

BAHRAIN

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Regional conflicts will eventually lead to political change

The past month witnessed active participation by the people of Bahrain in protests and demonstrations as the situation in the country continued to worsen. There were several events that triggered what seemed to be a new upheaval.

First there was the 13th anniversary of the 14th February Revolution. Activists have been planning to mark it in a proper way to ensure that the reform movement does not end. These preparations took many forms in addition to the protests and demonstrations. On Monday 14th February at least 33 such activities took place as the regime was encircled by the public demands for fundamental transformation continue unabated. On that day, the graveyards also became a focal point for the families who had lost their children over the past decade as a result of the regime's brutality. Many people visited the homes of these families to show their support and sympathy. International bodies had warned the regime against any attempt to use undue force against the peaceful protesters. Yet several protests were attacked with force leading to detentions and injuries. Support to the Bahraini revolution was expressed by noble friends in Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, UK and elsewhere. The main roads in Bahrain were lined up by family members calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the prisoners. Graffiti was abundant with slogans calling for political change and an end to impunity. Reports were issued by local and international human rights bodies to support the people and their demands. The issue of impunity has remained one of the most intractable problem in the country. Without bringing torturers and killers to justice, the situation is unlikely to change. The people will thus continue their dynamism and will not stop their protests until change has been achieved. The regime is aware of this and it has also decided to cut off with the people and seek foreign allies and defenders..

The second was a dramatic move by the khalifi regime that has taken many by surprise. In addition to establishing relations with the occupiers of Palestine in the summer of 2020, the regime has taken further steps that have angered both the Bahrainis and the Palestinians. The khalifi dictator shocked the region by effectively handing over the country to the Israelis. Last month he received the Nafthali Bennett, the Israeli

prime minister. Then a permanent Israeli liaison officer was appointed in Manama. Israeli police and army officers were also placed with the Bahraini forces. Earlier the khalifis had announced that they were giving the Israelis a free hand in the national statistics office which keeps the information on the natives. To underpin these initiatives, a senior khalifi member shocked everyone by announcing openly: MOSSAD is present in Bahrain. He was addressing a meeting in Vienna when he made this declaration that shocked the organisers of the event themselves. The woman adjudicator said: Are being sarcastic? He said this is the reality. These developments have widened the gap between the native Bahrainis and the khalifis and ensured that the two sides had reached a point of no return. The people have been so enraged that their daily protests have now concentrated on this issue. This is a serious deterioration in the morale and political inclination of the region. The Bahrainis have long supported the Palestinian cause and rejected the Israeli occupation. It is now expected that the internal situation will continue to deteriorate further. The natives are now more united than even in rejecting the regime's pro-Israeli policy and calling for the khalifis to leave the political scene.

The third development is the deterioration of the regional relations. On one hand the GCC has continued to fragment as relations among its leaders continue to deteriorate. The Saudis and Emiratis have pushed the khalifis to intensify their links with the Israelis and are being used as Guinea pigs in this dangerous game. At the same time the relations between Saudi Arabia and UAE is becoming more tense as the dreams of Abu Dhabi to extend their regional influence become more blatant. Also Iran is becoming more frustrated with the policies of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain who have intensified their normalisation process with Israel. Despite the repeated re-assurances by Iran of its readiness to improve relations with them, Tehran views these developments as a serious threat to its national security. The presence of the Israelis in the Gulf waters has been a distant possibility until these regimes changed the course of the regional alliances. Last month Bahrain went further as mentioned above and has infuriated Iran

as never before. The situation in the Gulf is thus becoming more volatile as the counter-Revolution alliance pushes ahead with its declared anti-Iran policy. The Zionist state has made it clear that it is working to entrench the anti-Iran block. This amounts to declaration of war from one side and could escalate the tension further. Whatever those involved in hatching this plot may say, the fact remains that the regional stability is now facing more serious threats as a result. It is not in interest of peace and stability to be part of secret or open plots against others. Constructive diplomacy must always remain the first choice.

