

BAHRAIN

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

Four issues challenging Bahrainis on 50th Independence Day

As the predicament of the political prisoners continues, people's activism on political and human rights fronts have shown no sign of abating. Whole families have protested for the past three months and called for the immediate and unconditional release of their loved ones. Streets are lined up by socially-distanced relatives, men and women, raising placards with the demands and the images of the political hostages. At the same time leaders of the opposition inside and outside jails are insisting on achieving the people's political demands. In these circumstances several developments have happened in the past month that have direct links to the situation in Bahrain.

The first is a statement by the most senior political and religious leader, Sheikh Isa Ahmad Qassim calling for a new contractual constitution that will lead to a freely-elected and fully functioning parliament. It also implies that the government should also be elected by the people and not imposed by the ruling khalifi dictators. This call marks a serious approach to the stalemated situation. Although the senior cleric has not called for the removal of the hereditary tribal regime, the implications are clear. For the past half a century, the contractual constitution has been at the centre of conflict in the country. While some sectors within the opposition continue to believe that such a constitution is possible, the revolutionary groups have given up hope that the tribal hereditary dictatorship could ever be trusted to establish a rule based on the rule of law and based on a mutually-agreed constitution. They believe that the country must now get rid of hereditary dictatorship after decades of its failure to uphold constitutional law and rule.

The second is the emergence of some calls from opposition circles that next year's "elections" should be contested by the opposition. This is a divisive call that the majority of the natives will reject. The wounds caused by khalifi atrocities are still fresh. There are in excess of 2000 political prisoners many of them condemned either to death or life imprisonment. The families of the hundreds of martyrs killed by the khalifis see this as betrayal and will resist any call to co-habit with those responsible for the murder of their children. These families of the 20,000 political prisoners be-

lieved to have been detained over the past ten years have deep feelings of resentment, anger and bitterness as their children continue to live with their horrific wounds. Up to 100 have lost one or two eyes. Many others lost limbs or became permanently crippled as a result of torture. Others lost their jobs and sources of livelihood. Families have been broken up as a result of long-term imprisonment as young wives lost hope of ever seeing their young husbands who had been condemned to life behind bars. As the khalifi regime clings to its culture of impunity and shelters torturers and abusers, the prospects of real rapprochement appear extremely remote.

The third is the sour memories of the victims of execution ordered by the khalifi tyrants. On 27th July natives remembered three young men whose lives were robbed by those killers two years ago. On that day in 2019 Ali Al Arab and Ahmad Al Malali were brutally murdered after the regime refused to listen to the pleas of their families and the human rights activists and bodies to spare their lives. In 2016 three others had been executed: Sami Mushaima, Ali Al Singace and Abbas Al Sami'e. Those killings were seen as revenge from the Bahraini natives whose rejection of the khalifi dictators has infuriated them and led to them to the language of blood to punish the natives. The victims were given the death sentence despite their innocence. The regime's torturers had forced each of them to sign "confessions" extracted under extreme forms of torture. The khalifi judges refused to refer the victims to specialized units to examine their bodies for marks of torture. Bahrainis will thus continue to reject the khalifi killers and will continue their activism to remove them from power and bring them to justice as torturers and killers.

The fourth case here is the recently disclosed surveillance of tens of thousands of journalists, human rights and political activists and other public figures. This has been going on for the past six years. Governments have used a surveillance tool called Pegasus" to infect the mobile phones of over 50,000 people around the world. The spyware was developed by the Israeli group (NSO) and used by many governments to spy on their people. The

United Arab Emirates is reported to have played great role in financing the group and other Israeli businesses as well as using it to target not only its opponents like Ahmed Mansoor but international journalists including Raula Khalaf of The Financial Times. The Saudi regime used it to track down Jamal Khashoggi and kill him at its Istanbul Consulate in October 2018. The khalifis used it extensively against native Bahrainis. A human rights activist, Sayed Ahmed Al Wada'ei is among those whose phones were targeted for surveillance. It is ironic that European countries such as UK would remain silent after the exposure of this criminal activity that targeted citizens within UK.

