issues during the next human rights dialogue, tentatively scheduled for late autumn 2020. He added: As regards Mr Mohamed Ramadhan and Mr Hussain Moosa, the EU Delegation in Saudi Arabia (accredited to Bahrain), together with resident EU Member States' representatives, attended their hearing of 8 January 2020. Following the confirmation of their death sentences by the Bahrain's High Criminal Court in January 2020 and subsequently in July 2020 in a final ruling, the EU issued statements on 9 January and 13 July 2020. Today a Saudi court decided to transfer the case of Loujain al-Hathloul to the Specialised Criminal Court (Terrorism court). This disturbing development has come after almost three years of incarceration and one year of court appearances. Fears are now rising for the safety of several other women activists like Nassima Al Sadah, Samar Badawi and Nouf Abdul Aziz who had campaigned to allow women to drive and respect human rights.

Saudi Arabia is pursuing a new campaign to denounce the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist political movement feared by most Gulf monarchies, as Riyadh prepares to deal with what is likely to be a less friendly U.S. administration under Joe Biden. Over the past two weeks, officials, religious scholars and state media have warned Saudis about the group's "ideas", saying they sow dissent and call for disobedience against the state's rulers. They have urged people to report members to authorities. Such diatribes are an indication Riyadh is worried that President-elect Biden's administration will more closely watch the autocratic kingdom's human rights record and be more tolerant of peaceful Islamist activism, experts say.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
25th November 2020

New khalifi PM detains Bahraini children, Saudis haunted by G20

The health of one of the prominent leaders of Bahrain's Revolution has deteriorated in recent days. Mr Hassan Mushaima was transferred to the hospital and given temporary treatment to control his blood pressure that had rocketed and his irregular heart beats. He has now been diagnosed to have a weak heart. Given his age at 72, his long and sour experience with cancer and other ailments such as diabetes, ear infections and weak body, Mr Mushaima's medical situation has become precarious. The lack of proper health care is among the factors that have led to his ill health. Calls are mounting for the release of Mr Mushaima and other political prisoners who have spent ten years behind bars without committing any crime punishable by law. The demand now is not only to provide Mr Mushaima with proper medical care but to release him and the rest of the Bahraini political prisoners immediately and unconditionally. They are arbitrarily detained and their jailers are committing serious crimes by continuing to hold them

against their will.

In a virtual event on Thursday 12th November organised by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) and titled Citizenship in Bahrain, Right or Privilege, organisers and participants marked eight years since the Gulf Arab state revoked the nationality of 31 citizens. The move was the first in a series of similar citizenship revocations. Abdulghani al-Khanjar, a leading Bahraini political activist whose nationality was stripped by the government, said that the authorities had used citizenship revocation as a "tool to terrorise activists and their families and deny them their political and civic rights". "The Al-Khalifas [Bahrain's ruling family] think that citizenship is a privilege that they can take away from people," he said, calling on the new administration of United States President-elect Joe Biden to pressure the Gulf state into changing its approach. Other speakers include Zahra Albarazi, an independent consultant on statelessness, Courtney Radsch,

advocacy director at the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Mouna Ben Garga from the World Alliance for Citizen Participation [CIVICUS]. A similar seminar was held on Tuesday 17th November organized by Salam for Human Rights.

Following the death of Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa the post-colonial prime minister of Bahrain, his successor, Salman bin Hamad ordered a new wave of arrests. Scores of native citizens were rounded up, jailed and abused. They included 14 years old yousuf Zayer Ali and Hoor al-Ajami, 16 years old from Duraz. After ill-treatment, abuse and threats of further persecution, they were released. Many others were arrested for talking about the crimes committed by the defunct "butcher of Bahrain" during his 50 years reign of terror. They include Ahmad Al Wadi from Iskan Aali. Moosa Saeed, from Salmabad town was detained on 12th November. His family did not hear anything about him for five days. They are extremely worried for his safety and well-being. Moosa had already

Demise of Bahrain's PM, Saudis must release detainees before G20

Today Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the longest serving prime minister in the world passed away, having been in his post since the British withdrawal in August 1971. Bahrain has suffered greatly under his premiership. In 1975 he abrogated the legitimate constitution, dissolved the parliament and plunged the country in its dark era that has continued until now. For 30 years he was the strong man who ruled Bahrain with an iron-fist policy, helped by the notorious British colonial officer, Ian Henderson who died in 2013. They wreaked havoc on the people utilizing one of the most vicious security apparatus in the region. Torture became institutionalized, or as the regime-financed Bisioni Commission affirmed in 2011, it was "systematic". Khalifa's role was eclipsed soon after his nephew, the present ruler Hamad bin Isa al-khalifa, grabbed power after his father had died in March 1999 to establish the worst political regime in the region. The PM was sidelined and the power was concentrated in the royal court under Hamad and his sons. Bahrainis sighed relief at the departure of Khalifa who spread fear, torture, corruption and absolute dictatorship. People's hopes were dashed when Salman became PM.

