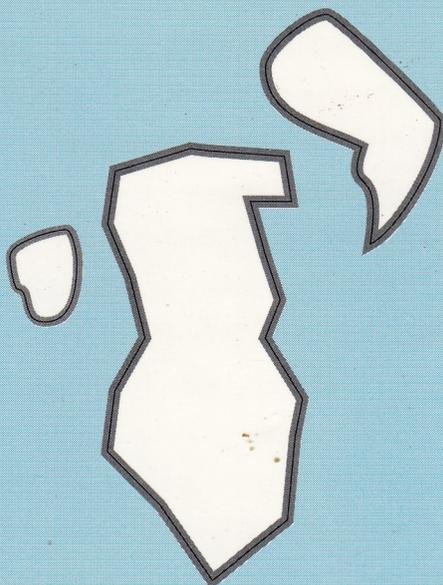


# BAHRAIN

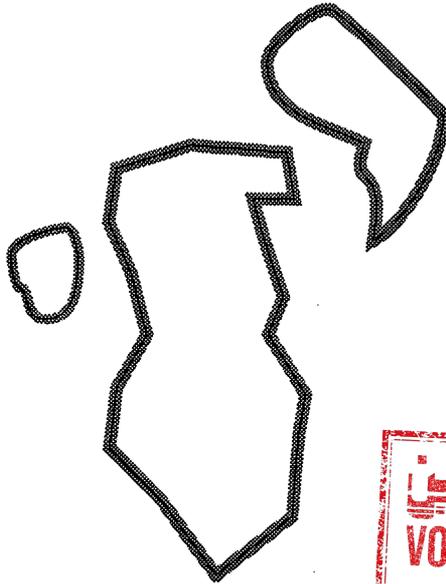
## The Drive for Democracy



By  
Konstantin Matveev

# BAHRAIN

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## Introduction

Bahrain is a small state in the Gulf. The name, which means Two Seas, applies both to an archipelago of some 33 islands and the principal island which is connected to Saudi Arabia by a causeway. If Bahrain is minuscule, a mere dot on the map, size cannot hide a magnificent history. It lies between latitude 25 degrees 32 seconds & 26 degrees and 20 seconds North and longitude 50 degrees 20 seconds & 50 degrees 50 seconds. Bahrain is the smallest amongst its neighbours with a total area of 695 sq. km (about 270 sq. miles) versus 674 sq. km in 1976. The slight increment in size is due to land reclamation.

Bahrain island (also known as Awal) accounts for 85% of the total area. Muharraq island is 3.25%, Sitra 2.07% and Nabih Saleh 0.11%. Hawar group of islands is off the coast of Qatar. Qatar and Bahrain are disputing the sovereignty of the uninhabited (but potentially oil and gas-rich) islands.

Bahrain land is composed of sand and bare rock. Most of the islands are surfaced with hard limestone rock. The north and west of Bahrain are suitable for agriculture. Sweet spring water has been depleting at a fast rate in recent years. The climate is hot in summer and mild in winter. From November to April, the period is very pleasant, with temperatures ranging from 15 to 24 degrees centigrade. Average temperature is 36 degrees centigrade with high humidity. The annual average rainfall is approximately 77 millimeters.

The population of Bahrain is 585,400 (68% citizens, 32%

foreign residents). Citizens make up about 400,000 (1997 estimates). The citizens concentrations (residents in areas) are approximately as follows (based on 1990 estimates): Manama 24.4%, Muharraq 20.1%, Jidhafs 12.5%, Isa Town 8.4%, Sitra 8.2%, North-Western Region 7%, South (including Riffaa) 6.3%, Western Region 5.4%, Central Region 5.4%, Hidd 2.3%. The Gross Domestic Product GDP is \$5.0bn (1995) and per capita is \$8,100.

There are approximately 190,000 workers in Bahrain, of whom 84,000 are citizens and 106,000 are foreigners. Many thousands of foreigners are employed in the military and security services. Estimates are based on the Military balance 1996/7 issued by the IISS: army (8,500 personnel), navy (1,000), air force (1,500), coast guard (250), police (9,000), and recently the National Guard, an army unit designated for suppressing internal dissent (number not known).

Here in remote times, some 10,500 years BC was a Sumerian state - Dilmun - then considered a paradise on earth, and a foundation for a human civilization. Bahrain engaged the attention over many centuries of scholars and researchers from many countries and enormous volumes, books and articles were written. Scholars focused on its various aspects - history, economy, sociology, culture, traditions and habits. Not deeply explored, however, was the political history, notably the struggle of the national, patriotic forces for democracy, civil rights and liberties - those virtues which in Europe have long been taken for granted.

Political problems, a recurring theme with Bahrainis, have been complicated and bloody. Bahrain was effectively controlled by the British for 150 years up until 1971. Independence was declared on 15 August 1971. The present ruling family (the Al-Khalifa) invaded Bahrain (from Zubara in Qatar) in 1783 and again in 1809-10. Britain controlled the island starting from 1820 through a series of treaties and laws issued via (Order-in-Council) that started with protection and management of external affairs to

administering internal matters.

After World War I it was the British, the island's protectors by treaty, who themselves initiated moves for administrative reforms through their advisers, political residents and agents and officers based in Bahrain. In 1926, the ruling shaikh was assigned his own independent adviser, Charles Belgrave, who served for 31 years, in the wake of British Government representatives, such as Dickens and Daly, who had wanted to modernize Bahraini society. Belgrave, however, halted this process. In essence, from 1926 till the present day - apart from the years 1973-75 when a constitution and a national assembly existed - this period has been marked by tense struggle by the people for civil rights and liberties. The abrogation of the constitution and banning of parliament in 1975 have led to the current unrest in which young and old are involved.

In the struggle, patriotic forces faced bullets, batons and prisons. Those with weapons have an advantage, but they will not prevail over the people who form an overwhelming majority and have a strong will to win. The present conflict could lead to more unrest unless a peaceful settlement can be found. A solution must lie in dialogue between equal partners but the ruling Al-Khalifa family is not yet prepared for this. This book is devoted almost entirely to the history of the Bahrainis' fight for freedom, independence and life enhancement. Decades of arrests, exile and the separation of families have caused massive grief. The situation of two adversarial camps cannot continue. History shows one must give in or perish. Great empires - Assyria, Babylonia, Ancient Persia, Ancient Rome, the Russian and British empires - came to an end because of the existence of eternal and sharp centrifugal forces. The British discovered a method of survival through manoeuvre, enabling the empire to become a Commonwealth of Nations.

The British Kingdom learned from the example of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and the execution of King Charles I

(1649) that trifling with the people and fighting against them were perilous. It was necessary to listen to the people and heed their problems for the monarch to sit safely on the throne. What is the future of the Al Khalifa dynasty, which shows no willingness to listen to the people?

The democratic forces in Bahrain were running against a brick wall. Not surprisingly, Lord Avebury subtitled his book (1996) of correspondence with the British Foreign Office, 'A Brick Wall'. This is not to say that relations between Government and people in Bahrain were totally deadlocked; and even if they were, given the will, a way out could be found. World public opinion, reinforced by the mass media and literature, can bolster democratic forces in Bahrain and have an important influence on the Government. One of the tasks of this book is to highlight the underlying background for the conflict. I must express my gratitude to Lord Avebury, head of seminars on human rights in the British Parliament, and to Bert Mapp, author of an excellent book on Bahrain.

## 1. Dilmun-Bahrain from ancient times till fall of the Portuguese yoke

The most ancient history of mankind informs us that there were three earthly paradises. One, in the region of Lake Van in south-east Turkey, is considered the cradle of Indo-European peoples. They dispersed in various directions. The second, most famous paradise, known as the Garden of Eden in south Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) was where Adam and Eve had lived. The third, least known, paradise was Dilmun, presently known as Bahrain. We meet the name Dilmun in the Assyrian-Babylonian cuneiform, in the Akkadian cuneiform as Nidukki and in Sumerian mythology in two variants as Nie Dukkan (hide market) and as Teimot (erect a monument).

In Sumerian legends, Bahrain was named God's paradise, referring to the Water God of the Sumerians, Enki, and his wife-deity Ninhursaga. But the Sumerians were not indigenous to Bahrain-Dilmun or the Gulf. They were Mongoloids, known as Khasis, and because of the rising levels of the oceans immediately after the Ice Age (about 10500 BC) they migrated to north-western India and, more precisely, to the region of the Brahmaputra River Valley and this resettlement may be related to story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve. (*Bahrain and the Gulf, Past Perspectives and Alternative Futures* Ed by J B Nugent and Th H Thomas. Croom Helm, London and Sydney, 1985, p 15).

The Khasis created their religious centre on the Kama-Khya Hillock south-west of today's city of Gauhati. The priest clan of these Khasis bore the name of Sumer, which obviously

meant 'to throw a sudden burst of spears', showing they were at the same time a military elite. "At approximately 8500 BC, another more violent catastrophe, the great flood described in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Book of Genesis, and the legends of many peoples devastated the human race." (Ibid, p 12)

There were several reasons for this catastrophe, according to different scholars. One piece of evidence we find in the book by the renowned German specialist Otto Muck, who wrote that "at 8 pm on June 5th, 8498 BC, the core parts of Asteroid A punched the first decisive hole in the fracture zone on the Atlantic Ridge. And the forces of hell were let loose. Through these two newly formed vents the growing, red-hot magma shot up at terrific speed and mixed with the waters of the Atlantic. This created all the conditions for a submarine volcanic eruption of the greatest possible violence. The fracture seam was torn apart. The bottom of the sea burst open to the north and to the south. All existing volcanoes were activated and new vents were formed. "Terrestrial fire and ocean water became embroiled in ever increasing volume. Magma mixed with steam. The chain of fire ran all the way between the two continents, from the Beerenberg volcano on Jan Mayen in the north to Tristan da Cunha in the south. "And it must have all happened at fantastic speed. For two minutes the trajectory of the descending asteroid flashed across the sky. Its impact caused a tidal wave, but before this reached the coasts the gates of the underworld had burst open and the fire erupted before the deluge could drown everything. The volcanic eruptions ran along the entire fracture in a huge chain reaction, and fresh masses of magma and water were continually thrown into the all-destroying battle of the elements". (Muck, O., *The Secret of Atlantis*. Collins, London, 1978, pp 185-186)

The same flood was described in the Bible: "The same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights and the waters prevailed

and were increased greatly upon the earth, and prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered." (The Holy Bible, Genesis, Chapter 7, verses 11-19) .

Other scientists think that the catastrophe took place in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, causing volcanic eruptions and forming deep trenches in the oceans. The Mongoloids were forced to retreat to other countries in their ocean-going vessels. On their travels, the Mongoloids-Sumerians met Bahrain-Dilmun, which was called in their native language (Khasi), as we have already said, 'Nie Dukkan' or 'Tei Mot' - 'hide market' or 'erect a monument'. Through the Assyrian-Babylonian pronunciation the word Dilmun came into being and became known world wide. The Sumerians, forced to flee by the all-destroying floods, "built ocean-going canoes, loaded them with domesticated animals and other useful objects and sailed into what is now the Gulf, landing at present-day Bahrain. The leader of the expedition, Ziusudra, the high priest of the moon-god, was later identified by the names Utnapishtim and Noah. "The Sumer established a relatively progressive, brotherhood oriented, animal herding, farming and commercial civilization on the island of Bahrain, and founded their irrigation-based agricultural society on a rigid caste system." (*Bahrain and the Gulf*, p 17).

But on Dilmun, the Sumerians recreated their old traditions, except human sacrifices, built up canals and re-established their old irrigation system and "established brotherhood as the primary ethical ideal of their society. All adult males were expected to treat other men of their nation as brothers, and it is well known that during later times male Sumerians actually addressed each other as brothers."

After a short period of time Dilmun became the centre of sea trade, standing "at the most important crossroads between the Far East, the Indus River Valley, the Fertile Crescent, the

Red Sea, and the east coast of Africa. Given its easy defensibility, plentiful water supply and strategic location, Dilmun was ideally endowed to eventually become the world's first major centre of long distance trade. "Assuming that the word Nidukki indeed denotes hide market, this raw material for clothing appears to have been its most important export. In all likelihood, the earliest primitive forms of merchant capitalism originated on this island." (Ibid, pp 18)

Little by little, the Sumerian population increased and had to extend their settlements to the Persian coast and Mesopotamia. They brought their civilization, language and religion and in south Mesopotamia around 4500 BC established Ur, Eridu, Larsa, Lagash, Sippar, Niepur, Kish and many other cities. The Akkadian King Sargon the Great stopped Sumerian expansion in Mesopotamia at about 2300 BC and incorporated Bahrain-Dilmun in his empire. The Babylonian empire, which succeeded the Akkadian, took over Bahrain-Dilmun and maintained its role of commercial centre. It became Assyrian when Babylonia was in turn conquered and so remained until 612, the year of Assyria's destruction by Media and Babylonia. In 539 BC, the Persians conquered Babylonia and Bahrain-Dilmun was absorbed into the Babylonian empire and later on into the empires of Alexander the Great, Achamenid, Arshakid and Sasanid.

In the seventh century AD, Bahrain was conquered by Islamic forces and henceforth was an Islamic land. The Muslim Arab invaders established some commercial and economic centres, the Masjid Al-Khamis (Al-Khamis Mosque) and later Bilad Al-Qadim. When the Damascus Caliphate was created in the seventh century, Bahrain became part of it. Umayyad rule lasted some 90 years and then Bahrain fell into the hands of the Abbasid dynasty, ruling from Baghdad. This period saw many rebellions in the Arab Caliphate, which forced many Shia Muslims to flee to Bahrain, where the Shia element was dominant in number, a phenomenon which survives today.

At the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the

tenth, the Carmalithian movement was initiated in eastern Arabia. Close to the Ismaili sect and led by Abu Said Al-Jannabi, they persecuted the local population, who had no wish to submit. Those who disagreed with the Carmalithians (outside Bahrain) were forced to find refuge in Bahrain, where they gathered their resources, formed an army and declared war on the Carmalithians in 1058. Abul Bahlul led a revolt against the Carmalithians that led to the end of their rule. Another ruling family, Al-Ayuni, governed Bahrain at the beginning of the 15th century. Early in the century, Shaikh Ibrahim Al-Maliki, ruler of Qatif and Al-Hasa, included Bahrain in his state. From his cruel rule came salvation in 1487, when Omanis invaded and governed.

The arrival of the Portuguese was random, for their goal was India. At the end of the 15th century, a squadron of ships, commanded by the navigator Vasco da Gama (1497-1499), sailed from Portugal for India and on the way discovered the Gulf and Bahrain. In 1510, the Portuguese realised the value of Bahrain and the Gulf as outposts to protect their conquests in the Indian Ocean. Vasco da Gama was succeeded as viceroy of India by Alfonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515) who, in the year of his death, captured the Strait of Hormuz. Bahrain was under the control of the ruler of Hormuz, who was in turn subordinate to the Persian Shah. The Portuguese intervened and snatched Bahrain in 1521. The Portuguese rule was marked by extreme cruelty and heavy taxes, against which the people rebelled. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Middle East, in Anatoly, the Turks came to power with Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566), to whom a delegation of Bahraini notables was sent in 1534 with greetings. In 1535, Turkish troops were in control of the northern part of the Gulf, while the Portuguese controlled the south. Confrontation continued until 1560 and the victory of the Portuguese, who ruled Bahrain until 1602. During this period, another growing power, Persia, began to show interest. Together with the Bahrainis, who hated both Turks and Portuguese, the Persians assisted the internal revolt that overcame the

Portuguese. However, the Portuguese threat was not finished and many attempts were made to re-impose their yoke up to the end of the 17th century.