Where does this state of affairs lead to? It is not easy to predict the future events but the prospect of military confrontation cannot be totally discounted. What prevents it from happening then? Other considerations are obviously weighing heavily against the rush to military confrontations. Iran is not alone in the region. It has forged strong links with Qatar and the recent visit to Doha by the Iranian president is a strong testimony to this. Syria, Iraq and Yemen are close allies of Iran. Even embattled Lebanon is unable to swim against this tide despite the Saudi pressure. It is a silent regional crisis fuelled by those who will benefit from regional discord especially when it turns into wars. One of the most pivotal factors here is the prevalence of dictatorship in the region which those powers continue to prop up. Whether they will succeed in taming the urge of the people for freedom and rights is open to speculation. But one thing is certain: Dictatorship is not self-sustaining, neither it benefits anyone, even dictators themselves. The natural momentum of the liberation movement cannot be eradicated by force or intimidation. The Israelis have supplied these dictators with the worst and most comprehensive means of surveillance, but have they eliminated the people's zeal and urge for change? While the prisons of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain remain overcrowded with the freedom fighters, dictators will not be able to sleep in peace; their fear of being toppled will ensure that their sleepless nights will continue until their downfall. This is not a distant possibility but it can happen sooner than the dictators may think.

UK court to decide on Bahrain spyware case, Saudis under scrutiny

Yesterday two Bahraini dissidents who accuse the Bahraini regime of using spyware to surveil them had their case hearing at the High Court in London. Saeed Shehabi and Moosa Mohammed, political activists living in the UK discovered that their computers were infected with FinSpy in September 2011, seven months after anti-government protests started in the country. The software, produced by UK-German company Gamma Group, can conduct live surveillance through a computer's camera and microphone to access documents, emails and messages. The judge listened to the lawyers of both parties and has reserved the judgement. The lawyers of the khalifis attempted to use the diplomatic immunity card but the judge allowed the case to be heard. The judgement will set a precedent to other victims of hacking and surveillance by their governments.

The number of the political prisoners who have been infected with Covid-19 is steadily rising, while the officials have maintained a wall of silence on the crisis. Among the latest known to have been infected is the renowned human rights activist, Naji Fateel. He has not been allowed to call his family for the past two weeks since contracting the virus. Precautionary measures to stop the spread are minimal.

Fears are growing for the lives of Jaffar Sultan and Sadeq Thamer, sentenced to death by the Saudis. The youngest sister of Jaffar has called for his life to be spared. On 20th February the khalifi court extended the detention of the Sitra children one more week for the sixth time. This confirms the sham justice of the khalifi dictators. The judge rejected the lawyers' request to release the children despite a pledge to bring them back upon request.

Five of them have been detained since December 27, 2021.

A senior figure of the khalifi junta has openly revealed the extent of the cooperation between his family and Israel. Abdulla bin Ahmad al-khalifa said that MOSSAD is Active in Bahrain. His blatant statement caused major offence to the people who see the sovereignty of their country and the safety of the people have been severely compromised by the regime's policy. No sovereign state will speak in this language or acknowledge its subservience to foreign powers. Bahrain's rulers have decided to switch sides in the Palestinian conflict by joining the Israeli occupiers.

On Monday night, Ahmed Jaafar, the prisoner who was illegally deported from Serbia to Bahrain last month, was beaten up by a Jordanian policeman named Saddam. This crime happened at Bloc 4 of the notorious Jau Prison after he had refused to be transferred to a ward with drug offenders. Ahmed was forcibly transferred to Ward 3, Bloc 12 of Jau Prison - reserved for drug offenders. He is now suffering from severe pain in his chest due to the beating. Another Yemeni policeman told him "We will make you bleed and we don't care".