Pressure is mounting on UK government to change track of its policy on Bahrain. British figures such as former senior army officers and the former MI6 controller for the Middle East, have been advising Hamad at a time when security forces have severely cracked down on dissent. The Queen has personal links to Hamad. Since his retirement as MI6 as controller for the Middle East in 1999 Geoffrey Tantom has advised Bahrain's dictator, for over 20 years. Tantom was knighted by the Queen for "outstanding service" to

UK/Bahrain relations.

Three native Bahraini orators (lamenters) were slapped with prison sentences ranging from one year to three months behind bars. Abbas Al-Ghasra, Mahmoud Al-Fardan and Jaafar Fadhel were jailed for their participation in religious mourning ceremonies.

Worrying updates have been received from the notorious Jau Prison in Bahrain. Prisoners who were moved from Building 4 to 21 have reported the following: the majority of prisoners are sick with flu symptoms, but the authorities have not tested them for Covid-19, the installation of CCTV inside of cells monitoring their every movement, overcrowding in the cells, forcing some prisoners to sleep on the floor. When a prisoner asks for a Covid-19 test, he is told that he will be put into isolation even if he does not test positive. Also, the prisoners are limited to five contact numbers. The cost of the calls is expensive and those who refuse to be recorded are banned from making calls. Personal belongings have been seized, forcing prisoners to buy new essential items from the prison shop. Some prisoners will likely go on strike

In the wake of Trump's defeat in the US presidential elections an atmosphere of disappointment, unease and anxiety is sweeping through the ruling elites in the Middle East, especially the GCC countries who have backed him against president-elect Joe Biden. Pressures are mounting on Biden to present a different approach to foreign relations, support democratic transformation and stand firm against human rights violations especially in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "President Biden's promise to make democracy and human rights a priority in our foreign policy and to reassess our cooperation with abusive governments in the Middle East must start

by ending America's own contribution to human rights abuses in the region," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of DAWN. "That means not only fulfilling his stated commitment to end U.S. support for the disastrous Saudi-led war in Yemen, but also ending military support to systematically abusive governments, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel." Bahraini opposition believes that the US reputation may partially be restored if the new administration breaks away with those of the successive former presidents especially Donald Trump who had supported those abusive regimes and saved Saudi killers.

Pressures are also mounting on Saudi regime to release political prisoners especially women detainees like Loujain Al Hathloul and Naseema Al Sadah. Women members of Irish parliament have called on their government to summon the Saudi ambassador over the continued detention of women prisoners such as Loujain Hathloul's treatment in prison, and to explain why she is being denied regular contact with her family.

Amnesty International (AI) has taken up the case of woman prisoner Nassima al-Sada and launched a campaign to get her released by the Saudi jailers. AI said: Nassima is in prison for her work defending women's rights in Saudi Arabia. She goes months without seeing her children or lawyer. Sign the petition now to demand her freedom." She urged people to write to the Saudi authorities to: Immediately and unconditionally release Nassima al-Sada and all women human rights defenders and activists detained for their peaceful human rights work; and: Drop charges against Nassima al-Sada and all WHRDs and women activists on trial for their human rights work.

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11th November 2020

spent years behind bars and was only released few months ago. Four other women were also detained including a 60 year old women riddled with various ailments. Two young native Bahraini girls were among the victims of the new PM repressive policy.

A khalifi court has ordered the detention of another citizen, Film producer, Yasser Nasser for one week. Hussain Mhanna, whose family hasn't heard from him for a month, is in prison because his friend was tortured so he gave them his name, then he was arrested and tortured until he "confessed" to an unspecified crime for which he was given a life sentence in one court session.

The death of Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa last week at the age of 85 sealed a black chapter in the country's recent history but his successor is likely to follow in his footsteps. He was seen as an authoritarian by the independent press. On 11th November Reuters reported it under the title: Bahrain's security hawk Prime Minis-



ter Khalifa dies, succeeded by crown prince. On the same day the Daily Telegraph described him as: A friend of the West, he led his country away from economic dependency on oil but was ruthless in cracking down on dissent.

As the G20 meeting in Saudi Arabia approaches, Agnes Callamard, the UN Expert on Extra-Judicial killings has reminded the world of the crimes committed by the host

country. This week she tweeted: "On the week States are prepared to meet virtually for the G20, let's remember what the host country #SaudiArabia did to #JamalKhashoggi, to dozens of other journalists still detained, to Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya'a al-Zahrani." Lina Alhathloul, sister of woman political prisoner, Loujain, tweeted: "Loujain is on her 18th day of hunger strike and we don't have any news of her. We urge G20. leaders to call on her release ahead of the summit."

Two people from the Al Huwaitat region where Mohammad bin Salman plans to build his new city were arrested this week for refusing to vacate their homes. Ibrahim Saleh Abu Khalil AlTuaqiqi, a poet and Abdullah Ahmad Al Raqabi were detained for refusing to give up their home for demolition.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
18th November 2020

Khalifa bin Salman's long tenure ends, with no prospect of reforms

Excerpts from an article by Kristin Smith Diwan Nov 18, 2020

Khalifa bin Salman's tenure at the head of Bahrain's government ran for 50 years, spanning most of Bahrain's existence as an independent state. Upon his death, state newspapers praised him as the architect of modern Bahrain: a wise leader who lived for the people, a statesman who advanced ties to the world, and a pillar of support for the expatriate community. Opposition media outside Bahrain were less forgiving, noting his long reliance on the state security law and his reputation for corruption. His form of retail politics built upon access to state land and patronage and traded on the personal connections that enriched his business allies, both Sunni and Shia, as well as himself.