## 2. Pearl of the Gulf

The population of Bahrain was the most prosperous and advanced nation in the Gulf. As a trading pearl centre and as a centre of knowledge, Bahrain was always held at high esteem. It was always known for its sweat spring waters, pearls, palm trees and scholars. For example, Captain Ahmad bin Majid described Bahrain in 1489 saying "Awal (an old name of Bahrain) the island of 360 villages, sweat water, pearls and one thousand trading boats" (see Monik Kervran, Bahrain in the 16th Century, Ministry of Information, Bahrain, 1988). A postgraduate (MA) dissertation submitted in 1952 by M. G. Guriawala to the University of London described one of the great philosophers of Bahrain, Sheikh Maitham Al-Bahrani (1201-74): "when Bahrani discusses the views of the opponents, he generally reproduces them with definite fairness. This is shown by comparing his account of these views with the original versions of such views as set forth by the authors in these classical works on Muslim theology and philosophy, such as Al-Asha'ari, Al-Baghdadi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, etc. He sets these views in order numbering in an exact way. Then he replies to them one by one in accordance with their numerical order. In his replies to the objections and doubts raised by his opponents, he may seldom write with passion, but rather proceeds to prove the falsity of these views with logical coolness".

In his PhD theses (University of London), M. A. Al-Tajir states "For centuries, the Shia Arabs (Baharnah) had been involved in traditional trades and crafts, such as date-cultivation, fishing, weaving, sail and mat-making,

boat-building, pottery and some other cottage industries of lesser economic significance.

Portuguese dominion over Bahrain was brutal. Through barbaric policies, the rulers tried to quell the spirit of a proud, strong people. Mutinies and rebellions were mercilessly repressed, but eventually the Portuguese were expelled. Though ruling for several generations, the Portuguese "were unable to sink roots, however superficial or marginal, in any segment of society. Their effects on life-style language, architecture, and the authority system were virtually nil. The Portuguese oppressive measures earned them nothing but enmity of the native population, and when their grip on trade and garrison began to loosen in the 17th century they were instantly obliterated. A combination of forces - European competition, the persistent longing of the emperors and kings of Persia to expand their dominion into the Gulf, plus native Arab resentment - worked to put an end to Portuguese rule and monopoly. They were ousted from Bahrain in 1602, from Hormuz in 1622 and from Masqat, their last stronghold in the Gulf, in 1651 or 1652." (Fuad I Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain, The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in an Arab State*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, and London, 1980, pp 16-17).

The Dutch appeared in the Gulf at the end of the 16th century and had their own ambitions - to win the spice trade between India and Europe. But their supremacy in Bahrain and the Gulf was limited, by two factors. One, the local population did not want to exchange one foreign yoke for another, Portuguese for Dutch. The other reason was the emerging power in the area of Great Britain in the image of the British East India Company. This new political force destroyed the Dutch presence in the Gulf. "At the beginning of the 18th century, the Dutch began to give in to the British, and by about 1766 they were forced to abandon their last part on Kharj Island. By this time British influence and trade had become supreme in the Gulf, often with Persian help, in

spite of some short-lived interruptions by the French in 1763." (Ibid, p 17).

We have mentioned above the foreign oppressors of Bahrain. At the same time, we would like to mention the Arab forces which seized Bahrain and tried to establish their own perpetual rule. Among them were the rulers of Oman who seized Bahrain. The Persians, who controlled Bahrain after Portuguese evacuation, were defeated by the Omanis who took over Bahrain and other islands between 1717 and 1720. When a new Shah of Persia, Nadir Shah (1734-44), came to power, his troops and fleet extended their influence to Bahrain and some minor islands. During this period Bahrain was internally controlled by Bahrainis with their capital located in Bilad al-Qadim.

### **3. Al-Khalifa "conquers" Bahrain**

In the 18th century, piracy in the Gulf led to instability and Bahrain suffered the most, since it retained a prosperous trade in pearls and enjoyed a highly esteemed reputation as a centre of knowledge and scholarly. Bahrainis disagreed amongst themselves on the best way to defend their islands and preserve their security. This disagreement gave an opportunity for the present Al-Khalifa family to gather its allies and attack Bahrain in 1783. The invasion of Bahrain was brutal resulting in the mass killing and plunder. The union of Utub tribes (Al-Khalifa), with their cradle in the Zubara region of Qatar, managed to capture Bahrain. Since that time, the Al Khalifa family considered themselves conquerors and ruled Bahrain by sheer force and persecution of the indigenous population, known as Bahranah.

As stated, at that time there existed an internal conflict as to the best way to defend the islands which suffered immensely from raids by pirates and invaders who killed many people during their plunder of the island. Bahrain attracted all types of people because it was the wealthiest place in the Gulf as a result of its pearl trade. In one of their trips to Bahrain a member of the Al-Khalifa quarreled with a Bahraini in Sitra island (on the East of Bahrain shores) about the purchase of an item. This quarrel led to the death of one of the Al-Khalifa slaves.

To revenge this death, the Al-Khalifa attacked Sitra and killed many innocent people. The mood in Bahrain demanded a revenge to this attack. A Bahraini naval force

moved to besiege the Al-Khalifa in Zubara (Qatar). This military operation failed to achieve its target. The return of Bahrainis without punishing the Al-Khalifa intensified the internal conflict. At that time, the Persian ships (which are part of a protection agreement with local rulers in Bahrain) suffered a defeat at the hands of the Ottomans in the northern part of the Gulf. This piece of news spread and reached Al-Khalifa. The Al-Khalifas mustered their forces and tribal allies for an attack on Bahrain and managed to overrun the local government that was in disarray. (See Mohammed Ali Al-Tajir, *Okod al-Aal fi tarikh Awal*). The head of the Al-Khalifa tribe, Ahmad bin Muhammad, who succeeded his brother Khalifa in 1782, captured Bahrain in 1783. He named himself Al-Fateh, meaning the Conqueror. This concept runs deep in the heart of the problem. For the Al-Khalifa to call themselves Conquerors (Fateh) means they legitimized for themselves the killing of the natives of Bahrain as well as the confiscation of properties. As a result of this medieval concept and policy, the natives (the Baharnah) were transformed from owners of the land to "forced-labour" in their plots of land. The Al-Khalifa "Conqueror" kept his residence in Zubara and ruled Bahrain from a distance until his death in 1796. A bloody quarrel broke out over shares in the Bahrain booty. Al-Jalahima and their allies attacked Al-Khalifa, until 1826.

## 4. Omanis and Wahhabis in Bahrain

Ahmad bin Mohammed's short reign (1783-96) was helped by the prosperity of Bahrain's trade and pearl fishing, but the period after his death, until 1869, brought instability, wars, feuds and invasions. "The first to threaten Al-Khalifa were the Wahhabis, who captured Al Hasa in 1795 and from there began to descend upon Zubara. They besieged and occupied the town in 1796 and it was completely demolished by Salman bin Ahmad, who succeeded his father and became chief of Al-Khalifa and their allies. After his defeat in Zubara, Salman and his followers retreated to Bahrain and settled in Jaw on the east coast.

"In about 1800 they left Jaw for Muharraq and for Rifa, where Salman built an impressive citadel still used by his descendants. In 1799, the Imam of Masqat attacked Bahrain on the pretense that Al-Khalifa were not paying him tribute for the passage through the Strait of Hormuz, then under his control. His attack was repulsed, but between 1799 and 1801 he forced the Al-Khalifas out of the island and took 25 Al-Khalifa hostages to Masqat. To protect his newly occupied territory, the imam built a fort at Arad in Muharraq Island and appointed his son, Salim, as agent to manage the affairs of Bahrain.

Between 1799 and 1802, the Sultan of Muscat controlled Bahrain at a time of internal resistance to the Al-Khalifa. A new political and religious movement, the Wahhabis, now appeared on the mainland of Arabia. The founder, Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1791), turned his face

to Bahrain and other Arab states, and his army, linked to other tribes, occupied Bahrain. Between 1803 and 1809, Bahrain was under the influence of the Wahhabis. (R Wilkinson, *Speak Together of Freedom, the Present Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain*. The Parliamentary Human Rights Group, UK, March 1996, p 4).

In 1809, the Al-Khalifa allied themselves to the Sultan of Muscat and attacked Bahrain to re-establish their rule. Up until 1820, Bahrain was plunged into anarchy. In 1820, the Al-Khalifa sought to become a party of the General Treaty that provided the Al-Khalifa the protection of the British. Between 1820 and 1869 members of the Al-Khalifa family clashed against each other. In 1869, the British intervened and installed the 18-year old Isa bin Ali. His rule lasted until 1923, under which the Shia (Baharnah) were treated like slaves on demand. In February 1922, the Baharnah revolted against the bondage conditions that transformed them from owners and controllers of the land to overburdened, taxed and persecuted population. The British intervened and removed Isa bin Ali in 1923 to restore internal security.

Their conditions before 1923 were described by the (British) Resident as follows: "The mass of the people of Bahrain who are Shi'ahs, were the sufferers and their condition resembled that of helots, who could call no lands nor produce of any lands their own".

Land (in the pre-Al-Khalifa era) and property were held individually according to the Islamic law of 'ihya', which literally means 'bring back to life.' According to this law, whoever cultivates or continues to cultivate a plot of land, earns the right of its usage - a right he passes on to his children. The Al-Khalifa conquest brought with it a strong presence of Sunni Arab tribes who intensified struggle for power between Al-Khalifa claimants and between them and their tribal allies. "Interfactional wars between Al-Khalifa claimants did more damage to Bahrain society and economy than did the invasions of their enemies. Among the groups

who stood to suffer most were the Shia, who lived both in villages and cities. (Fuad I Khuri, pp 28-29)

In 1802, the Omani fleet left Bahrain. Al-Khalifa, who had retreated to Zubara, re-attacked the island and drove the Omanis away, with the assistance of the Wahhabis.

The Omanis, persistent, repeated their invasions in 1802 but were crushed and put to flight. Another enemy appeared in 1803. Now the Wahhabi leaders were captors and Bahrain stayed under their control until 1810. A weakening of the Wahhabi state in Arabia enabled Al-Khalifa to recapture Bahrain - this time with the help of a former enemy, the Imam of Masqat. Through an agreement, Al-Khalifa had to pay tribute to the Imam until 1813. When weakness overcame the Imam, Al-Khalifa put aside his treaty and signed the General Treaty of Peace with the British authorities in 1820. In 1820, the Khalifa ruler signed the first of a series of treaties which established Britain as protector of Bahrain, a supposedly independent state. Under this protection, the Khalifa shaikhs consolidated a feudal system of government, while the British Government gained a valuable base on the Indian trade route. The Gulf came under India Office administration, and Persia provided bases for the Royal Navy and Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf until their transfer to Bahrain. "Where Britain had treaty relations with shaikhdoms - notably Bahrain, Kuwait and the Trucial Coast - a political agent was appointed (with the rank of captain or major), answerable to the resident (customarily lieutenant-colonel). These officials had a dual role - to safeguard Britain's interests and to handle the foreign affairs of the shaikhdoms. (see H V Mapp, *Leave Well Alone*, Prittle Brook Publishers, Southend, 1994, p 47).

## **5. British Protection**

Though protected by the Treaty and the British navy and troops from predators - from Iran, Turkey, Masqat, the Wahhabis and so on - Bahrain was still attacked four times by Omani troops and navy, in 1816, 1820, 1822 and 1828. However, the Omani army was repulsed by Al-Khalifa troops headed by Abdullah bin Ahmad and Khalifa bin Salman. (Fuad Khuri, p 27)

"The Omani invasion of 1828 was the last battle against external threats (other than the Al-Khalifa). The General Treaty of Peace and the subsequent treaties concluded in 1861, 1880 and 1892 neutralized external forces threatening the island from all sources: France, Germany, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, the Wahhabis, the Omanis and even dissident factions within Al-Khalifa in Bahrain. This series of treaties induced greater, and gradually more direct, British involvement in the internal affairs of Bahrain, reaching a climax in 1919 immediately after the First World War." (Ibid, p 27)

As scholars witness, Al-Khalifa settlement raised many conflicts in Bahrain society which were ruining the country until 1869. "Al-Khalifa began to divide into two opposed factions immediately after their departure from Zubara and their settlement in Bahrain, with Salman bin Ahmad and his followers settling at Manama Island and his brother settling at Muharraq Island. At that time the two islands were separated by a narrow inlet that hindered communication. Gradually, Abdullah came to rule almost independently in

Muharraq and Salman in Manama, each retaining a separate tribal administration. "This duality of the ruling regime deepened the rift between Abdullah and Salman and eventually created an unworkable arrangement.

The conflict between them was heightened in 1834 after the death of Khalifa bin Salman, who succeeded his father in 1826. On the death of Khalifa bin Salman, his uncle Abdullah, who by now had crowned his rule of Muharraq by successful raids against the Wahhabis in Qatif and Uqair, became sole ruler of Bahrain. The rulers of Bahrain at this time had claims over many ports and forts between Damman and Qatar on the mainland. In 1835, Abdullah bin Ahmad had to contend with a rebellion in Qatar, engineered by one of his sons, supported by Isa bin Tarif, chief of the Huwaila tribes, then composed of Al-BinAli and Al-BuAinain. It took Abdullah time and force to smash the rebellion in Qatar, but he was not supported in this case by the Huwaila tribes. "Abdullah continued his military action and in 1842 he began a petty war against Muhammad bin Khalifa, the ruler of Manama. Abdullah's sons at the same time were trying to take money from pearl dealers, traders and merchants and all this in an unlawful way. Certainly, in such a situation, the British authorities were not indifferent towards his actions. And they responded to them adequately. (Ibid, p 30)

But Abdullah's policies in external and internal affairs brought real chaos to Bahrain and its population. Scholars came to the conclusion that "the continuous feuds and wars during the later part of Abdullah's reign exposed the population of Bahrain, particularly Shia, to all kinds of extortion and plunder, forcing many to emigrate to other ports and cities of the Gulf, notably to Muhammarah (Khurramshah) in Iran". (Ibid, p 30)

When Muhammad bin Khalifa - a far relative of Abdullah - received a serious defeat he fled to the mainland to enlist Wahhabi support. With their assistance, Muhammad seized Murair fort in Zubara. From there, and helped by supporters

in Manama, he attacked Bahrain and defeated Abdullah on Muharraq Island. Abdullah left for Damman fort and gained support from the Trucial Coast and Iran for an assault on Bahrain. But he faced British opposition and when Damman fort fell to Wahhabi forces, Abdullah was induced to leave for Iran and later for Qatif. Here he prepared another offensive against Bahrain but an expedition in 1845 failed. He tried again in 1846. While trying to balance Turkish and Iranian claims, he took more decisive measures against the Wahhabis, who were forcing their conquest through the sons of Abdullah. He blockaded the Wahhabi coast at Qatif and Damman, refusing to cease even after the British confidentially offered to guarantee the security of Bahrain.