The above cases illustrate the extent of diversion of political stride in Bahrain between the people and the rulers. It is an unsustainable situation that has, over the decades, led to conflict between the two sides. When the British withdrew their forces from all areas East of Suez the expectation was that democracy would replace colonialism. But the past fifty years have proven the futility of those expectations. The British had no appetite for democratising the Gulf which had been under its protection for 150 years before its withdrawal. What they left behind was a legacy of dictatorship, abuse, political polarisation and moral crisis. For the past fifty years UK has been staunch supporters of those autocracies especially the rulers of Bahrain. Despite the calls for UK to change this policy, successive governments have upheld the special relations with the khalifi torturers. The present government is less inclined to criticise the khalifis for any crime they commit against native Bahrainis. This unwavering support is morally wrong and politically disastrous. It is time for UK to draw a line with its bleak recent past and adopt a new humane policy, support democracy and defend human rights. The suffering of the people of Bahrain over the past half a century must end now; UK must disengage from supporting khalifi dictators, torturers and abusers. Bahrainis will pursue their noble goals and will leave no stone unturned in their struggle to achieve democratic transformation and an abrupt end of the hereditary dictatorship.

New report documents Saudi abuses, Bahrainis go on hunger strikes

International concern is growing as the health of Mr Hassan Mushaima and Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace continues to deteriorate. Both have been targeted for serious medical negligence and other abuses. Mr Mushaima, 72 suffers multiple illnesses including heart, cancer, arthritis and ear infection. For three weeks now, Dr Al Singace has been on hunger strike demanding proper medical care, family contact and the return of a book he had finished after four years of research. Political prisoner, Ibrahim Al Mo'men and other detainees have joined in a hunger strike. Bahraini activists in London have also been on hunger strike since outside Bahrain Embassy. Yesterday the second anniversary of the execution of two native Bahrainis was marked inside and outside the country. Several protests were seen last night in various parts of the country. A seminar was held online last night to mark the sad anniversary with participants calling for the trial of khalifi senior official starting with the head of the regime. He had signed the death sentences which was unlawfully imposed on Ali Al Arab and Ahmad Al Malali who were executed on 27th July 2019. The crime was carried out despite the pleas from Amnesty International and other NGOs not to carry out the death penalty after a grossly unfair trial based on "confessions" extracted under torture. In 2016 three native Bahrainis, Sami Mushaima, Abbas Al Sami'e and Ali Al Singace were also executed by the khalifi killers. Two Bahrainis are awaiting execution; Mohammad Ramadan and Hussain Moosa. International pressure is mounting on the khalifi killers to stop these executions which are "extra-judicial killings". Following the scandal of the Israeli surveillance spyware known as Pegasus project, Bahraini journalists and activists have been summoned by the khalifi torturers. Former journalist at al Wasat newspaper, Jaffar Al

Jamri is one of those asked to appear at one of the regime's torture chambers. Democratic lawmakers in Washington have called on the Biden administration to consider placing the Israeli group, NSO Group which developed Pegasus on an export blacklist and said recent revelations of misuse reinforced their conviction that the "hacking-for-hire industry must be brought under control". The statement by four members of Congress followed reports by the Pegasus project, a collaboration of 17 media organisations including the Guardian, which investigated NSO, the Israeli company that sells its powerful surveillance software to government clients around the world.

Yesterday a native Bahraini political prisoner died as a result of gross negligence and lack of medical care. Hassan Abdul Nabi Mansoor, 35, succumbed to his sickle cell disease. He was serving a three-month sentence for calling for political reforms in the country. For several days he was pleading for medicine at the Dry Dock prison, but his jailers failed to provide him with proper medical care or medicine and his transfer to hospital was intentionally delayed. This lack of care contributed to Mr Mansoor's tragic death at young age.