A young native Bahraini remains behind bars for engaging in a debate on women rights. Sayed Ali Al Mousawi was detained few days ago by the cyber crimes department who gave no reason for his detention. He had responded to a woman lawyer who called for giving wives the right of divorce. His brother, Hashim calls for his release Aya Majzoub, Lebanon and Bahrain researcher in the Middle East and North Africa Division of Human Rights Watch tweeted: Repression has become institutionalized, as authorities detain kids, place torture vic-

tims on death row and continue to heavily restrict citizens' most basic rights.

Reprieve, the NGO which campaigns against capital punishment has launched a fund raising campaign to defend Bahraini death row prisoners. It said: Maher, Mohammed and Husain, on death row in Bahrain, depend on people like you to help fight for them. But time may be running out for them. The number of people facing execution in Bahrain has increased by 2500% since 2011. These three men depend on Reprieve's investigations, legal work and campaigns to expose the injustices they face, to fight for their human rights, and to tell the world their stories.

The Saudi human rights NGO, ALQST has confirmed that the Saudi authorities had sentenced lawyer Mut'ib al-Amri to seven years in prison for his peaceful activism. Al-Amri, detained in Dhahban Prison since 2018, was subjected to severe physical and psychological torture. He was sentenced by the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) to seven years in prison on charges of "inflaming public opinion, and criticising the symbols of the state" because of criticisms and calls for reform he posted on the Twitter account

Yesterday the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an opinion calling on the Saudi authorities to release Salman Al Saud and his father, following a complaint submitted by ALQST and MENA organisations. In their decision, the UN experts found that the princes' detention had no legal basis and that they had been targeted "for their membership of the royal family, rather than for something they have done"

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Anniversary of Bahrain's Revolution marked, Saudis issue death sentences

Eyebrows were raised by the defenders of the khalifi dictators in Washington, London and Tel Aviv after the people of Bahrain displayed massive show of revolutionary zeal to mark the 11th anniversary of their Revolution. Monday became a remarkable day when activities linked to the occasion swept through the country. The residents of Duraz, Bani Jamra, Al Markh, Abu Saiba, Shakhoura, Sanabis, Al Daih, Karzakkan, Nuwaidrat, Ma'mair. Sitra and other place defied the regime's ban and lined up the public roads raising the slogans of the 14th February Revolution. These include: People want regime change, We will not forget our political prisoners and leaders. The social media were inundated with details of these protests despite the regime's attack on civil liberties. People were beaten, detained and pursued in the narrow alleyways in desperate attempts to forestall the pro-democracy activities. Pre-emptive detentions led to the arrest of scores of youths from many towns

and villages. For the first time in four years, an elderly woman was also detained. In the past few days the regime sought to pre-empt the Revolution anniversary through mass arrests. Three natives were detained from Sanabis: Ali Ramadan, Jihad Al Sabe' and Ammar Al Nasheet. From Sitra those arrested include: Haidar Ali Nasser and Sayed Hussain Jawad. Three were detained from the town of Al Daih: Hussain Mohammad Eid, Hassan Fu'ad and Hussain Hani. Jaffar Mohammad Hassan was arrested from Al Ekr town. From Karzakkan Ahmad Abbas Ali Abbas was arrested. Hussain Mohammad Hassan Al Mutawwa' was also detained. From Ma'amir town Hisham Abdul Hassan Ashoor was detained after being summoned by the torture officials at the khalifi-run prosecution service. From Jidhafs Karzar Abdul Nabi was arrested.

The khalifi dictators have broken one more moral boundary by arresting a native Bahraini woman on political grounds. Yester-

day, Fadeela Abdul Rasool, 52, a grandmother was detained with her husband, Sayed Radhi Ali Moosa, 56 and his brother Sayed Jaffar Ali Moosa, 59. They were accused of sheltering a young relative who is wanted by the torturers.