So far as the British were concerned, they wanted "to keep Bahrain under their control without being officially responsible for it. The British used diplomacy to neutralize Turkish and Iranian claims and military muscle to bring Muhammad bin Khalifa back into line. They besieged his war fleet in Bahrain, captured two war vessels, Tawila and Hamarah, and forced him to call off his blockade. And again he was crushed by Muhammad bin Khalifa and took refuge in Masqat where he died in 1849. We consider that since this time Bahrain was left in the hands of Al-Salman branch of Al-Khalifa and this control continues today.

"Al-Salman control of Bahrain, however, was not left unchallenged. Various claims to this island were advanced by the Wahhabis, the Turks and the Iranians. "Muhammad bin Khalifa tried to balance the Turkish and the Iranian claims by pretending to side with both at the same time. It is said he possessed both Turkish and Iranian flags and hoisted either one to appease whoever approached him first. "British intervention ended in the Treaty of 1861, in which the ruler of Bahrain pledged himself to abstain from the 'prosecution of war, piracy and slavery at sea' in return for British protection,. By signing this treaty, Bahrain became party to the Perpetual Treaty of Peace concluded earlier with the chiefs of the Trucial Coast. The conclusion of this treaty was

followed by British bombardment of Damman with the object of forcing the Wahhabis to withdraw their support from Muhammad bin Abdullah, now the claimant to the principality of Bahrain against his cousin Muhammad bin Khalifa. Consequently Muhammad bin Abdullah, with several of his brothers, left Damman for Qais Island. "In 1867, trouble again erupted in Qatar with a mutiny in Wakrah and Dawha against Bahrain's resident ruler Ahmad bin Muhammad Al-Khalifa who had seized a Badu emissary deported to Bahrain. "The mutiny was quelled by removing Ahmad to Khur Hasan and inviting Jasim bin Muhammad Al-Thani, one of the chiefs of Al-Thani in Dawha, to Bahrain to negotiate a more lasting arrangement for the administration of Qatar. Upon his arrival, Jasim was put in prison. Apparently, Muhammad bin Khalifa's reconciliatory policy was meant only to gain time to prepare for the attack on Qatar. (Ibid, p 31).

In October 1867, in alliance with the chief of Abu Dhabi, Muhammad bin Khalifa ruthlessly ransacked Wakrah and Dawha. The victims of the invasion appealed to the Wahhabis for redress - an appeal that produced a few scattered naval skirmishes against Bahraini boats but did not threaten Al Khalifa's hold in the island." (Ibid, p 32)

In reality, it was a sheer violation of the Perpetual Treaty of Peace and the British authorities sent their navy to Bahrain in September 1868. The ruler was frightened by the British warships and decided to leave Bahrain and to find refuge in Qatar. Ali bin Khalifa, Muhammad's brother, became ruler and he made an agreement with the British whereby Bahrain would give up its warships and pay the British 100,000 dollars as a penalty for those who had suffered in the Qatar invasion. Muhammad was exiled by the British to Kuwait, where he organized an invasion of Bahrain. In the ensuing battle, Ali's army was defeated and Ali and his brother Ibrahim were murdered. Muhammad and his followers settled in Muharraq but in November 1869 they were confronted by a British expedition and many were deported

to India.

In 1869, on recommendation of the British, an inexperienced 21-year member of Al-Khalifa, Isa bin Ali, resident in Qatar, was made ruler of Bahrain, a position he kept until his abdication in 1923.

The 1861 treaty between Britain and Bahrain meant that "from here on, Bahraini foreign relations and defence fell entirely into British hands. The rulers of Bahrain were denied the right to own a war fleet or to lease territory to foreign powers for diplomatic or commercial purposes without British approval. They were even denied the right to assume jurisdiction over foreigners, including mainland Arabs, Iranians, Ottomans and Europeans, who collectively amounted to a large segment of the population."

Under Isa bin Ali, Bahrain entered a period of arbitrary internal rule with merciless subjugation of the natives of the country. During this time Bahrain was "a supposedly independent state". The start of the 20th century saw the emergence of oil as a key source of energy, particularly for the British who were changing from coal to oil to fuel the navy. At the outbreak of World War I, Britain's source of oil was Iran, though the Gulf as a whole was to prove a vast reservoir of oil. This was enough for Britain to keep a grip on Bahrain through treaties. Bahrain is still an excellent military bastion, a strategic point in a sensitive and vulnerable region, from which Britain and the USA can control the situation in south Asia. Some three-quarters of the world's proven oil reserves is concentrated in the Gulf. That is why Britain pays considerable attention to Bahrain as a citadel of British interests and is expected to continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

## **6. Great Britain and its control of Bahrain's Defence, External and Internal Affairs**

Britain's interest in Bahrain was many-sided. Firstly, it was a base for commercial operations in the Gulf. Secondly, Britain wanted to stop piracy in the Gulf, an obstruction to trade. Thirdly, Bahrain was a citadel against possible Russian expansion to warm seas in the south. Fourthly, it was a transit point for the British navy in the chain connecting "the greatest pearl of the British crown," India, with British colonies in the Far East and Africa, and with Britain itself. "Until the turn of the 19th century, British interests were commercial, with little concern for local administrative affairs. Local British officials were concerned mainly with port facilities, pearl production, exports and imports, and a general political order that stimulated international trade.

"Bahrain at that time came under the imperial authorities of the Political Residency at Bushire and was served by an Indian assistant who maintained an office in Manama. This arrangement started in 1829 and continued until 1900, when a British officer was appointed to the post. In 1904, the imperial officer at Manama was changed from assistant to a political agent, which marked a new era in British-Bahrain relations and subsequently the beginning of change in the authority system. In 1935 a British naval base was established in Bahrain, and in 1946 the Political Residency was transferred to this island. As an island, a key port for eastern Arabia, and a centre of transit trade and of pearling, as of 1820 Bahrain began to enjoy a special status in Great Britain's Gulf policy. The exclusive agreements of 1880 and 1892 made Bahrain virtually a protectorate. According to the

terms of these treaties, the ruler agreed to let Britain control foreign relations and protect the island from any external aggression. He also agreed to accept British 'advice' concerning succession, customs and port facilities." (Fuad I Khuri, p 86)

After World War I, Britain appointed to the political posts in Bahrain many educated officers, who knew the Arabic language, culture and traditions. It was easy for them to cope with the ruler, authorities and the local population. It was easier for them to carry out badly needed reforms concerning civil courts, schools, municipal organizations, foreign subjects and other matters. The ruler, however, opposed many reforms which he saw as undermining his authority. It was rumoured that this resistance led to the resignation of the author of the reforms, Major H Dickson, political officer. His successor, Major C Daly (1920-26), was even keener on reforms.

## 7. The "Baharnah" Uprising of 1922

The bondage imposed by Isa bin Ali on the native Baharnah was ended in 1923 following the historic uprising of February 1922. In his PhD thesis (University of London, 1979) entitled "Protection and Politics in Bahrain 1869-1915", T. T. Farah , states "very much at the bottom of the social strata under Al- Khalifa rule were the Baharnah, the indigenous Shi'ite inhabitants who ... were of mixed Arab origin and constituted the largest distinguishable group within the total population. Virtually serfs, they supplied the agricultural work-force for the Sheikh (of Al Khalifa) and his retinue, held the land they worked usually in return for unpaid labour (sukhra) and were also assessed for services based on their possessions (eg boats and animals)."

The history of the 1922 uprising is well documented by the British Foreign Office record and has been covered by excellent books such as Bahrain 1920-1945 (a PhD thesis) by Mahdi Abdulla Al-Tajir, ISBN 0-7099-5122-1, and al-Bahrain (1920-1971), by Saeed al-Shehabi, Dar al-Kunoz al-Adebeya, 1996. This uprising is land mark in the history of Bahrain. For 54 years, the Al-Khalifa enslaved the natives of Bahrain utilizing the protection of the British Empire. It was only after World War I that the British started changing their attitude towards persons such as Isa bin Ali.

Dr. Al-Tajir states "on 6 February 1922, while a fidawi (member of an armed group used by Al-Khalifa to persecute the Baharnah) was escorting a Baharnah villager who was under arrest in Manamah, several Baharnah accosted the

Fedawi, overpowered him and released their kinsman. According to the British Political Agent, the villager was wrongfully incriminated and unlawfully arrested and beaten up. In Manamah, the Baharnah closed the bazaar to a standstill. They were determined to press their case with Shaikh Isa bin Ali who, in the words of the Agent, was 'oblivious to the fact that he was sitting on a volcano'. This communal action by the Baharnah posed a serious challenge to the authority of the Shaikh who sought the Agent's advice. The latter, not wishing to be directly involved in relations between the Ruler and his subjects, urged Shaikh Hamad (eldest son of Sheikh Isa bin Ali) to find ways of appeasing the Baharnah. It was decided that a deputation of Baharnah, accompanied by a number of leading Sunni personalities, should seek an audience with the ruler."

During the meeting, the Baharnah submitted the following demands:

1. No one except the ruler and Shaikh Hamad to decide (court) cases or have the right to punish in any way.
2. Cases which Shaikh Hamad cannot decide to the satisfaction of both parties to be referred by him to the Shara' (religious court), Majlis al-'Urfi (trading court) or Salifah (court) as the case may be.
3. No one to be dragged off to the ruler's court without notice, but to be served with a summon signed by Shaikh Hamad.
4. Documents concerning gardens leased to subjects by the ruling family to be in duplicate, a copy in possession of each party, and to be witnessed by independent witnesses. No conditions other than those written in the document to be enforced.
5. Steps to be taken to stop the Shaikh's camels being allowed to enter and graze in private gardens (of the Baharnah).
6. 'Sukhrah' (i.e. forced labour; also commandeering of donkeys where by Baharnah are forced to walk with the donkeys while members of the Al-Khalifa ride over) to cease.
7. The practice of placing calves belonging to the ruling

family with Bahraini bakers to fatten free of charge, to cease.  
 8. The prison to be put in proper order and a reasonable house provided for the same.

After consulting with the chief members of his family, Shaikh Isa agreed to concede to these demands. The Agent, on the other hand, doubted the Shaikh's real intentions. On 7 March the Resident visited Bahrain and while there communicated government instructions to Shaikh Isa to the effect that 'if misrule leads to uprising, the Indian (British) Government will find it most difficult to render him any support whatsoever'. He also cautioned Shaikh Abdullah (arch-rival of Sheikh Hamad) not to oppose Shaikh Hamad's Administration and urged Shaikh Hamad to show firmness in dealing with 'oppression'. Thereafter both Shaikhs Hamad and Abdullah frequently sought the Agent's advice admitting to him that the difficulties facing them were caused by 'past misrule'. Commenting on this change of attitude, the (British) Political Agent noted:

"They have been compelled by recent events to realize that such tyrannical rule as they have exercised in the past is, with the spread of democratic ideas, bound to come to an end".

Since February 1922 the Baharnah had refused to pay discriminatory taxes, with Shaikh Hamad pursuing a conciliatory policy towards them. His efforts were thwarted, however, by his uncle Shaikh Khalid and his sons who continued to try to collect taxes. During April many Baharnah assembled, at the Agency in protest and when they refused to leave, the Agent asked Shaikhs Hamad and Abdullah to talk to their representatives. They agreed to disperse only after they had received assurances from the Shaikhs that they would 'instruct Shaikh Khalid to cease interference with liberty of persons and to postpone collection of taxes'. In addition, they were told that the Rulers would consider their complaints regarding taxation and the administration of justice, and subsequent to these developments the Shaikh decided to abolish the 'obnoxious

taxes' in preference to 'reasonable and just taxation'. In addition to Customs revenue, the Shaikh collected the following taxes :

1. Date-garden tax. Collected quite arbitrarily.... from Shia (Baharnah) only.
2. 'Raqabieh', literally 'neck-tax' or 'poll-tax' levied on males at varying rates in different localities. It has been collected from Shia only and is particularly obnoxious to them.
3. Fish-tax. levied from Shia only at varying rates.
4. A special tax on Shia during Muharram.
5. A variety of taxes collected in kind from Shia only.
6. A pearling tax. This was originally collected from all pearling boats, which are mainly owned by Sunnis. Of late years a large number of the boat-owners have ceased paying.

The Shaikhs now asked the Agent to suggest an alternative method of taxation. After sounding out local opinion, he submitted the following scheme:

1. Date tax of 1-10th on gardens watered by flow, and 1-20th on those watered by life, to be collected uniformly. This tax is admissible under Shara' (religious) law.
2. Fish tax of 1-10th on fish caught in the local fish traps, and 1-20th on fish caught otherwise.
3. Abolition of 'Raqabieh' and all other taxes on Shia, and substitution with a very light ground tax for all houses, other than those in the towns of Manamah and Muharraq, which pay municipal taxes, to be collected without religious distinction.
4. The impartial collection of the existing pearling tax.

Dr. Al-Tajir continues the story: "As the Sunnis were virtually immune from taxation, it was anticipated that they would oppose the introduction of the above scheme. In the event of such opposition the Government of India (under the British Crown and responsible for Bahrain) was prepared to back the scheme regardless of Sunni opposition. the Agent was in no position to speak for the Government, but he submitted the matter to the Resident noting that if the Sunnis

refused to pay taxes, the Shi'ah's would follow suit, in which case the Shaikh's income would be drastically cut. Already the Shaikh's revenue had dropped as a result of the Baharnah refusal to pay what they regarded as arbitrary taxes. For the scheme to be acceptable to both sections of the population it was necessary that it received the approval of the Government before its introduction, Daly noted. At this juncture the Shaikhs were at a loss as to how to collect revenue from Shi'ahs without provoking further protests. The Agent advised them to open a Government office to be run by two clerks. This office was destined to become the precursor of a central bureaucracy.

Early in May 1922, the Government of India cabled the Resident: "It is the ardent desire of the Government of India that they should not be drawn into interference between the Ruler of Bahrain and his subjects. But as the proposed reforms are mainly due to their warning against oppression, etc., and appear sound in themselves, you are authorized to inform the Shaikh that the Government welcome his scheme and will lend their moral support to an honest attempt to put it into force impartially. This authority is given on the understanding that you felt that more than moral support is unlikely to be required." Although the (British) Government promised moral backing for the reforms, it was nevertheless anxious to avoid any accusation that they were forced upon the Shaikh.

In June 1922 a reconciliation, apparently on firmer grounds than before, was effected between Shaikh Abdullah and the Administration of Shaikh Hamad. Shaikh Abdullah was promised 'an attractive allowance from the revenues of the Islands' in return for assisting Shaikh Hamad in the conduct of affairs. The Resident commented: "If an arrangement between Shaikh Hamad and Shaikh Abdullah can be arrived at on a pecuniary basis, so much the better; such an arrangement is more likely to be lasting than any other."