Seyyed Hashem al-Wadi'i top Shia cleric has been detained in Hamad town for holding Eid prayers. The violent security raid against the Shia community is amid Al Kalifa claims on coexistence, freedom of religion and respecting diversity in the Persian Gulf Arab state. The US Department of State in its annual report on freedom of religions has quoted a number of international human rights organizations on restriction of freedom of religions targeting the Shia community in Bahrain and detention of the Shia clerics in the country.

A new crisis is developing at the notorious Jau prison. The political inmates at Bloc 20 have refused to consume their meal after they realized that filth had contaminated the

tea and food provided by the prison management. This is in addition to the poor quality of most of the supplied foods.

Yesterday an in-depth study of the Saudi prison system was launched. It was prepared by ALQST for Human Rights detailing sub-standard health and hygiene conditions, reckless medical negligence, and increasing use since 2017 of private detention facilities to carry out torture far from scrutiny. The report titled "Shrouded in Secrecy: Prisons and Detention Centres in Saudi Arabia", builds on the organisation's seven years of documenting human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Most of the prisoners surveyed were unlawfully arrested, and most of them were held without charge or release beyond the statutory time limit. Half of them developed health problems as a result of their conditions of detention, and nearly all reported torture or other forms of ill-treatment including threats, beatings, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation and denial of family contact. "The Saudi authorities have repeatedly failed to address the issues," says ALQST Deputy Director Joshua Cooper.

A Saudi court sentenced a Sudanese journalist to four years in prison for social media posts critical of the kingdom, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday. Ahmed Ali Abdelkader, a 31-year-old media personality and journalist, was jailed for "insulting the state's institutions and symbols", "negatively speaking about the kingdom's policy ... and speaking on (media platforms loyal to parties hostile to the kingdom) in a way that is harmful to the kingdom" among other charges. The charges are linked to tweets and media interviews he shared on Twitter in which he criticized Saudi actions in Sudan and Yemen.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
28th July 2021

Unlawful use of Israeli Pegasus spyware to target activists condemned

An international uproar has erupted after the uncovering of an Israeli surveillance project that has crossed many boundaries of ethics and morality. Human rights activists, journalists and lawyers across the world have been targeted by authoritarian governments using hacking software sold by the Israeli surveillance company NSO Group. The investigation by the 17 media organisations including The Guardian, suggests widespread and continuing abuse of NSO's hacking spyware, Pegasus. This is a malware that infects iPhones and Android devices to enable operators of the tool to extract messages, photos and emails, record calls and secretly activate microphones. The leak contains a list of more than 50,000 phone numbers that, it is believed, have been identified as those of people of interest by clients of NSO since 2016. NSO Group's spyware has been used to facilitate human rights violations

around the world on a massive scale, "The Pegasus Project lays bare how NSO's spyware is a weapon of choice for repressive governments seeking to silence journalists, attack activists and crush dissent, placing countless lives in peril," said Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International. From the leaked data and their investigations, Forbidden Stories and its media partners identified potential NSO clients in 11 countries: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Togo, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Bahraini regime is known for targeting activists and infecting computers with spyware. In 2014 Finfisher was used to target devices of 60 Bahrainis. Serious concerns are rising for the health of the most senior political leaders. Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, 60 has been transferred to hospital after his condition worsened. He

was on hunger strike protesting his continued unlawful detention, lack of proper sanitation and medical care. Mr Hassan Mushaima has also been transferred to a clinic which was evacuated in recent days. His family is extremely worried about his rapidly deteriorating health. The prison authorities are tight-lipped about his condition. At 72, Mr Mushaima suffers several ailments including cancer, diabetes, blood pressure, eye and knee problems. Yesterday, Father of the UK's House of Parliament Sir Peter Bottomley endorsed a motion calling for the release of political prisoners in Bahrain including Hassan Mushaima and Dr Abduljalil Al Singace.