It was this corruption that drew the ire of the hard-line Bahraini opposition in 2011. They openly demanded his ouster, holding protests at Bahrain's financial harbor where they accused Khalifa bin Salman of obtaining newly reclaimed land for the symbolic payment of 1 Bahraini dinar. The reformist camp also appealed for his removal as part of a broader transition to an elected head of government. Yet in the end, the prime minister endured, drawing upon his personal ties to the Sunni community and connections to Saudi rulers. An unprecedented countermobilization by Sunnis, the deployment of Saudi-led Peninsula Shield Forces, and brute force turned back the political uprising.

The main political beneficiary of this crackdown, however, was not the prime minister. The Khawalid, another ruling faction more blatantly sectarian in approach and committed to Shia marginalization, rose in influence along with the growing importance of the security state. Political allies of the prime minister began to find themselves orphaned, while sons and grandsons looked vulnerable in their public posts. In search of relevance in his last years, Khalifa bin Salman probed political support further afield, sending Ramadan greetings to Qatar's emir and exchanging visits with a prominent Shia cleric seeking to mediate between the Shia community and the government. These acts may have signaled a discomfort with the maximalist politics practiced by the younger Gulf leaders that eclipsed his more traditional approach in his sunset years, but they did not noticeably halt his declining influence.

Royal Scions on the

Rise

The man who takes Khalifa bin Salman's place at the helm of government is in some ways a forerunner of those new generation politics. The crown prince's agenda – championing Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 plan for economic diversification while drawing to his side bright young Bahrainis eager for change – reads like an earlier run for the nationalist agendas later promoted by neighbors such as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia. Salman bin Hamad's program was complicated by the necessity of integrating the majority Shia population, prominent in labor and the private sector, into his reform program. While he undoubtedly advanced this project, it was ultimately thwarted by the accompanying political demands of the Shias and the more sectarian approach of many of his family members.

His political fortunes suffered alongside those of Khalifa bin Salman in 2011. But unlike the prime minister, Salman bin Hamad experienced a political renaissance. In 2013 he was appointed by his father as first deputy prime minister, which positioned his ascent to prime minister. This rehabilitation allowed him to resume his leadership of the economic portfolio, which has preoccupied him since his father came to power in 1999. During those earlier years, he built parallel institutions such as the Economic Development Board, a shadow government to circumvent the intransigence of the prime minister, his uncle, and to thwart his hold on public policy. The death of Khalifa bin Salman consolidates the crown prince's authority over the economic portfolio. But Salman bin Hamad has also gained leverage over the security file and his hard-line rivals in the ruling coalition as well.

This comes as King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa has been taking measures to tilt the levers of power toward his own progeny. In January, the king established a Higher Executive Committee for the Supreme Defense Council. He appointed his sons Salman and Nasser as the head and rapporteur of the committee respectively, placing them in clear lines of authority over the council, whose membership includes all three officials who compose the Khawalid

clan. This expands the security credentials of the crown prince, who is already the deputy supreme commander of the Bahrain Defense Force. In October 2019, King Hamad appointed Nasser bin Hamad al-Khalifa, the crown prince's younger half-brother, as national security advisor. Nasser bin Hamad's popular full-brother, Khaled bin Hamad al-Khalifa, is also a military officer and holds positions in sports, which provide a platform for reaching Bahraini youth.

The significant challenges Bahrain faces as the least-endowed Gulf country in a declining oil environment has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Bahrain has been managing structural budgetary problems through strong public support from its Gulf allies in the form of a \$10 billion aid package. In response, Gulf allies have required greater fiscal discipline from Bahrain, which the government has met through its Fiscal Balance Program. Bahrain has had some successes in this regard: leading the Gulf in labor reforms and restructuring the government to cut expenditures and raise new revenue.

The island kingdom remains in fiscal peril. The International Monetary Fund is projecting a 4.9% decline in gross domestic product, with Bahrain's fiscal deficit climbing to 15.7% of GDP. Even with the substantial Gulf aid, Bahrain has resorted to the debt market twice in 2020, posting a \$2 billion bond issue in both May and September. Bahrain's debt-to-GDP ratio stands at well over 100%, which has led ratings agencies such as Fitch to downgrade Bahrain's credit rating. All of this signals even greater fiscal austerity in Bahrain's future. While the government has been offering support to the private sector through the pandemic, it has also enacted across-the-board budget cuts of 30% and reformed social insurance to end the annual rise in pensions.

Serving as prime minister at a time of austerity is unlikely to increase the crown prince's popularity with the public. Pressures will come from civil servants as well as the business community, which often sought Khalifa bin Salman's intervention to thwart labor reforms.