This reconciliation was described by the Agent as a serious

blow to the disaffected tribal elements, since its separated Abdullah from the tribal camp which opposed Shaikh Hamad's Administration. After the uprising of February 1922 reforms faltered. This represented a serious blow to the Baharnah hopes of achieving parity with others. "Haji Ahmad bin Khamis, one of their leaders, informed the Agent that it was incumbent upon the Government of India to ensure a fair and just Administration in Bahrain; that on his accession to the Rulership, Sheikh Isa bin Ali had made such a commitment; and through their friends in India the Baharnah would publicize their grievances in the Indian press".

"Unlike his predecessor, who had deep respect for customary practices, preferring to ease reforms in through persuasion and conversion, Major Daly was insistently tough, uncompromising and power minded. The two years he had spent in Iraq during the rebellion of 1918-20, trying unsuccessfully to force administrative reforms, made him all the more determined to carry out similar reforms in Bahrain. His political tactics were entirely different from Dickson's. As soon as he took charge of the agency, he began to deliberately counter Shaikh Abdullah's (the influential son of Isa bin Ali, and the one responsible for abusing the Baharnah in Jedhafs and Sanabis) authority, power and influence, knowing in advance that Abdullah enjoyed support among the tribesmen". (Fuad Khuri, p 91)

The administrative reforms on which the British were insisting "became the major political issue in the country, dividing Bahrain into many competing factions. These factions gradually evolved into two polarities: one composed of peasant and urban Shia who favoured the reforms, and the other of tribal groups who opposed them. "The Khalifa ruling family was divided on the issue: some supported the reforms and worked for their implementation; some strongly rejected them and worked for their suspension. Shaikh Hamad and his intimates, supported by the political agent, headed the first faction; Shaikh Abdullah and the ruler,

supported by the tribesmen, headed the second". During 1921 and 1922 tensions ran high between the two factions and Major Daly. Deputations, petitions, official and unofficial letters were sent to various authorities, each side considering its position correct. For example, Daly "submitted to the Bombay Government, through the political resident at Bushire, a long report in which he included specific incidents of corruption in the tribal administration, mismanagement of public services, and the 'atrocities and oppressions committed by the regime' especially at the hands of Shaikh Abdullah against the local Shia population". (Ibid, pp 92-93)

The British Government was very cautious of what to do concerning the reforms in Bahrain and always was slow to take action. In the meanwhile, the supporters of the reforms were not satisfied with the speed of reform, and the rejectors of the reforms understood the uncertainty of the British Government in this field as inaction. It gave them an opportunity to strangle the reforms in various ways. "Two parties were very active in this regard, though for different reasons. The first was the Al-Khalifa faction, headed by the ruler, Isa bin Ali, who saw in the reforms the waning of their dominance; the second, composed of the Dawasir tribe and some merchants of Najdi origin, saw them as a limitation of tribal authority. Being the strongest tribal group in Bahrain, the Dawasir never recognized Shaikh Hamad as successor, nor did they pay taxes to the Al-Khalifa regime, on the grounds that such payment implied a submissive status in tribal politics. In May 1922, they visited Najd and earned from the Wahhabi emir his support against the reforms. It was not clear why the Wahhabi emir worked against the reforms - perhaps he saw them as a potential threat to the theocratic state he was establishing in Arabia, or perhaps he wanted to use the disturbance as a Trojan horse with which he could enter Bahrain". (Ibid p 94)

In order to stop this interference and factional strife, the British were in a hurry to depose Isa as ruler and to speed

up reforms. His son, Hamad, succeeded as ruler and he "appointed a British adviser who gradually assumed most of the powers of government, setting up an administration which contained a few other British officials and presiding over the development policy of the state". (see Sir Bernard Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand, The Gulf in Transition 1953-1958*. Michael Russell Publishing, Great Britain 1990, p 58)

The British authorities' actions were dictated by their recognition that Bahrain was unprepared for self-rule and because of many other internal problems. In British eyes, Bahrain was weak and defenceless. The Bolshevik revolution in Russia had influenced Bahrain and other Arab countries. The ideas of freedom and independence from colonial yoke embraced the world. Such thoughts and ideas penetrated Bahrain in spite of all prohibitions.

The system of personal advisers and political agents and residents was the best, the British believed, to steer Bahrain through a restless world and stormy seas. Arriving in 1926 as personal adviser, Charles Belgrave served rulers for 31 years. "Belgrave was the virtual ruler and the chief minister under Shaikh Salman. He kept everything in his own hands with virtually no delegation, including maintaining in his own person the position of commandant of police". (Ibid, p 60)

During the factional rivalries after the World War I, violence broke out in spite of the British presence. In March 1923, the Sunni tribe of Dawasir in Budayya invaded the Shia villages of A'ali and Barbar. Then in April and May 1923, fighting in Manama between Shia of Persian origin and urban Sunni of Najdi origin resulted in 12 deaths and many injuries. "These disturbances were meant to intimidate Shaikh Hamad, embarrass Major Daly and weaken Shia support for the suggested reforms. Shaikh Hamad and Major Daly responded swiftly and decisively. On 14 May 1923, two British military vessels arrived in Bahrain, followed on 17 May by the transfer of the active conduct of affairs to Shaikh

Hamad, and on 24 May by instructions to the customs officer to transfer the revenues to Hamad." (Fuad I Khuri, p 95)

Shaikh Hamad and the British quelled the riots and arrested some participants and exiled them abroad. The British persuaded the ruler, Isa, responsible for the riots, to abdicate in favour of his eldest son, Hamad. It was 21 May 1923. The resistance of the anti-reform movement continued and found many supporters among Sunni tribesmen. But little by little Major Daly and the new ruler managed to pacify the country. "After the abdication of Shaikh Isa, public authority fell entirely in the hands of Hamad, who tried to deal with the disturbances according to a formalized criminal procedure." (Ibid pp 95-96)

The Dawasir were mainly responsible for the riots in Bahrain and the basis of resistance to the reforms, for which reason they were compelled to leave their Budayya stronghold and settle in Damman in 1923. Three years later they wanted to return and Shaikh Hamad approved of resettlement in Bahrain provided they were prepared to:

1. Pay a state tax like other subjects.
2. Submit themselves to formalized criminal procedures
3. Accept a permanent police station in Budayya.
4. Recognize the ruler as the highest authority in Bahrain.
5. Accept the ruler's authority to appoint and dismiss their chiefs as deemed necessary.

Part of the Dawasir accepted these terms and part did not. It was a positive step by the new ruler, designed to see that reforms were not hindered but continued in operation. (Ibid pp 96-98)

The British authorities were interested in undermining the tribal system, which opposed order and law and British power on the island. At the same time, reforms could not satisfy Bahraini society completely as they "ignored the issue of legitimacy of the government, the recognition of economic

resources and public services, including pearl production, palm cultivation, fish traps, imports, exports or port facilities, constantly distinguishing between public funds and private earnings and property." (Ibid p 99)

It was necessary to stir everything into action, to implement all these things in practice. Of great effect was the introduction of municipalities - in Muharraq, Al Hidd, Sitra, Jidd Hafs and a central department to oversee their social and economic activities. From 1951, Bahrain was divided into 14 municipal areas, governed in an informal manner and each headed by a government official.

Another step toward effective centralization was the institution of a body representing the heads of all the villages, who were, from 1957, appointed by the Government, the council of ministers. The two institutions - municipalities and village heads - were united under one "roof," the Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs, in the period 1971-74.

## **8. The role of cultural and sports clubs in generating public consciousness**

The British authorities between 1918 and 1971 tried to organize Bahraini public life on English lines. The way of life, organization of sport movement, public clubs and associations were outwardly of Arab character yet essentially English by nature and content. Programmes, internal orders and aims were English, as were organizers, trainers and coaches in the beginning. The main aim of these organizations was to provide Bahrainis with any goals other than political and class organizations and parties which might unite them on a traditional, secular, or ideological bases. Between 1918 and 1975, 141 clubs, societies and associations were created. Only two were closed for political reasons. At first, activities were for the privileged elite, but after the 1950s people from different classes and levels joined. From restricted institutions, they gradually became centres of public activities, for discussion of political, economic and social topics, and ultimately centres of the struggle for freedom and parliamentary democracy.

Certainly, we can't say this about all the clubs because some were neutral politically; but, on the whole, the clubs, societies and associations played a great role in reviving national and public self-consciousness and aspirations for more freedom and democracy and opposition to injustice. In these places, lectures and seminars ranged over popular issues - such as Bahrain's history, social and economic situations, culture and religion, politics, power sharing, elections, independence and constitutional rule. Scholars concluded that "clubs have always been an integral part of the political arena in Bahrain.

New formulations in politics affect club organization. The emergence in 1973 of three political blocs in parliament - the People's Bloc, Religious Bloc and Independent Middle - reflected formulations in club organizations. The dissolution of parliament in 1975 and the subsequent disintegration of the broad political blocs slowed down the spontaneous emergence of larger and broader club organizations.

The Government understood the part these institutions could play in moulding political and social consciousness, leading to different class and political demands and political struggle. It therefore decided "to regulate and limit the spread of club organization in the country, deemed necessary in view of the roles members of the Uruba and the Bahrain Clubs played in turning the sectarian conflict of 1953 into a popular uprising, threatening the government and its continuity... "The law of 1959 required that clubs be localized in specific villages or quarters of towns or cities, have designated meeting places and specified aims and commitments, refrain from interfering in politics, conduct their meetings according to a written constitution and be represented by executive committees elected by general assemblies. It also required that members be above 18 years old and that they submit their names and addresses along with the club's constitution to the proper authorities for approval. No club was allowed to hold meetings or sponsor Programmes before it was officially licensed by the Government, nor was it allowed to sponsor plays, theatrical shows or musical performances unless they were approved in advance by government authorities. "

In the eighties, the laws governing clubs and association went further than earlier restrictions by prohibiting any public function and by requiring all clubs to obtain written permission for any activity beyond a purely sport one. However, these government regulations did not cramp the number of clubs or their membership. Popular desire for self-expression brought a surge of people over 18 to join. Thanks to their popularity, the number of clubs soared to 32 between 1956 and 1965, and increased by 36 between 1966

and 1975. All these reforms, including club, society and association activities, were carried through with the initial help and recommendation of the British political advisers, agents and officials. (See Fuad Khuri)

The British were very interested in many-sided reforms that could change tribal structure without cardinal change in political power. On the other hand, many changes in Bahrain carried out with British help and approval - concerning public rights, private properties, Sunni wakf, Shia wakf (properties of the Mosque), inheritance, pearl production, creation of social and sports organizations, etc. - were directed at strengthening the power of the ruling class and lessening and weakening revolutionary movements, riots and disturbances. Reforms had to lead to a prosperous community with strong democratic tendencies, to make all citizens relatively equal and satisfied. In such a situation, the British could retain their influence and save the ruling regime from catastrophe and religious and political confrontation.

Any changes could be regulated, in the opinion of the British, and the ruling regime modified and gradually democratized. But clashes could lead to overthrow of the regime and expulsion of the British from the Gulf. Inflexible, undemocratic Bahrain could create and can create, to the British mind, real havoc in the Gulf by uniting with any other state in the Gulf or by receiving any other foreign influence. That's why the British strove to carry out all the necessary reforms to preserve Bahrain and its existing regime within the framework of good relations with Great Britain.

Today, the overwhelming majority of Bahrainis - the Shia and Sunni who were the backbone and basis of all the reforms after World War I - do not necessarily want to overthrow the regime or ruin the country they love. They want gradual yet deep reforms that will lead to a free, equal, prosperous and democratic Bahrain.

## 9. The Opposition's struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights: 1950s to the present

After World War I, Arab and Muslim Bahrain adopted many features of capitalist Western lifestyle. Society divided into classes and groups with social and economic differences. There arose bureaucracy and political movements and parties which stimulated demand for equality, human rights and democracy." Since then, the challenge has drifted to the rising new forces - the Shia, the labour force, the students and the underground political parties. The content of the challenge likewise changed from usurpation of power and property to legitimacy of authority, focusing on public representation, a standardized code of justice, and a host of economic complaints and grievances." (see Fuad Khuri, p194)

In fulfilling reforms, the British sought support from the Hamad bin Isa bin Ali, and most of the Shia. From the early 1920s, society divided into strata, thus a local working class, students, officials, teachers, professional and so on. Each fought for their own aims. For example, the students' strike of 1928 in Muharraq; the pearl divers' riots of 1932; the Shia protests to improve the courts in 1934 and 1935; the BAPCO labour strikes in 1942 and 1965.

Each event had its own particular reasons. As Fuad Khuri wrote, "The student strike of 1928 took place after a British official interfered in the affairs of a public school, The divers' riots were caused by the enforcement of a law reducing the loan payments to a maximum of 200 rupees - an act intended to free divers from debt commitments to pilots and

merchants. The riots were instigated by pearl merchants, who saw in the law a limitation of their authority and profits. The Shia protests to improve the court system followed harsh sentences inflicted upon fellow Shia. The labour strike of 1965 was occasioned by a BAPCO decision to automate production, thus laying off a large number of employees. The participants in these strikes, riots, protests and demonstrations had no plan to alter the form of government or change the structure of the state. The demonstrations of 1938 were an exception to this generalization. They constituted the prototype for the uprising of the mid-fifties: the networks and inner circles active in the uprising were formulated immediately after the demonstrations of 1938.

"Until the mid-fifties, these instances of unrest had no 'national' base cutting across ethnic and religious divisions. The urban Sunni showed sympathy toward pan-Arab causes and concern with national independence and sovereignty; the Shia were mindful of internal problems: court organization, standardized civil and penal codes, representation, work conditions, salaries and wages. The protests and rebellions of the twenties, thirties and forties organized by the merchant nationalists to restrict the influence of colonial officials were not free of commercial interests." (Ibid p196)

The economic situation and linked social conditions worsened the lives of the population when the proceeds to the Government from oil and other resources began to shrink. The oil source was not infinite and the Government had to think of a future without it. The measures of reducing oil extraction and cutting wages and salaries of workers, thus reducing living standards, sparked protests and riots, and now, not only Shia but Sunni became involved.

Scholars rightly indicated that "while socio-economic transformations were taking place, new forces of protest appeared. The urban Sunni salaried labour began to unite informally with the Shia in one political front, opposing the regime in power. 'Informally' because there was no

large-scale formal organization that joined them in a single hierarchy. They acted in unity if mobilized by informal circles and networks often based in underground political parties. The uprising of the mid-fifties is a case in point." (Ibid p 196)

The indications were that Shia and Sunni could satisfy their goals by working together. Creating unity has never been easy. Former unfriendly relationships between two sections of one Muslim religion, not always on doctrinal grounds, have at times resulted in bloody clashes. In September 1953, a member of the ruling Al-Khalifa family led an attack on a Shia procession and started a sectarian conflict. This was followed by a series of minor clashes in different parts of Bahrain, culminating in a sectarian encounter at the oil refinery. In June 1954, Shia workers, joined by their brethren from neighbouring villages, fought Sunni workers at the oil refinery; many people were injured and one Sunni was killed. Police arrested suspects from both sides - many were tried and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

Believing that their brethren were harshly and unfairly treated in the trials, a Shia crowd gathered on 2 July in a mosque to free the prisoners. The police opened fire and killed four Shia men. After this incident, the clashes began to move in a different direction, gradually developing into a national uprising threatening the entire structure of the state. The intolerance of old generations of the Al-Khalifa was due to the fact that they started witnessing the loss of a privileged status that enabled them to accumulate wealth and power without accountability. Throughout the British protection, from 1820 until independence in 1971, the British practiced 'divide and rule', diverting Sunni and Shia from common attention to the prospect of overthrowing the ruling regime and expelling the British.