On Friday 16th July five Parliamentarian signed a letter calling on Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to raise the case of Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace. Andrew Gwynne (Labour), Lord Browne of Ladyton (Labour), Baroness Bennett of Manor Cas-

The three Bahraini prisoners at St Helena jail, reminder of the British legacy

BAHRAINI PRISONERS (1957-1961)
The release from St Helena jail of the three Bahraini prisoners marked a special day for the struggle of Bahraini people. Fifty years after the British withdrawal the UK's relations with Bahrain remains controversial.

The three, Abdali al Alaiwat, Abdulrahman al Bakir and Abdulaziz al Shamlan, had been prominent members of the National Union Committee in Bahrain and had been tried by the ruler of Bahrain for offences against the state and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment. The ruler of Bahrain asked Britain for assistance in removing them to a British Territory and it was decided that they should be sent to St. Helena.

The British Government applied the conditions of the Colonial prisoners Removal Act, 1869 and, after consultation with the St. Helena Government, the prisoners arrived on the island on the 27th January 1957.

The three prisoners were housed under guard at the former searchlight station at Munden's Point, which had been specially prepared for the purpose. They were cared for by local male servants and kept very much to themselves.

In March 1959 one of the prisoners, Abdulrahman al Bakir, applied to the St. Helena Supreme Court for a writ of habeas corpus, in which he challenged the Governor to show that the imprisonment was lawful. Since the Governor, who at that time was also the Chief Justice of St. Helena, could not be expected to direct the issue of a writ against himself, Mr. Justice Brett of the Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria was appointed Chief Justice and brought to the island from Lagos with three Barristers from London and a Foreign Office Adviser. His application was based on technical matters concerning The Queen's Jurisdiction in Bahrain, the applicability of the 1869 Act to the prisoners sentenced by a court other than a British

Court, and the procedure followed by the various Governments in applying the Act. It was dismissed by the Supreme Court and his appeal to the Privy Council, which was heard in the first half of 1960, was also dismissed.

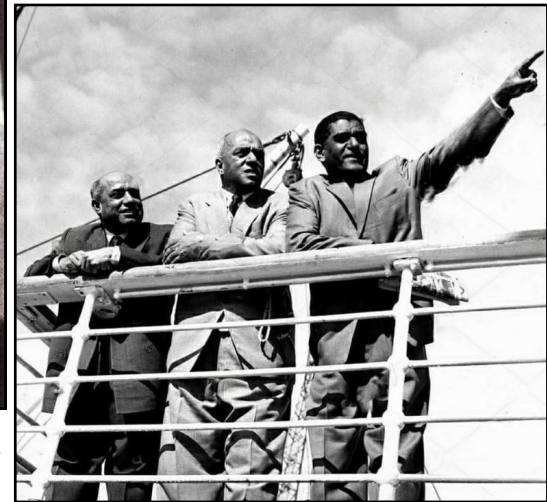
In June 1961 another of the three men, Abdulaziz al Shamlan, made a similar application. On this occasion Mr. Myles Abbott, formerly of the Nigerian Federal Supreme Court, three barristers and his solicitor came for the trial, and this time the application was successful. As the circumstances were identical in the cases of all three they were immediately released from custody and left for England by the next ship.

People still living on St. Helena remember the Bahrainis exile, though they had very little interaction with them during their stay.

A rare photo of the three leaders on board of British commercial ship "Warwick Castle" as it approached George 5th in London after they were released from their jail in St Helena. The photo was taken on 14th July 1961.



Bahraini Prisoners (Alaiwat: rear, left; Al Bakir: rear, centre; Shamlan: rear, right) Britain next (and, to date, finally) called on St. Helena's services as a prison island in 1957 to detain three Bahrainis.



tle (Green), Lord Scriven (Liberal Democrats) and Navendu Mishra (Labour) asked for the return of a book he had spent four years to write but confiscated by prison officials, an end to medical negligence and his immediate and unconditional release.