The four young natives from Samaheej Town who have spent months behind bars have had their detention extended until 28th February while the khalifis decide their fate. Two are underaged, Hassan Mubarak, 15 and Yousuf Yasser, 17. The other two are; Jassim Mohammad, 18 and Salman Ali, 19. These detentions came as the news that the notorious Jau Prison has become infested with Covid-19. At least 67 political prisoners have been infected and banned from communicating with their families even by phone. Among those infected with Covid-19 is Ali Mohammad Reda from Abu Quwwa town and Sadiq Hassan Jawad Al Mokhowdar.

On the 11th anniversary of Bahrain's Revolution, Reprieve, which opposes capital

Suffering of Bahraini prisoners deepens, Saudis hold secret trials for activists

On 3rd February, Dr Abduljalil AlSingace's health deteriorated suddenly, forcing the on-duty doctor and an ambulance crew to intervene to treat him. He was given an oxygen mask. His health is in a fragile state as a result of 213 days of his ongoing hunger strike. Yesterday English PEN, which supports writers in jail, tweeted: Seven months ago, Dr Abduljalil Al-Singace began a hunger strike to protest prison conditions and the confiscation of his manuscript. We're deeply concerned by reports that his health has significantly deteriorated in the past week.

As the 11th anniversary of the Bahrain Revolution approaches the regime is taking preemptive steps to prevent massive participation in the expected protests. Yesterday khalifi torturers summoned Munir Mushaima, brother of martyr Sami who was executed in January 2017 with two other natives.

Jailed native Bahraini religious leader Sheikh Mirza Al-Mahroos has started a hunger strike to protest ill-treatment and lack of medical care. He has been suffering Colon disease in but has not been properly examined or treated.

Fears are growing for the life of political prisoner, Ibrahim Yousuf Al Samahiji after he was removed from his cell a few days ago. He had exhibited symptoms similar to those of Covid-19. While he was calling his family the call was abruptly ended. His cell mates said he had been moved to the isolation building. He is serving a life sentence for opposing the khalifi dictators. Another political prisoner, Salman Abbas Al Ismail, 25, from Nuwaidrat has caught Covid-19 for the second time. He has been in detention since 20th December 2017.

On Monday 7th February, 11 human rights groups said an Emirati airline RoyalJet A6-RJC plane belonging to a private airline

based in Abu Dhabi had flown Ali Jaffar from the Serbian capital Belgrade to Bahraini capital Manama where he was handed over to the Bahraini authorities. "We fear that by using your company's aircrafts to carry out Mr Ali's wrongful extradition, you may have played an active role in violating the ECHR's interim measures and article 3 of the UN Convention against Torture, which enshrines the principle of non-refoulement," the groups said in the letter published on the website of Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB). "You have also violated the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, under which business enterprises' responsibility to respect human rights requires that they seek 'to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they have not contributed to those impacts'.

Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassem, has slammed the war by Saudi Arabia on the order of the United States describing it as "a dirty war in view of religion and conscience." He said: "The full scale war against Yemeni nation was launched at the will of the US administration and carried out by a neighboring Muslim country." he added." Ayatollah Qassem made the comments in a message issued amid the worst Saudi-led attacks on Yemen.

On Monday 7th February the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) and Human Rights Watch said that Bahrain authorities are detaining six boys, ages 14 and 15, in a child welfare facility. The authorities have not provided the boys or their families with any written justification for their weeks-long detention and have denied parents' requests to be present during their interrogations and to visit their sons. The boys, from the Sitra area, are being held on

the orders of the public prosecutor's office at the Beit Batelco facility in Seef district, which a government website describes as an "institution ... for children of unknown parentage, orphans and children of broken families up to the age of 15." The children's alleged offenses appear to have occurred in December 2020 or January 2021, when they were 13 and 14, based on the boys' recollections of their interrogations. A statement by the Office of the Public Prosecution alleges they threw Molotov cocktails that damaged a car near a police station. The confessions were obtained under extreme forms of torture.