"Initially protesting the high-handed manner in which the British adviser was running the affairs of the country, requesting that proper authority be exercised by the Al-Khalifa ruler himself, the demonstrations of 1938 took on

new demands as the salaried labour joined in. They protested the higher rate of employment of Indians in public administration and in government-controlled enterprises and the discrepancies in wages between Indian and Arab employees. The participation of the salaried labour brought in an entirely new social perspective, the collaboration of the Shia who never before had joined protests or demonstrations organized by the Sunni. The Shia had suffered various oppressions at the hands of Al-Khalifa before the implementation of the reforms and were accordingly suspicious of the transfer of authority to a government controlled by Al-Khalifa. To appease the Shia, the leaders of the demonstrations, 'the merchant nationalists', agreed to request the institution of a legislative council and the improvement of employment conditions, salaries and wages.

"Fearing the consequences of a joint Sunni-Shia coalition reinforced by labour grievances, the Government acted swiftly and decisively; they arrested a large number of leading demonstrators and strikers and sentenced them to varying terms of imprisonment. The leaders of the movement were banished to Bombay." Unity alarmed the Bahrain Government and the American and British presence as well. "The Government cut short the movement in its embryonic stage but it did not kill the embryo. The junior members of the movement learned two lessons: that collective protests and rebellions, to be successful, must have an organized leadership linked to the rank and file continuously through a hierarchy of office; and that cooperation between the Sunni and Shia is indispensable for the success of any reform movement in Bahrain." (Ibid p 198)

In World War II, Bahrain was under the control of British military forces as a precaution against German invasion of the Middle and Near East. The French and British occupied Syria and Iraq, while Russia and Britain occupied north and south Iran. Considering Bahrain on a war footing, the British discouraged internal political activity and tried to promote economic and social advance. "During the second world war, the strong British military presence in Bahrain slowed down

political activity. Many participants in the demonstrations of 1938 were employed by British military authorities, worked in British enterprises, or profited from the increasing trade and transit operations. After the war, many Arab countries became independent, the Arab League was established, and the state of Israel was founded - events that helped create a strong pan-Arab movement in Bahrain, led by a core of nationalists affiliated with political parties. In the early fifties, this core, based in the Bahrain and the Uruba Club, launched an ambitious programme of 'Arab enlightenment,' as they called it.

"In Bahrain context, this 'enlightenment' meant rejecting sectarian politics, opposing colonial rule and the tribally controlled regime, and championing the cause of the labour classes. The programme was carried out through public lectures held in cultural and sports clubs and the weekly press." (Ibid p 198)

We are far from saying that these two sides organized the clashes between Sunni and Shia, but we are 100 per cent sure that the riots and clashes of 1953-54 were useful and profitable for the ruler of Bahrain and the British. Farsighted leaders of the Sunni and Shia stopped the sectarian violence.

"They called upon the leading Shia and Sunni notables to discuss the issue and to plan to end the sectarian fights. Three meetings were held to this effect at the Bahrain Club, at the Ahli Club and in Abdul Aziz Shamlan's house, but none produced the expected results. More meetings meant lower attendance, and lower attendance meant the notables had less enthusiasm for facing the crisis. Jealous of each other's presence or absence, the notables who were mostly merchants, spent a good part of every meeting on social formalities without dealing organizationally with the problem.

"In their secret meetings, the network of five decided to bypass and establish a committee of Sunni youth to approach

Shia leaders for joint action toward reconciliation. The committee included Abdullah Al-Zain, Yusuf Al-Sai, Abdul Rahman Al-Ghaffar, Abdul Aziz Shamlan, Ali Al-Wazzan and Abdul Rahman Al Bakir, none of whom belonged to the 'traditionally established families' among either Sunni or Shia. This was why in the first meeting in the house of a Shia notable in Ras Rumman (Al-Hajj Hasan Aradi), the Shia-appointed representatives, some of whom were prominent merchants, complained about the absence of Sunni notables." (Ibid p 200)

The patriotic forces vainly strove to calm events of 1953-54. Rioting continued and the Government, which had stood aside, had to intervene, though without initial success. In 1954, the Shia began to criticize not only the Government but its British adviser and accused him of instigating sectarian clashes. The Shia leaders, fearful of the sectarian threat to unity, had to meet clandestinely in changing venues to escape police surveillance.

"While the network members (now seven) were organizing themselves in a broader political front, the bus and taxi drivers declared a strike in September 1954, protesting against the Government decision to force subscription to third-party car insurance policies. The drivers objected not to the law itself, but to the high premiums imposed by a foreign-based insurance company. Carried out by the Sunni and the Shia jointly, the strike brought the country's transport to a standstill and offered to the opposition a golden opportunity to demonstrate the efficacy of the newly built organization still operating underground. Led by Al-Bakir and Al-Shamlan, the opposition proposed to establish the Co-operative Compensation Bureau, governed by an administrative committee composed of leading merchants and drivers." (Ibid p 201)

The opposition leaders claimed they had created an incipient general assembly, a prototype of the future Bahrain parliament, and they demanded that the Government

"institute an elected parliament, enact a civil and criminal code, introduce an appeal court staffed with judges trained in law, and permit the working classes to organize labour unions. Two committee members, Bin-Musa and Bu-Dhib, plus a handful of leading notables, were requested to present these demands to the ruler; but, knowing the contents, he refused to receive them."

This refusal added to bitterness between opposition and government. Some opposition leaders decided not to fight on two fronts, to concentrate on the Government and exclude the British. In 1955, the opposition demanded that the ruler recognize their "High Executive Committee" as the legitimate representative of the people, to elect a parliament, trade unions and so on.

Talks went on until 1956. On 2nd March, the British Foreign Minister arrived at Muharraq and was attacked, an event which led to further disturbances that were put down with difficulty. Two months later, negotiations were resumed and the ruler recognized the High Committee (provided it changed the word Executive with National and that its leader leaves the country for a short period) and its right to express opinions. This victory for the people was also success for the ruler, because reconciliation brought peace. However, these blessings were wrecked by external events in the Arab World. In what was to lead to international outrage, Israel, France and Britain on 29 October 1956 invaded Egypt after it nationalized the Suez Canal. Israel seized the Sinai, and all three armies occupied the canal zone. Bahrainis reacted with serious disturbances. On 2 November, demonstrators set fire to many British, European and Government commercial premises. The police and British troops put down the riots and many demonstrators were imprisoned.

The riots reflected not only Arab World affairs but the tension between Government and opposition over demands for democracy, human rights, and sectarian equality. "In their struggle for power, the two polarities resort to different

ideologies and different organizational skills. To prevent the rise of large-scale formal political organization, the Government opposes the foundation of political parties, societies, labour unions, clubs that cut across regional, ethnic or religious groupings." (Ibid pp 212-217)

During all these disturbances, in fact since his appointment as adviser in 1926, Charles Belgrave had been at the right hand of the ruler, at first Shaikh Hamad, then his son and successor, Shaikh Salman. Any hopes for reform were dashed, for Belgrave was inclined to suppressing political and social progress. The British authorities "considered some of the political demands to be reasonable, and that it would be right to enter into discussion over them, in order to satisfy moderate opinion that the Government's position was reasonable. While we showed our sympathy with some of the aims of those who wanted to reform the system of government in Bahrain, we had also made it clear in unmistakable terms that we gave our full support to the ruler at the same time as we were pressing him to adopt these changes." (See B. Burrows, *Footnotes in the Sand*, p 611)

Shaikh Hamad, as we remember, began as a supporter of reforms, even contradicting his conservative father, Isa bin Ali. But after his father was deposed, Hamad faced difficulties which made him more conservative.

"It would be wrong to underestimate the difficulties which faced a ruler in Bahrain in steering a stable course in circumstances in which he was being pressed for reform and progress by certain elements, particularly members of his family and close retainers, thought dangerous. At the same time, there was still the memory of the British intervention in the twenties which had resulted in the deposition of the then ruler.

"There was also apparent divergence between the advice being received from the representatives of the British Government and from Belgrave. As a result of all this there

was a temptation to do nothing unless it could be shown that change was forced on the regime by the external pressure of the British so that it could not be regarded as the ruler's fault if he made concessions which he, or others, might think were unwise."

In the summer of 1953 an incident took place in a procession and the police were forced to fire their rifles in the air. The British concluded that "the particular incident died down but it was directly and indirectly the genesis of the formation of a politically motivated movement led by a committee consisting of one representative of the Shi'ite community and three Sunnis which proceeded to formulate demands including the removal of the Adviser and the setting up of committees to examine various aspects of the administration."

The following year, having failed to obtain what they wanted, a general strike was called which was more or less effective for a short period and led to further disturbance in which the police felt obliged to open fire. In these circumstances it became clear to us that we had now to depart from our general principle of non-intervention in internal affairs in order that the integrity of the state should be preserved, which was part of our general objective. "This intervention would have to take two or possibly three forms. One was to press the Bahrain Government to improve the quality, size and efficiency of the police force. The existing force had clearly demonstrated that it was inadequate both in numbers and in training. It was moreover impracticable that Belgrave, in addition to his other responsibilities, should be commandant this force. "The second requirement was that certain concessions should be made to the political movement which were in any case reasonable. This would have the additional benefit of regaining the support of a quite important section of the middle class of Bahrain society consisting of the merchant families, senior officials and so on. Their sympathy was basically with the ruling family so long as it appeared to be the only guarantee of stability but they

could not help sharing some of the aspirations of the politicians for devolution of power and participation at least on an advisory basis of other sections of the population.

"Thirdly, and initially in the background but later playing a prominent part in the solution to the crisis, was the possibility of intervention by British forces in the last resort to preserve law and order." (F. Khuri, pp 62-63)

"On the question of relations with the political movement and its 'committee' made up of the four leaders, we found ourselves reluctantly drawn into the position of negotiating between them and the Bahrain Government owing to the initial reluctance of that Government to enter into direct relations with them. Our participation in these negotiations, or rather our assumption of the position of mediator, was deeply resented by Belgrave and the ruling family. "It led us in an unwanted position of constitution-makers and inventors of new political institutions... The nature of the reforms should be built so far as possible on existing practice. This meant a certain amount of democracy in the government of the municipalities, and advisory committees dealing with the subjects of health and education, which were the activities of government having the greatest impact on the mass of the people. We also responded to the desire for a more institutionalized form of labour organization by bringing labour experts to help draft a trade union law which was eventually adopted." (Ibid p 64)

In March 1956, Selwyn Lloyd, former British Foreign Secretary, visited Bahrain and "at a press conference during his stay he said that the British Government believed in the gradual evolution of representative institutions and the maintenance of law and order. The speed of progress must vary country by country. The British had great confidence in the Ruler. This incident made us realize that we could not depend on such a narrow margin on future occasions of the same kind and that we must be prepared to intervene with British forces if required in order to maintain law and order

if they were threatened to this extent. Only a week or two later another incident provoked further trouble in the streets which the police proved unable to contain without opening fire.

"This led to a strike and further disorder and the imposition of a curfew which did not prevent a good deal of damage being done to cars and buildings. After the strike died down Belgrave and the Ruler agreed to meet the members of the 'Committee' who were more or less managing the political movement and negotiations and discussions dragged on not very fruitfully about the composition of the various councils.

"There was however one matter on which we felt obliged to intervene, with great reluctance. One of the slogans shouted by the crowd on the occasion of Selwyn Lloyd's visit was to demand that Belgrave should go." The British regarded Belgrave as "an important source of instability in Bahrain and it would be better if he could be persuaded to leave." The British authorities were wise enough to decide to appoint a new British adviser and "to continue to press the Bahrain Government to meet those of the demands of the reformats movement which we thought acceptable, while at the same time reaffirming our general support for the Ruler. With the growth of the political movement, the choice was whether to repress such activities or to make concessions which were in any case reasonable. Our advice had accordingly been to strengthen the Bahrain police, to introduce reasonable reforms and to allow the political movement to express its views to the Bahrain Government in a constitutional manner. If the Ruler were stronger, there would be less need for the British Government to intervene." (Ibid, pp 68-69)

The Ruler was persuaded to dismiss Belgrave, with effect from the beginning of 1957. It took the Government three years, 1953-1956, to restore calm, which was punctuated by serious disturbances to which British forces were summoned. The authorities, British and Bahraini, realised that force alone would not calm down the political opposition. They decided to concede various reforms and dismissal of Charles

Belgrave who, in his 31 years, behaved more as an executioner of the Bahraini people than as an adviser.

"Charles Belgrave died in 1969. His son, James, worked for a time in Awali and later became a fellow director of a publicity firm owned by a Conservative Member of Parliament in a London which handled the Bahrain Government's public relations. A tragic irony, after formative years spent in an alcohol-free environment, James, like his wife, died prematurely from drink related causes." (see H V Mapp, p 275)

The period 1953-56 was one of profound significance, for the Government refused to learn that peace could only come through reforms, not by force alone. The opposition gained from the mood created by Bahrainis' deep interest in the Arab World's affairs, their own self-consciousness and the aspiration to unite all factions of society in one solid front. The stubborn persistence of participants in the struggle for the first time compelled the ruler of Bahrain to negotiate seriously with his opponents. Another phenomenon must be stressed. The use of British troops to suppress demonstrations in 1956 created a feeling that Britain, at the end, would be on the side of dictators rather than democrats. In 1957, the British established a special branch (intelligence services) that continued to be headed by Britons until the writing of this book. Thereafter, the Government and Ruler have faced their people alone - to say nothing about a new shield or buffer in the person of the Ruler's current security chief, Mr Ian Henderson, and his British team commanding the intelligence and security services.

## **10. The Constitution and first attempt at parliamentary rule**

The people's centuries-old struggle for human rights, justice, legitimacy and democracy, spurred on after two world wars and through the fifties and sixties, led logically to the creation of constitutional and legitimate institutions in the form of municipal councils, health and education committees, the Constitution and the elected National Assembly (Parliament).

The Constitution and Parliament were a real victory for Bahrainis of all classes and religious sects. Popular pressure forced the Amir, Isa bin Salman, to adopt the first Constitution, with its democratic, progressive and modest characteristics.

The Constitution, adopted on 26 May 1973, consists of a preamble, five parts, three chapters and 109 articles. The preamble outlines the aim to attain "a future system based on consultation and justice, full participation in the responsibilities of rule and administration, ensuring freedom and equality, and strengthening bonds of fraternity and social solidarity, adhering to human values, attaining prosperity and well-being for mankind and spreading freedom and justice over the world and maintaining world peace..."

Part One, called State, has three articles. Article 1 reinforces the Khalifa dynasty. "The rule of Bahrain shall be hereditary, the succession to which shall be transmitted from His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa to his eldest son..."

Part Two has 16 articles. Article 4 says that justice underlies the system of government. Co-operation and mutual understanding are firm bonds among citizens. Liberty, equality, security, tranquillity, education, social solidarity and equal opportunities for citizens are the pillars of society guaranteed by the State. Article 13: The State shall ensure that work is made available to the citizens and that its terms are equitable.