Political prisoner Hisham Al Sabbagh has entered into hunger strike to protest the ill-treatment on all levels. Two weeks ago his uncle passed away but he was not allowed to call his family to express condolences.

The regime has ordered four natives from Duraz to pay over \$2500 each as punishment for participating in a religious event. The four had participated in the commemorations of the martyrdom of Imam Mohammad Al Jawad. On 14th July regime's forces stormed many houses in Sitra and ordered their occupants to appear for interrogation. They had participated in peaceful marches calling for the release of the political prisoners. One day earlier

many youths from Duraz were also summoned to appear at Roundabout 17 police station. Several of them were detained and are still in custody.

Saudi authorities have carried out a new wave of arrests targeting academics in Abha city. This follows a crackdown on activists in May and a string of harsh prison sentences issued the month before. Repression has intensified since the Biden admin chose not to sanction MBS in February.

Dr Omar Abdulla Al Sa'doun, a Saudi religious advisor and an expert in Islamic finance, has been arrested for criticizing a new repressive law restricting the use of loudspeakers in mosques. This is part of MBS's new policy of cracking down on religious activities and traditions.

On 19th July, Human Rights Watch and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) said that a prominent Emirati human rights defender may face retaliation after a private letter he had written detailing his mistreatment in detention and flagrantly unfair trial,

was published in the regional media. United Arab Emirates (UAE) authorities have held Ahmed Mansoor, 51, largely incommunicado, isolated him from other prisoners, and denied him a bed and mattress since imprisoning him in March 2017. Mansoor is held at the notorious al-Sadr Prison near Abu Dhabi serving a 10-year prison sentence handed down on May 29, 2018, by the State Security Chamber of the Abu Dhabi Court of Appeals following a grossly unfair trial on spurious charges.

The letter, published on 16th July 2021, by Arab121, a London-based Arabic news site, details the grave violations committed by the UAE's state security agency against Mansoor since his arrest and detention. It describes being held in indefinite solitary confinement, deprived of basic necessities, and denied any meaningful contact with other prisoners or the outside world. It is an appalling situation.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
21 July 2021

Remembering Bahraini Poet Ghazi Al-Haddad (1961-2021)

By Ali al-Jamri

Ghazi Al-Haddad (1961-2021), the great Bahraini poet, died on Wednesday 23 June. Like many of Bahrain's most prolific poets, he was best known for his Hussaini poetry marking the occasions, struggles and martyrdoms that are central to Shi'a Islam, for which he will be best remembered. Yet he also wrote well-known revolutionary poems during Bahrain's 1990s intifada and poems powerfully asserting the marginalized Bahrani identity.

As I remember Ghazi, I am drawn to one of my favorite lines of his:

ونحنُ فخرُ أوائلِ في حضارتها
ونحنُ أعلى بني غربائها نسبا
لنا شمائلُ عبد القيس في كرم
ومن ربيعة طابت ريحنا حسيبا
ونحنُ جمرُ الغضا لو جئت مسجرة
لا تحسبهُ من تحت الرماد خبا

In translation:

We are the pride of Awal in all her history

We are the eldest of all her Arab communities

We bear the noblest qualities of Abdulqays

While from Rabee'a comes our fine pedigree

We are a dimmed coal – but strike the wick

From beneath the ashes, we will burn brightly

*

The poem is a powerful assertion of Bahrani identity and history, which is denied and devalued both in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In the pre-modern era, 'Bahrain' referred to the north-eastern coast of the peninsula (roughly from modern Basra to Oman), while the islands now known as Bahrain were then called Awal. Awal and the towns of Qatif and Al-Ahsa (in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province) are considered the "heartlands" of the Baharna, the longest-settled Arab community in the area, who trace their histories and lineages back to the pre-Islamic era to the Arab tribes there, among them Abdulqays and Rabee'a. Nothing demonstrates this community's marginalization more explicitly than the fact that the vast majority of political prisoners in Bahrain today are Baharna Arabs. Some bad-faith critiques would call this poem an attack on non-Baharna Bahrainis, but not so, it is an assertion of resistant existence in the face of repression.