Saudi officials are said to hold secret trials for political prisoners and deprive them of meeting with attorneys and family members in order to hide the violations committed against the dissidents in jail. Sanad human rights organization which defends political and civil rights in Saudi Arabia said many of the political prisoners stand secret trials and receive arbitrary and unfair sentences based on confessions extracted under torture. The organization highlighted that Saudi authorities grossly mistreat imprisoned dissidents in flagrant violation of international principles, which demand justice and transparency in the criminal procedure. It said Saudi authorities must remedy their unfair policy toward the country's prisoners of conscience, and respect human rights. Saudi Arabia has stepped up politically-motivated arrests, prosecution and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

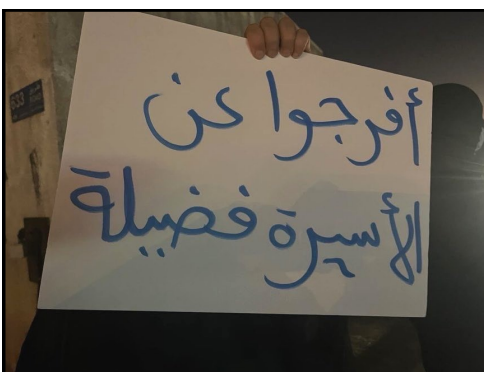
On 3 February, the Court of Appeal upheld a two-year prison sentence issued on 3 December 2021 against Abdulrahman al-Dowaish, son of the missing preacher Sulaiman al-Dowaish. Abdulrahman has been detained since 18 October 2021 for asking where his father was.

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punishment issued a statement calling for a moratorium on executions in Bahrain. It said: The number of people facing execution in Bahrain has increased by 2500% over the past decade, since that uprising in 2011. Maher Abbas al-Khabbaz is one of the people facing execution. In February 2013, Maher was arrested, detained and tortured – including being denied access to food and water. A year later, he was sentenced to death. The UK shares responsibility for what happens to him. It urged people to sign a petition to save their lives.

Abdulrahman al-Dowaish, son of the missing preacher Sulaiman al-Dowaish, has been sentenced by Saudi authorities to two years in prison for enquiring about the fate of his father. On 3 February 2022 the Court of Appeal upheld the sentence, which was originally handed down unannounced, by the Criminal Court on 9 December 2021.

As ALQST has previously reported that Abdulrahman was arrested after sending a text message to Badr al-Asaker, director of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's private office, to ask for information about his father Sulaiman, who has been forcibly disappeared by the authorities since 2016. Abdulrahman was arrested on 18 October 2021. The Saudi Quran reader, Abdul Majeed Al-



Arkani, was arrested last year and remains incommunicado. This follows his contact with a Turkish academic at a conference held by the Muslim World League in the Kingdom. Since the arrest of Al-Arkani, no news has been heard about him. Private sources reported that he was beaten and tortured during the interrogation sessions about his relationship with a Turkish figure, Yassin Aktay, to whom Al-Arkani sent a greeting message.

A young Saudi national has been had his death sentence confirmed by the Appeal court. The fate of Aqeel Al Faraj fate hinges on the forthcoming decision of the high court. Two young Bahrainis will hear next week the decision of the appeal court. Sadiq Thamer and Jaffar Sultan were arrested seven years ago from the Bahraini-Saudi causeway and falsely accused of planning sabotage activities.

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Bahraini civil society comes under renewed pressure

By Nazeeha Saeed*

Bahraini authorities are tightening their grip on civil society by targeting the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS), one of the leading rights organizations in the country. The move comes as Bahrainis have faced increasingly severe restrictions on their political and social activities since the violent crackdown on mass pro-democracy protests in 2011.

The government now apparently seeks to control all manner of civil society organizations, from human rights groups to cultural and sports clubs. Its seeming goal is to purge all members of banned political organizations from public life, using draconian laws.

Prominent rights group comes under fire

Civil society organizations in Bahrain are vetted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. In a sign of the toughening climate, BHRS—a prominent rights group—recently received a letter from the ministry which rejected three candidates for its board of directors for the upcoming year. The hopefuls included incumbent BHRS President Abdul Jalil Yousef.