Part Three, Public rights and duties. Article 17: Citizenship may not be withdrawn from a naturalized citizen except within the limits of the law. No person enjoying citizenship by origin may be deprived of it except in cases of high treason and dual nationality. Article 18: People are equal in human dignity and citizens shall be equal in public rights and duties before the law, without discrimination as to race, origin, language, religion or belief.

Article 19: Personal liberty is guaranteed in accordance with the law. No person shall be arrested, detained, imprisoned, searched or compelled to reside in a specified place, nor shall the residence of any person or his liberty to choose his place of residence or his liberty of movement be restricted, except in accordance with the law and under the supervision of the judicial authorities. No detention or imprisonment shall be imposed in places other than those specified in prison laws. In these places, health and social welfare shall be observed, and they shall be subject to the supervision of the judicial authorities. No person shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, enticement or degrading treatment, and the law shall provide the penalty for these acts. Any statement or confession shall be null and void if it is proved to have been made under duress or enticement or degrading treatment. The stages of investigation and trial are ensured in accordance with the law. No physical or moral injury shall be inflicted on an accused person. The right to trial shall be guaranteed in accordance with the law.

Article 21. Extradition of political refugees is prohibited or

threat thereof. Article 20. No crime or penalty may be established except by virtue of law, and no penalty may be imposed except for offences after the relevant law has come into force. An accused person shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty in a legal trial in which the necessary guarantees for the exercise of his right .

Article 22. Freedom of conscience is absolute. The State shall guarantee the inviolability of places of worship and the freedom to perform religious rites and to hold religious processions and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country.

Article 23. Freedom of speech and freedom to carry out scientific research shall be guaranteed. Every person shall have the right to express and propagate his opinion in words or in writing or by other means, in accordance with the conditions and procedures specified by law.

Article 24. Freedom of the press, printing and publication shall be guaranteed in accordance with the conditions and procedure specified by the law.

Article 25. Places of residence shall be inviolable. They may not be entered or searched without the permission of their occupants except in the circumstances and manner specified by the law.

Article 26. Freedom of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications and the secrecy thereof shall be guaranteed.

Article 27. Freedom to form associations and trade unions on a national basis and for lawful objectives and by peaceful means shall be guaranteed. Public meetings, processions and gatherings shall be permitted, provided that their purpose and means are peaceful and not contrary to morale.

Part Four, Powers. Article 32. The system of government shall be based on the principle of separation of the legislative,

executive and judicial powers, functioning in co-operation with each other in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.

Chapter I. The Amir. Article 33. The Amir is the Head of the State, his person shall be immune and inviolable, and he shall exercise his powers through his Ministers who shall collectively report to him on the general policy of the Government, and each Minister shall be responsible for the affairs of his Ministry. The Amir shall appoint the Prime Minister or relieve him of office by an Amiri decree. The Amir shall also appoint Ministers or relieve them of office by an Amiri decree upon the recommendations of the Prime Minister. Ministers shall not be appointed from amongst the members of the National Assembly in the first legislative term, but they may be appointed from amongst the members of the National Assembly or others with effect from the second legislative term. The total number of Ministers shall not exceed 14. The Amir shall be Supreme Commander of the Defence Force. The Amir shall protect the legality of the Government and the supremacy of law, and shall take the following oath at a special sitting of the National Assembly. Legislative Powers, Article 43 stipulates that the National Assembly shall be composed of 30 members elected directly by universal suffrage and secret ballot. The number of these members shall be increased to 40 with effect from the elections for the second legislative term. A member of the National Assembly must be a Bahraini citizen by origin, and be not less than thirty full-calendar years of age on the day of election.

Article 45. The term of the National Assembly shall be four calendar years commencing from the date of its first meeting.

Article 47. The National assembly shall have an annual session of not less than eight months.

Article 53. Before assuming their duties in the Assembly or its committees, members of the National Assembly, including

the ministers, shall take the following oath in public sitting: "I swear by Almighty God to be faithful to the Country and to the Amir, to respect the Constitution and the laws of the State, to defend the liberties, interests and properties of the people and to discharge my duties honestly and truthfully."

Article 56. Sittings of the National Assembly shall be public. Article 65. The Amir may dissolve the National Assembly by a decree in which the reasons for dissolution shall be indicated. However, dissolution of the Assembly may not be repeated for the same reason. If the elections are not held within the said period, the dissolved Assembly shall be restored to its full constitutional authority and shall meet immediately as if the dissolution had not taken place. The Assembly shall then continue functioning until a new Assembly is elected. Article 75. The Assembly shall set up, among its annual standing committees, a special committee to deal with petitions and complaints submitted to the Assembly by citizens.

Article 81. During his term, a member of the National Assembly shall not be appointed to the board of directors of a company, nor shall he participate in concessions granted by the Government for public bodies. Article 82. During their term, members of the National Assembly with the exception of Ministers may not be awarded decorations.

## 11. The governing of Bahrain society from mid-1950s to 1973

Bahrainis worked diligently to improve the situation of their country. A Council of State was created in the early seventies while Bahrainis replaced foreigners in high posts. And the ground was laid for independence in 1971, for adoption of the Constitution and for National Assembly elections. In 1973, the Amir kept his word and the Parliament of 30 members was chosen. They were divided into The People's Bloc, The Religious Bloc and the Independent Middle. The blocs had their own peculiarities, specifics and aims. They fought each other and the Government. (H V Mapp, p 259)

The Government seized on points of differences and manipulated them, finding elements it could rely and lean on. Blocs wanted to fulfill their pledges to the electorate - to establish trade unions and improve wages and salaries, for example. They had gone further than what the ruler expected. Going through details of the budget for example was rather testing. Many MPs expressed their concern at the allocation of BD 4 millions for the Amir out of the overall state budget of BD29 millions. Fearing accountability, the ruler took a drastic measure to "temporarily" protect himself and the Khalifa dynasty. So, "after the elections to the National Assembly and the emergence of three power blocs, a government composed of 14 appointed ministers was formed. The ministers were given the same rights and privileges as the elected members in Parliament. This meant that the Government, with the support of a bit less than one-third of the elected members could pass by a majority vote in the assembly any legislation they wanted. In practice,

there was no question of the parliament being able to take over the government of the ruling family.

"In the parliamentary system there are two sides to cope with each other - the government and parliament. In the case of Bahrain, the government is responsible before the ruler (the monarch) and the parliament. Both these sides before taking or making any decision - important or petty - must consult each other or inform each other beforehand. "The first year, 1973-74, was experimental; neither side knew exactly what authority it could exercise. It gradually appeared that the main task of parliament was to question government about already executed projects or legislated laws instead of sharing in decision-making when laws were drafted. A great part of every parliamentary session was devoted either to information exchange about projects and policies between parliament and cabinet, or to reading and commenting on petitions submitted to the government by various groups and factions in the country. Petitions covered a large number of subjects ranging from sewers in villages to employment of foreign labour, lack of schools, salaries and wages and a host of other social and economic grievances." (see F. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, p 231)

The ruler treated parliament as a screen behind which he or the government could decide what or what not to do. An example of this we give below. It happened in October 1974. "Without consulting parliament, the ruler issued a new law granting government the right to arrest and imprison for three years, without interrogation or trial, any person suspected of disturbing national security. This law was issued after a handful of 'political activists' were arrested in the spring of 1974. Many voices in parliament, including the 'red shaikh' (an elected member of the Al-Khalifa family), the People's and religious Blocs, demanded that the law be submitted to the assembly for approval or modification before being implemented. Uncertain whether the parliament would pass the law, the government made no response to these demands. Government uncertainty was based on many

formal protests and petitions submitted to the ruler before the elections to the Constituent Assembly, requesting that such laws would limit the political freedom of candidates and voters - the very freedom the assembly was meant to guarantee. Many of the protesters and petitioners then were elected to the parliament" (Ibid, p 231)

Political tension, or battle, between the ruler and government on one side and parliament on the other, lasted for about five months and was undermining the state. Thereupon, the government decided to declare a state of emergency, but this only weakened the position of ruler and government as protests mounted. A popular negative mood was supported by all blocs in parliament, which paralyzed the assembly's functions. A government bid to separate the blocs and destroy their unity meant offering concessions. The government likewise ignored a suggestion by some of the Independent Middle to incorporate the security law in a general criminal code.

By May 1975 it appeared that all attempts at compromise had failed. To avoid defeat, the government simply withdrew from the scheduled session, thus forcing parliament to adjourn the meeting. It was hoped that during the summer vacation, when parliamentary meetings were suspended, the parties concerned would find a workable solution to salvage the new democratic experiment in Bahrain. But in August 1975, in accordance with the constitution of the country, the ruler instead dissolved the parliament altogether on 26 august 1975.

The first attempt at democratic government came to a dramatic end because one side (Amir Isa and his British adviser Ian Henderson) refused to listen to the other side and adopted the Bill in breach of Article 42 of the constitution that states, "No law may be promulgated unless it has been passed by the National Assembly and ratified by the Amir."

Yet, stunned parliamentarians were bypassed. The official

gazette announced that the Amir had issued on 22 October 1974 "Decree law on State Security measures," empowering the Minister of the Interior to order the detention of political suspects for three years without charge or trial. Moreover, the law denied detainees right of appeal, by virtue of the fact that the Supreme Court of Appeal was the first and last court to pass sentences in political cases, if ever an individual was brought to court. This law is still in force. All 30 assembly members objected to the content of the law and the manner in which it was passed. On 14 June 1975, seven MPs, across section of parliament, including the prominent leader Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri (now adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International), issued a statement which the local press published making it clear that parliament demanded repeal of an unjust law. On 25 August, the Prime Minister withdrew his cabinet from the parliament in protest at the MPs' refusal to accept the State Security Act. Next day, the Amir issued a decree suspending parliament and several articles of the constitution. The parliament has not been restored since then and the unconstitutional State Security Law has been implemented since its first day of issuance.

The problem was not simply that both sides had to learn democracy and its use, and how to be tolerant, educated and law abiding, but rather that the Amir and his advisers wished to rule without consulting the people's representatives in parliament. The Amir desired to rule as patriarch of a big family, leaning on the tribal traditions of a 19th century monarch. If the assembly had given in to him, his demands would have increased; by its legislative stubbornness and persistence, it entered into history as a real, democratic National Assembly. (P Wilkinson, *Speak Together of Freedom*, pp 5-6)

Of course, it is difficult to agree with all these words, because the states of the Gulf cannot be dependent on or linked with each other for ever. Each country has its own way of life, way of developing and way of adopting democratic reforms

and liberties. All the Gulf states are not doomed to live with restricted liberties and limited human rights. There is no way for any society to live on a volcano. Something must be done to lower the pressure.

## **12. The Opposition's struggle for human rights and restoration of democracy, 1975-1990**

One effect of the dissolution of parliament was to draw into political activity many Bahrainis who had been politically neutral. Their entry into the struggle for democracy and observance of human rights brought government retaliation. In 1976 the police arrested two prominent activists, Saeed Al-Uwainati, a journalist, and Mohammed Gholoom, a physician. Their deaths, by torture, were meant to serve as a warning to the people, especially those in the vanguard of the struggle.

Bahrain police begin to make mass arrests. Scores of trade unionists and political activists, including Abbas Awachi, Abdali Al Khayat, Jaafer Sumaikh, Abbas Hilal, Ahmad Al Shamlan (also redetained in February 1996), Dr Abdul Hadi Khalaf and many others, were detained and ill-treated under the provisions of the State Security Law.

The early years of the 1980s witnessed intensification of the violation of human rights. The Government, using the pretext of countering the influence of the 1979 Iranian revolution, implemented sectarian policies excluding the Shia community and committed widespread abuses of human rights. In 1980, more than a hundred people of Iranian origin were loaded in boats and expelled from Bahrain without any due process of law. Most of those evicted were born in Bahrain and held valid passports. It became common for a Shia to be arrested, ill-treated, expelled from work, banned from further education and restricted from traveling abroad. This policy caused a migration of several hundreds of people

to London, Copenhagen, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other Gulf states."

Torture and persecution have become endemic under the State Security Law. I give some examples so that readers may visualize what is happening in Bahrain. On May 10, 1980, Jamil Ali Mohson Al-Ali, who was from Manama and in his twenties, died under torture. Photographs of his body in the mortuary showed signs of cigarette burns, ironing, drilling and severe beating. Demonstrations broke out in protest at these gross violations, but the grip of the security forces was tightened further. On July 10, 1980, Karim Al-Habshi, also from Manama and only 18-years-old, was tortured to death. And on February 14, 1981, Mohammed Hassan Madan, in his early thirties, from Dair, also died under torture, and again demonstrations followed. On February 15, security forces attacked and killed a boy of nine, Adel Khokhi, from Samahij. On August 19, 1981, a religious man, Shaikh Jamal Al-Asfoor, was killed in custody, showing signs of torture...

On occasion, the Government has provoked the opposition into actions in order to counter them. In December 1981, the Government alleged discovery of a conspiracy directed against state security and made numerous arrests. From these 73 people were put before the State Security Court and given sentences ranging from seven years to life imprisonment. The security forces used these events to further consolidate sectarian policies and as a result every Bahraini Shia became a suspect unless proven innocent. For example, in 1982, the Shia universities admitted about a hundred Bahrain students from the Shia community. They were formally notified of their acceptance, but the Bahraini authorities intervened and prevented the students from taking their places in the university.

Similarly, in February 1984, three private schools run by the Islamic Enlightenment Society were closed down. The society and school buildings are located on the main Budayya Highway and remain to date a stark example of sectarian

policy. The end of the 1980s saw a crackdown on all Shia teaching circles in mosques. The Shia community is the only segment in Bahrain society (including foreigners) that is prevented from teaching its religion. "The Shia of Bahrain are banned from senior positions in the Foreign, Defence, Interior and Justice Ministries, and have recently been sidelined in service ministries such as Health, Transport and Water and Electricity as well. As a result, unemployment amongst the Shia community has soared to 25,000-35,000 people, while more than 100,000 people of the foreign workforce are now working in Bahrain. (see R. Wilkinson)

Endless tension since 1975 and the dissolution of the assembly means that neither government, nor state, nor people can function normally. Struggle cannot continue indefinitely, and the side that yields must be government and state. A wise ruler, like an army commander, must manoeuvre, change positions for attack, retreat and conquest. In diplomatic and political terms, society cannot stand still, without changes and reforms. In ancient times as today, rulers who could accept and practise progressive ideas had opportunity to survive. The British monarchy provides a good example and Tsarist Russia a bad one. The last Tsar, Nicholas II, unreceptive to advanced ideas and unable to manoeuvre, relied on force. The outcome was tragic for him, his family and the monarchy. Bahrain is on a Russian course, the Amir and his advisers sailing against a flood tide and safe only so long as the ship's propulsion is working perfectly.

The 1980s witnessed "a continuation of human rights abuses that resulted in the death in custody of 30-year-old Radhi Mahdi Ibrahim on August 30, 1986. Three weeks later, on September 20, Dr Hashim Ismael Al-Alawi also died, under torture.