Another of his most famous poems is "If My Tongue Was Cut" (لو كان revolutionary poem from the 90s.

"If My Tongue Was Cut" bears translating; a resistant poem written following the arrest of Sheikh Abdulamir Al-Jamri during the 90's

intifada which called for the reinstatement of Bahrain's constitution and democratically-elected National Assembly. The government had suspended both in 1975, after the assembly tried to block the passing of an onerous State Security Law that granted the security forces wide-ranging powers of arrest. Sheikh Abdulamir, my grandfather, was one of the main opposition leaders, and was instrumental in bringing together a cross-faith, cross-political coalition calling for the reinstatement of the constitution. First arrested in 1995, he spent the next five years between prison and house arrest. "If My Tongue Was Cut" speaks to Sheikh Abdulamir's imprisonment and draws comparisons to Abbas's struggle for water in the Battle of Karbala. The latter is an almost standard trope of righteous, desperate struggle within Hussaini poetry. But it is also insistent in brotherhood between Sunnis and Shia, in calls for the reinstatement of the constitution:

If my tongue was cut,

let it grow back and call out 'Jamri'

...

Abbas, if misrule should spread,
would sooner let his hands be cut

...

The Companions of Ali have returned
revolutionary by descent and blood,
And who taught the new generation
the constitution is the solution?

(This line sets off a chain of questions on who has made sacrifices for the constitutional cause, the answer to which is the imprisoned leader)

...

No Sunni, no Shia,
Brothers till Judgement Day
For Hidd and Zallaq

Are like for like Sitra and Bilad
(Hidd and Zallaq are dominantly Sunni towns, while Sitra and Bilad are dominantly Shia towns)

This call for unity is expressed throughout: the poem effortlessly weaves praise for the

imprisoned leader with references to Shia histories and calls for a national, unified opposition. While some parts read dated, it is consistently defiant and insistent on the need for a constitutional future. The poem is a time capsule for a very recent period of Bahraini history on which little has been written about, yet which is still relevant to us today.

Ghazi Al-Haddad only published one collection – Diwan Al-Huzn Al-Ma'shuq (The Adoring Sorrow), 2006, which is a collection of primarily religious poetry, and much of his religious poetry, for which he will be best remembered for in Bahrain, is available online. There is a wealth more of his work out there.

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In the last week, there has been an outpouring of grief from the poet community in Bahrain. For me, to translate felt a better way for me to remember. Of them, this poem by Zahraa Al-Motgawi affected me the most — it was how the news broke to me. Goodbye, Ghazi.

I want for a dictionary. Give me clarity
to charge my imagery with deep meaning.

*

I want for an alphabet. Between my lips
lays a poem, thick in its weighty metres.

*

I want them, so I may conduct rhymes
that draw tears on the day of mourning,

*

draw tears for our king of hearts,
to mourn the poet we lost to mortality,

*

to mourn Ghazi's voice, which fell like dew
which we wore on our skin like perfume.

*

He listened, loved Al-Hussain, heard the epics
then set alight volcanoes of sorrowful passions.

*

We said: Tomorrow he'll come, spreading
shade, and every ear shall wear his wit.

*

But death's arrow has taken him from us
and left us wandering this labyrinth, deprived.

*

On the day of departure, ingenious Ghazi, victor
of our hearts, knight among knights,
goodbye.

Ali Al-Jamri is a Bahraini writer and poet, based in the UK. A member of Young Identity and receiving mentorship from Commonword, he is also a New Writing North Arabic Translation mentee, 2021. He is the editor of the Between Two Islands poetry anthology (2021). Ali is also the guest editor of the forthcoming FOLK issue of ArabLit Quarterly (Winter 2021).