In an interview with Amwaj.media, Yousef said he “rejects” the action against him and his colleagues. The BHRS president charged that he and his colleagues are being targeted on the pretext that they were members of the National Democratic Action Society, a prominent leftist political party that was dissolved by the authorities in 2017.

Many Bahraini activists and civil society organizations have come out in support of BHRS. One such voice is Mohammed Al-Jishi, an outspoken Bahraini lawyer and human rights defender. Taking to social media, he tweeted, “Resorting to the tools of political isolation and using them against members of a long-standing human rights association and preventing them from running or voting is illogical.” He added, “Such action cannot be legitimate and contradicts constitutional principles.”

The law used to silence dissent

BHRS and its supporters have focused on condemning the legal justifications for the government’s repression of political activism. In response to being targeted, the prominent rights group has stated, “It is truly regrettable that there is no exception to the political isolation law; not for welfare associations, sports clubs or social centers, and now it has even reached human rights associations.”

The law cited by BHRS is an amendment to the ‘Exercising Political Rights Act,’ which was introduced in June 2018 with the express aim of preventing former members of banned political groups



from seeking office in Bahrain’s National Assembly.

Joe Stork, the deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, told Amwaj.media that “it would be better to change the name of the ‘Exercising Political Rights Act’ to ‘Forget Your Political Rights [Act].’”

Stork elaborated, “The amendment of Article 3 prohibits Bahraini citizens who are highly involved in civil activity from even considering becoming members of parliament. It is further evidence of Bahrain’s commitment to authoritarian rule.”

Hassan Al-Marzouq, the secretary general of the Unitary National Democratic Assemblage, a leftist opposition group, described the law as a “weapon used by the government against its opponents when needed.” Marzouq said this “confirms the complete reversal of the reform project launched by the King” and is a “complete repudiation of democracy.”

In a conversation with Amwaj.media, Marzouq charged that the law is aimed at marginalizing the political organizations that are most representative of Bahrain’s population, which he bases on them drawing majority support in past elections. “How can we describe what is happening today when three associations of public weight are punished by this unjust and iniquitous law,” Marzouq proclaimed, referring to Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, the National Democratic Action Society, and the Islamic Action Association—all of which are presently outlawed.

Bahrain’s uncertain political future

Al-Wefaq was once the largest bloc in the lower house of the Bahraini parliament, holding 18 out of 40 seats, before its legislators stepped down during the 2011 protests. The party was subsequently disbanded by the authorities.

Ali Al-Aswad, a former Wefaq MP, told Amwaj.media that the political isolation law is being extended beyond its mandate of targeting those running for parliament to punish citizens working in civil society organizations, including BHRS. He said the law amounts to “collective punishment” of all Bahrainis and indicates that the government does not seek to move forward with a more inclusive political process.

There was a time when Bahrain’s monarchy appeared open to allowing for greater freedoms. In 2001, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa introduced the National Action Charter, which was approved via a referendum and established an elected parliament.

MP Falah Hashem told Amwaj.media that the charter put forward by the monarch had a positive impact on economic, social, and political life in Bahrain, but he lamented that the country has regressed 21 years later. “Bahrain needs steps to recover and ensure the participation of all segments and forces of society in the political process and community activities,” Hashem said, “Bahrain needs to restore its unity by opening up to all.”

On the other hand, the lawmaker noted that some positive developments have occurred in recent times, such as prison reforms and steps towards bringing Bahrain in line with international conventions on human rights. He described these as “preliminary steps that can be built on to ensure civic participation for all.” Ultimately, Hashem said, for reform to be meaningful Bahrain needs to repeal laws that “deprive many citizens of rights guaranteed by the constitution, such as participating in elections as voters or candidates.”

Bahrain, Human rights, Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, Bahrain Human Rights Society

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