During June and July of 1988, clashes between security forces and residents of Bilad Al-Qadim resulted in many arrests and a sweeping crackdown. Shaikh Al-Jamri had delivered sermons in Bilad Al-Qadim as part of his social

programme that covered many areas. The Government attributed the unrest to Shaikh Al-Jamri's sermons and in July 1988 he was dismissed from the Religious Court where he had served as a judge since 1977 (even though it is unlawful to dismiss judges in Bahrain). In September 1988, Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, together with his son, Mohammed Jamil, and son in law, Abdul Jalil Khalil Ibrahim, were detained after a crackdown on mosque gatherings. Shaikh Al-Jamri was released on the same day, September 6, following an outbreak of demonstrations but his relatives were sentenced to seven and ten years imprisonment.

When the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, hundreds of Bahrainis who were forced out by the repressive policies of earlier years began to return home. Bahraini security forces invented a new method of punishment. People returning home were detained in the airport for interrogation. A few days later, new Bahraini passports would be issued with a validity of one year and the person would be deported to neighbouring countries. This procedure contravenes international standards as well as Article 17 of the Bahrain Constitution which states that 'No citizen shall be deported from Bahrain, nor shall he be denied re-entry.

### **Amnesty International's campaign for freedom and human rights.**

Early in the 1980s, Amnesty International turned the spotlight on human rights violations in Bahrain and accused the Government of unlawful behaviour. Violations "included the arbitrary arrest and prolonged administrative and incommunicado detention without charge or trial of suspected political opponents; the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, particularly during pre-trial detention, in order to extract 'confessions'; grossly unfair trials before the State Security Court; and the forcible exile from the country of Bahraini nationals. While executions have not been carried

out in Bahrain for many years, Amnesty International remains concerned about the introduction by law of new offences and the continued passing of death sentences. A disproportionate number of victims of such violations have been Shia Muslims, particularly in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and an alleged coup attempt in Bahrain in 1981.

Many suspected of having links with Iran were arrested, held in indefinite detention without trial or convicted to long terms of imprisonment following unfair trial. Certainly, it was known at home and abroad that there was no attempted conspiracy or coup, but the Government used the allegations to crush any suspected group or individuals. From its alarm over the revolution in Iran, it arrested so-called pro-Iranian members of underground organizations, insisting that these organizations were supported by Iran. Fifteen years after the 1981 alleged "coup", 73 Bahrainis are still in jail without any court proceedings. All the detainees have suffered ill-treatment and insults over the years, and six died in detention before 1986. Amnesty protested against "the dire conditions prevailing in Bahrain's prisons, conditions which are tantamount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

### **Vigorous confrontation between Government and Opposition.**

During 20 years of struggle for return of the constitution and the national assembly and for human rights thousands of Bahrainis were either jailed or banished and scores were killed under torture. The Government's only dialogue, repression, has been constantly used against any raising their voices in defence of democracy. (See Amnesty International Report, Bahrain, A Human Rights Crisis, Sept 1995, London).

The opposition stated "dictators must not be allowed to pursue their own agenda of destruction and human rights

violations. The world paid heavily to end the Nazi phenomenon, but new forms of racism and tribalism have emerged." (*Voice of Bahrain*, April 1996)

The Bahraini people refuse to surrender to the oppressors. The ranks of detainees are swelled by new ones, sons of the people. One is Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, religious leader and famous author who studied Islamic theology and law at Al-Najaf Religious Institute (1962-1973). His books include *Islamic Duties*, *Islamic Teachings*, *Women in Islam* and poetry. In 1973 he was elected by the 14th regional constituency to the national assembly and lobbied vigorously against the State Security Law.

During 1975-77 as a member of the Islamic Enlightenment Society he was involved in many cultural social, charitable and educational activities for the promotion of religious teachings and justice. In 1977, he accepted an invitation to become a Shia judge in the Religious Court, a part of the Ministry of Justice. But in 1988, the Government decided to punish him for his open opposition to the regime. In July, Shaikh Al-Jamri was suspended from duty and in September arrested, but freed after popular demonstrations. Later re-arrested, he is still in custody.

Oppression could not be maintained without the help of British officers working for the Bahraini Government. notably Ian Henderson, 'ruler' since 1966. "His first task was to reorganize the state security apparatus which involved amongst other steps recruiting many police officers from Britain. Attributed to him was introduction of 'severe torture' confessions. It does not matter what the detainee knows if it does not fit the picture of the conspiracy which Henderson and his men had in mind. "Bahraini security forces grew rapidly during the seventies and eighties, and today they are said to be twice the size of the defence force - 13,000 police to 6,800 soldiers. This is in a country which has a population of just above 500,000, one-third of whom are expatriates. Many prisoners who gave accounts of their torture to

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations describe a soft spoken, bald and tall British male supervising critical stages of torture and confessions... Many Bahraini Government officials and opposition figures do not dispute that Ian Henderson rules the country. On many occasions, ministers would promise families to release their sons, only to say later that Henderson had refused. And so, despite 24 years of independence from Britain, an officer from Scotland is the undisputed ruler. Consequently, people still blame the British for any killing or torture in Bahrain's notorious prisons." (See Brigadier Ian Henderson: *An Officer, but is he a gentleman?* Bahrain Freedom Movement, London, 1996)

### **13. The regime oppresses the citizens**

In August 1990, President Saddam Hussein sent his Iraqi army to invade the brotherly state of Kuwait, brutally occupying it as a declared new province of Iraq. The United States responded by assembling multi-national forces which, mainly through massive air strikes before a short, bloody land war, forced the Iraqi army to retreat. The Iraqi debacle and the liberation of Kuwait brought fresh perspectives and feelings that a new order of justice and democracy was in prospect in the Gulf. But in Bahrain, events were understood otherwise. The Government was frightened by happenings in the Gulf, while the opposition forces were wrong to think that they would achieve their goals at this stage.

A petition calling on the Amir to restore the national assembly and the constitution was drawn up by leaders representing all sections of society and signed by 300 prominent figures. It was submitted by its sponsors: Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, ex-MP; Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain, educationist; Dr Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood, university professor; Mr Mohammed Jaber Sabah, ex-MP; and Shaikh Isa Al-Joder, religious scholar. The Amir ignored the plea and instead set up a powerless and non-elected consultative council which had no constitutional basis, called the Shura Council. Its 30 members, appointed by the Amir, were meant to provide non-mandatory opinion to the Government.

Bahrain's people feel vulnerable in their country, at home, in the streets and even in mosques. Security forces may search, question and arrest anybody who looks suspicious. Lectures,

seminars, innocent speeches can be canceled and speakers detained. On March 6, 1993, a seminar planned to take place in Khawaja mosque in Manama, held by Shaikh Al-Jamri and Dr Al-Mahmood, was banned and a siege of the mosque was conducted. On August 21st Mattam Al-Qassab was closed down after the holding of a public function, and on September 26, 1993, a religious scholar, Seyed Dhia Al-Mosawi, was arrested for delivering a speech in the Momin mosque demanding the restoration of parliament. (see R Wilkinson, p 7)

Government attempts to exploit differences between the branches of Islam failed in the face of Sunni and Shia determination for unity. In October 1994, ten Sunni and four Shia leaders decided to send a petition to the Amir demanding, "restoration of the National Assembly through free elections, the involvement of women in the democratic process and the return to freedom of expression and opinion..." According to Article 63 of the constitution, the current Bahrain Government is unconstitutional. The petition was submitted to the public in October 1994, and 25,000 signatures of Bahrainis of voting age were collected. Permission for a meeting with the Amir was not granted and the petition has yet to be received. An engineering manager for the Ministry of Works, Mr Saeed Al-Asbool, was sacked in November 1994 because of his involvement in collecting signatures.

The first pro-democracy leader to be detained following the October 1994 petition was Shaikh Ali Salman, a prominent religious scholar who was instrumental in campaigning for signatures and in December many Shia villages openly demonstrated for his release. The police raided his home in Bilad-al-Qadeem on the 5th of December and arrested him; that morning, crowds gathered at mosques where Shaikh Salman had been leading prayers. As a result, excessive use of force by the police and widespread arrests were employed to suppress the popular uprising.

Security forces blocked main roadways, while rubber bullets and tear gas were sprayed from their helicopters. Reserve military forces were called in and it was reported that columns of special Saudi National Guards crossed the causeway from Saudi Arabia to Bahrain.

Among the casualties, Hani Abbas Khamis and Hani Ahmad Al-Wasti were shot dead, Mrs Zainab Al-Rashed was hit in the eye by a bullet fragment, Ali Mohammed Ismail was beaten by police and Haj Mirza Ali was clubbed to death by gun butts. Besides jailing 138 Bahrainis, the Government resorted to further deportation of political opponents. Three religious leaders, Shaikh Ali Salman, Shaikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Seyed Haider Al-Setri made their way to London after expulsion.

## 14. A New Factor in Bahrain Politics

Women's role in political struggle can be decisive, as in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Bahraini women entered the fray at the end of the 1980s. In March 1995, 310 professional women signed a petition to the Amir. This requested "initiation of a national dialogue, the restoration of democratic rights and the upholding of the rights of those held in custody. Of the 310 who signed, 92 were government employees and were threatened with dismissal from their jobs if they did not withdraw their support and apologize. Three refused to withdraw their signatures and submit formal apology - Dr. Munira Fakhro of the University of Bahrain, Aziza Al-Bassam, of state broadcasting, and Hassa Al-Khumairi, a department head in the Ministry of Education. These three were subsequently sacked.

The assertion of women in numbers of their rights and dignity surprised the Gulf and the Bahrain Government reacted. "There have been numerous cases of abuse targeted directly at women in Bahrain. Women have become very involved with political issues and a common feeling within the female community is that the Government is worried because the Gulf region has never seen such an influential involvement by women. The detaining of several women in recent months has been a new element in the conflict, and one which is uncommon in the Arab World. Shaikh Ali Salman said in an interview...'As is well known in the Arab, Gulf and Islamic countries...women are not arrested except in very exceptional cases. Really, the matter is that the detained women have a brother, husband or son who is arrested and they display

solidarity with the people demanding their just rights. The reaction by women has caused this cruel punishment.

Women are detained in seclusion for long times and are exposed to physical and psychological torture and are not allowed to receive their family members or lawyers. The threat of arrest, humiliation or torture has not intimidated women who realize that without justice and democracy their relatives will not be freed. So, they prefer struggle to sitting meekly with their hands folded. While women activists as yet represent only a minority, their organization is gathering momentum. In 1995, numerous women arrested included several teachers at Isa Town secondary girls' school after a demonstration. While beaten and humiliated in front of their students, the teachers persisted in their demands - and were suspended from their jobs without pay for three months.

"The Parliamentary Human Rights Group (Great Britain) received reports recently of a similar incident on March 23 and 24, 1996, where four people were arrested at a secondary school in Hamad Town, and of numerous occasions of secondary schoolgirls being beaten by security forces. Our readers must not think that the discontent is confined to a small group of men, women, young men and girls. It is in reality universal. (See: Sue Lloyd-Roberts, *Bahrain: A Turbulent Oasis*. Dialogue, July 1996, p 2)

The forces are not equal in Bahrain. "The Government may have all the means of repression, but it has failed to tame the aspirations of the people for a better life under the constitutional law. Having failed to contain the situation with the means of arms, it is time for the Government to try dialogue as a vehicle for peace and tranquillity. We are confident that change will eventually come to Bahrain."

The solution to this indefinite situation will require dialogue and concessions between Government and opposition and support for change from other Arab countries and from the West, especially Britain and the USA.

## **15. Women Petition of April 1995**

Your Highness Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa  
Amir of the State of Bahrain

Salutations from Bahrain's women,

Motivated by our well-founded confidence in Your Highness' kindness and by our strong belief in the importance of communicating our views to You through the democratic dialogue that You have on several occasions emphasized Your adherence to, we have the honour in presenting to Your Highness this statement to express our heightened concerns over the circumstances which our beloved country Bahrain is going through.

We were alarmed as Bahraini citizens by the recent escalation of incidents and the use of the language of violence instead of the language of dialogue to confront the incidents and resolve the conflict so that we were no longer able to ignore what was occurring around us daily especially with our awareness that the continuation of violence would not lead to solving the problem but to exacerbating it. The continuation and spread of violence will touch everyone sooner or later. Experiences of other nations have proved that violence is a vicious circle that generates resentment, deepens hatred and entrenches violence and in the end we will all be losers and our beloved country will be inflicted with wounds that will not heal for a long time.

While we confirm our total belief that sabotage and

destruction of public installations is completely unacceptable, we also understand that this could be an expression of the absence of dialogue channels and a reflection of the depth and magnitude of the build-up of suffering and the deterioration in economic and social conditions for a wide segment of the people of Bahrain especially the unemployed amongst them; conditions which need urgent solutions to confront the current developments.

We were also alarmed as citizens and mothers by the practices of the security and anti-riot force towards the citizens who dwell in the villages; practices which ranged from insults and severe beatings of young men, women and children to killing defenceless demonstrators including pupils and university students with bullets.

While we categorically and emphatically reject acts of sabotage, we do not consider them sufficient justification for the use of bullets by the security forces, especially against children and defenceless citizens. We are confident that the esteemed Bahraini Government will not rule out means of dialogue and dealing with demonstrators in order to resort to reasoning with them with bullets especially since the bulk of the acts of sabotage that the demonstrators are accused of committing is not legally punishable by death.

Your Highness, we believe that with your wisdom you are not unaware that progress in dealing with the developments requires breaking the circle of violence and only the stronger party with its wisdom and rationality and not with its weapon is capable of it. We are completely confident in Your abilities in getting our country out of this testing predicament to maintain national unity.

On this basis, we present to Your Highness this statement requesting your Highness' personal intervention to break the circle of violence and open the door to dialogue to consider with Your established wisdom ways of dealing with the situation which may be achieved through the following

means:

1. Ceasing the use of bullets to disperse demonstrators, illegal forced entries and mass arrests;
2. Dealing with detainees according to the rule of law with all that entails of guarantees to the detainees during periods of investigation and trial while expediting the presentation of the defendants to trial , releasing immediately the remaining detainees and repatriating the exiles;
3. Creating employment opportunities for all citizens, securing the minimum requirements for their livelihood and finding an effective solution for the increase in the foreign labour force;
4. Opening the door to a national dialogue with the aim of reaching the appropriate solution;
5. Reactivating the Constitution of the State of Bahrain and calling for elections to the National Assembly and allowing public liberties and freedom of speech;
6. Including Bahraini women in political decision making and utilizing their creative energies in all spheres to serve our country Bahrain.

We are hopeful that Your Highness with Your established paternal spirit and great wisdom are aware of the sensitivity of the situation and capable of taking the right decision which will ensure putting an end to the spilling of blood and rescuing our nation from this dangerous bend in the history of our dear country. Please accept our highest appreciation and respect to Your Kind Highness,  
Bahrain's Citizens and Mothers

Signatures: Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam, Programme Producer, Bahrain Broadcasting; Dr. Khawlah Mohammed Matar, Journalist; Dr. Monira Ahmed Fakhro, University Professor; Ayisha Khalifa Matar, Director, Modern Handicraft Industries; Dr. Fadheela Taher Al-Mahroos, Pediatrician; Jaleela Sayed Ahmed, Lawyer; Wedad Mohammed Al-Masqati, Lawyer; Fawziya Al-Sitri, Employee; Dr. Sabeka Mohammed Al-Najjar, Employee; Sawsen Ibrahim Al-

Khayat, Employee; Hussah Al-Khumairi, Director of Continuous Education; Mariyam Abdullah Fakhro, Employee; Khadijah Ali Masoud, Employee; Sheikha Mubarrak Hamad, Employee; Nadia Al-Masqati, Accountant; Farida Ghoulam Ismael, Employee; Koukab Abdullah Abu-Idris, Employee; Radhia Khalil Ibrahim, Teacher; Muna Abbas Mansoor, Employee; Leila Ali, Employee (PLUS THREE HUNDRED OTHER WOMEN).

*Note: Three of the leading women above were dismissed from their jobs as a result of submitting the petition: Ms. Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam, Dr. Munira Ahmad Fakhro, and Ms. Hassa Al-Khumairi*

## 16. Can the West be Trusted?

The Economist, 25 March 1995, questioned whether the UK Government would use its influence to bring about political reforms in Bahrain in the way the United States used their influence in Kuwait. It has already been noticed that the British Embassy in Bahrain treated events differently from the US, Japanese and French officials. While they provide generally accurate accounts, the British Embassy always plays down the uprising.

The Economist wrote: "For a few brief months, some 20 years ago, Bahrain's elected parliament and liberal constitution shone a brave message across the murky waters of the Gulf, In 1975, the light went out: the regime dissolved parliament and suspended the bits of the constitution that enshrined civil liberties. In October 1994, a committee of 14 prominent Bahrainis politely petitioned for a return to the good old months. A defensive regime - the ruling Al-Khalifa family - which has an even more defensive Saudi Arabia breathing down its neck, responded aggressively, cracking down on all dissent.

"Three Bahraini clerics who advocated democratic reforms in their sermons were deported and sought asylum in England. Their deportation sparked violent protests, leading to half a dozen deaths and several hundred arrests. Last week one of the original petitioners was arrested. More demonstrations and arrests followed. "Bahrain, linked by a causeway to Saudi Arabia, matters more than its 400,000 citizens (plus 150,000 expatriates) and modest natural resources might

suggest. America's navy has facilities there; so does Britain's forces. William Perry, America's defence secretary, came visiting this week to press for continuing vigilance against Iraq and Iran. Unemployment is high and rising, especially among the Shia, who are barred from the security services and other jobs thought to be sensitive. Economic grievances make Shia voices louder than others in protest".

"But dissent cuts across sectarian and class divides. It is neither exclusively Shia nor hard-line Islamist. The committee that drafted the petition for democracy and basic rights includes Sunni religious leaders and a Sunni feminist professor. As a sop, the Bahrainis have been given an appointed advisory council on Saudi lines. They despise this, looking instead to Kuwait's parliament, re-established after the Gulf war against strenuous opposition from the Saudis, who do not want anything smelling, however faintly, of democracy in their backyard. The Americans, uneasy at the thought that they had gone to war to rescue an unconstitutional monarchy, urged Kuwait's rulers to hold an election. Britain carries weight in Bahrain. Will it help the reformers? They aren't holding their breath".

## 17. The Sham of Democracies

What should be the response of a democratic country when it is called upon to support a democratic movement in the Third World? Why are we witnessing a selective approach to the 'democratization' process? Should democratic values be advocated worldwide? The people of Bahrain know well how partisan is the western approach. For they have become the victim of their trust in the democratic powers, especially the United States and Britain.

They observe the case of Iraq, where President Hussein's forces slaughtered powerless people while America watched. Despite the US-led United Nations' ban on Iraqi warplanes, helicopter gunships were allowed to operate and eliminate uprisings in southern Iraq. The Americans have made excuses, but none plausible enough to withstand the feeling of betrayal of the Iraqi people. A similar episode unfolds in Bahrain, a long standing friend of Britain and the home of US military bases. Twenty years of struggle for reinstatement of the constitution has resulted in thousands jailed or banished and scores killed under torture; supervised where not ordered by British officers. Why the British and American Governments condone repression in Bahrain is not clear. All the indications are that the Al-Khalifa tribal regime could not undertake the massive campaign of repression without the prior approval of the US Government. For example, when the riot police took the decision to attack students at the University of Bahrain on 1st April 1995, the US and British embassies had been informed in advance, according to informed sources. They were given similar notification when

Shaikh Al-Jamri, was first put under house arrest together with his family on 1st April and when he was arrested two weeks later.

Not a single protest has been made to the Bahraini authorities for ordering the unprecedented crackdown on the constitutionalists. The people have refrained from declaring controversial aims, such as the overthrow of the tribal regime which is both despotic and outdated, and have limited aims to reinstatement of the constitution. They thought this humble demand would be favoured by the democratic West. They have been compelled to conclude that Washington and London have assured the Bahraini authorities of their full support of repressive measures. The British Foreign Secretary said in London on 5th April that his Government offered full support to their old friends, the Government of Bahrain. This outrageous statement was looked upon as a license to Ian Henderson to pursue his hostile policies. Officials from Washington visited Bahrain to confirm US backing for the Khalifa regime's measures. The Western governments might have received with satisfaction and gratitude the opposition's modest demand, since restoring the constitution would endorse legitimacy of Khalifa rule, in the manner of the Al Sabah family's in Kuwait. Approval of Khalifa monopoly of power suggests a moral failure of the West.

Following a tightly controlled strategy, the security forces concentrated their attacks on certain areas to depict the uprising with certain colours. Then the information and interior ministers issued orders, published in daily newspapers, that any person who dared to transmit any news to the outside world would be punished. Whole villages were ransacked by security men and property stolen. Mosques were damaged, elderly men and women were taken prisoner, children were tortured and killed. And the information ministry activated its propaganda agencies to give a fictitious picture of stability.

The Economist of 22 April published a two-page paid advert

on Bahrain where the Government gave an impression of a business haven. However, the effect was nullified by a news item in the same issue referring to a crackdown on the Islamic opposition and arrests.

## 18. Eyewitness Kathy Evans

Under the headline, "Shia mosques smashed as police answer Bahrain unrest," The Guardian, 11 April 1995, published a report by journalist Kathy Evans in Bahrain. At the Mukbara mosque in the village of Sannabis, Hussein wept the broken glass into neat piles. 'Two days ago, they came again. This time they wrecked our mosques. This one and one down the road. We all saw it from our roofs,' he said. 'They' are the Bahraini police, who Hussein said pay almost nightly visits to the Shia coastal village, terrorizing its inhabitants. In the courtyard, small, round tablets used in Shia prayers, stones from the holy city of Kerbala, lay smashed into tiny fragments. 'They hate us Shia', Hussein said as he sorted through the broken prayer stones. Elsewhere in the village, shops were closed, shutters firmly down and the streets empty of life. Sannabis is just one of a series of Shia villages which have seen the worst of the Government's response to the five-month uprising by Bahrainis demanding jobs and parliamentary elections". Kathy Evans reported that Bahrain is the only country in the world that forcibly deports its citizens and ban them from returning home.

## 19. Unconstitutional Rule

Since the Amir dissolved the national assembly in 1975, international human rights organizations have compiled numerous reports and urgent action circulars in their endeavour to stop abuses in Bahrain. These bodies include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Article 19, Index on Censorship, Arab Organization of Human Rights, The International Commission of Jurists, the Bar Human Rights Committee, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, FDIH, International Human Rights Committee, PEN, Kuwait Society for Human Rights, and International Association Against Torture. Their calls have largely gone unheeded. The United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva placed Bahrain on a list for monitoring in February 1992. In the following 12 months, the Al-Khalifa acted on advice from foreign experts and allowed the return of some 150 exiles. Some political prisoners were released after serving full, but unlawful, sentences. When the American delegation on the UN Human Rights Commission proposed removal of Bahrain from the monitoring list, support came from other members. No sooner had Bahrain been cleared by the UN than it resumed unrestrained abuse. Documented cases of abuse have been prepared for presentation to UN sub-committees, but there is no sub-committee to investigate forcible exile - a unique human rights violation that has specialists baffled.

As the uprising continued month after month, there was no sign of an end to internal strife. The forms of torture used by the security forces were designed to cause maximum pain,

humiliation and even death. One victim was 16-year-old Saeed Al Askafy, whose mutilated and sexually-abused body was handed back to his family on 8 July 1995, only a few days after he had been detained. The people of Bahrain are not the cause of instability, and their demands are neither extravagant nor unprecedented. In fact, the 30 months of democratic experience was the quietest period in Bahrain's modern history. Throughout each decade of the 20th century, various opposition groups repeated the demand for an elected assembly. People were harshly treated, many exiled. The case of the three Bahrainis exiled to St Helena (1957-1961), compensated by the British for wrongful imprisonment, is well documented in British Foreign Office archives. People with conscience and values are called upon to declare their support for the popular movement in Bahrain and to deplore atrocities. Every voice counts in the struggle against tyranny and despotism. Silence prolongs the suffering of the innocent and encourages injustice.

## **20. Motion in the House of Commons**

Twenty-eight members of the British parliament submitted a notice of motion (No 1313) on 28 June 1995 stating: "That this House expresses its disgust at the latest crime against women in Bahrain committed by the British mercenary-led Security and Intelligence Services of the royal dictatorship of Bahrain; notes that high school teacher and mother of three children Fatema Abdullah Abu Idress was gassed by storm-troopers of the SIS who smashed into the Isa Town High School, shooting and teargassing schoolgirls staging a democracy demonstration, and that eight women teachers were arrested after being beaten and having their clothes ripped from them by the thugs, since when they have been systematically abused in prison and dismissed from their positions at the school; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to place concern for human and democratic rights above base financial considerations, and side with the democratic people of Bahrain against the royal despots who oppress them."

## **21. Government Unleashes Terror Campaign**

The Government's responsibility for abuse of individuals extends to attempts to create havoc by arson and even bombing. It is widely believed that the authorities have perpetrated violent acts to undermine the peaceful nature of the constitutional movement and by blaming dissidents seek to win sympathy for the Government. Such an incident was arson in a car park belonging to Al Ayyam, the daily newspaper. Two cars were burnt, one used by the editor, Nabil Al Hamar. The spontaneous reactions from various political quarters, including some of the Arab governments, to a minor incident indicate pre-planning of the whole thing. In fact, the support of some Arab governments to the Al Khalifa in this case was far greater than their half-hearted reaction to the coup attempt that took place in Qatar. Bahrain has been accused of an active role in the planning of the abortive coup and it is reported that the main figure behind it was a former minister, Shaikh Hamad bin Jassam Al Thani, who was paid by the deposed Amir, Shaikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani.

While the Khalifa Government pursues its campaign of terror, the opposition has unreservedly condemned all forms of violence, believing dialogue the only way out of the crisis.

## **22. Petitions, Statements, Letters and other official documents of the Opposition Forces**

As the sword is a weapon, so is the word, and its influence down the ages is well established. The opposition forces can respond quickly to any important event in Bahrain. The material used in communications - in petitions, statements, letters and so on - shows that the political opposition forces are peacefully minded people, yet stubbornly persistent and convinced they can achieve their goals without resort to arms.

## **23. The Petition Submitted to the Amir of Bahrain on 15 November 1992**

**His Highness Sheikh Essa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, the Amir of the State of Bahrain.**

Peace be upon you,

In a historic moment, Your Highness had approved the Constitution of the State of Bahrain on 12.11.1393 A.H. (6 December 1973) after it had been discussed and approved by the Constituent Assembly which you had called for it to be established according to Law No. 12/1972 of 9.5.1392 A.H.

At the time you were recalling Bahrain's history in the context of Arabism and Islam, and were anticipating with faith and determination, a future based on consultation and justice, rich in participation in carrying out the responsibilities of government and administration, ensuring freedom and equality, and confirming fraternity and social solidarity, as stated in preamble of the constitution. This constitution laid down the basis of popular participation in public rights and duties on a strong footing based on the principles of consultation as outlined by our Islamic religion, and on the principles of justice, freedom and equality which have always been deep-rooted in the Islamic and human civilizations.

That process was a pioneering change targeted by your highness in order to establish a modern system to govern the state of Bahrain and a cultural achievement which will be remembered by history for your highness.

And although the dissolution of the National Assembly on 26 August 1975 by the Amiri decree No. 14/1975 according to the authority which article 65 offers to your highness, the article itself emphasizes the need to call for the election of the new assembly within a period not exceeding two months from the date of the dissolution. Otherwise the dissolved assembly would retain its complete constitutional authority, that article 108 of the constitution prevents the suspension of any of its articles except in the case of martial laws within the limits outlined by the Law. The dissolution of the Assembly did not take place in these circumstances.

According to this and taking into account the local, regional and international changes during the recent years, and in view of the new direction of the international will to create a new world order, therefore the situation requires - if article 65 is not implemented - the call for electing a new national assembly by direct and free election process as determined by the constitution. This is so that the state may exercise its democratic system according to Article 1.d which states that: "the system in Bahrain is democratic, in which sovereignty is for the people who are the source of all powers, and that the exercise of power must be as outlined by this constitution".

And in order to institutionalize confidence, and mutual respect between the state and the citizens and due to our keenness on bringing together the efforts of the people of this country, the rulers and the ruled in order to achieve the progress and prosperity of this country, and in order to liberate the energies of every citizen to participate in the process of social and economic development according to article 1.e of the constitution which states that: "the citizens have the right of participation in public affairs and enjoyment of political rights, stating with the right of election, according to this constitution and conditions and circumstances outlined by the Law". We the undersigned present to your highness this letter motivated by the feeling of our Islamic and national responsibility, and our legitimate rights according to article 29 of the constitution which states

that: "every person has the right to communicate with the authorities in writing and with his own signature", and because your highness is the head of the state according to article 33.a of the constitution, requesting your highness to issue orders for election of the national assembly as outlined by section 2 of chapter 4 of the constitution.

The national assembly as a legislative and constitutional one does not contradict what has recently been mentioned regarding the intention of the government to form a consultative council to widen the sphere of its consultations regarding what the government wants to do. The consultative council does not replace the national assembly as a constitutional and legislative authority.

We hope Your Highness will realize this popular demand in which there is good for every one. Please accept our thanks and respect.....(Signed by 300 dignitaries).

The petition submitted to the Amir on 15 November 1992 was sponsored by six personalities, three Shia and three Sunni:

- 1- Sheikh Abdul Ameer Al-Jamri, Religious Scholar and Ex-MP
- 2- Mr. Hamid Sangoor , Lawyer
- 3- Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain Ali, Educationalist
- 4- Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood, University Professor
- 5- Mr. Mohammed Jaber Al-Sabah, Ex-MP
- 6- Sheikh Isa Al-Jowder , Religious Scholar

The Petition was signed by 300 people of high social, professional and political status.

## **24. The Historic Petition of October 1994**

**His Highness, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa  
The Amir of the State of Bahrain, may God save him**

It was an historic and successful step that you took to establish the pillars of the modern State of Bahrain. Following independence, you endorsed the Constitution on 6th December 1973 and enabled the holding of the legislative election. This was a leading edge in the modern history of Bahrain and that of the region. It has confirmed your belief in the importance of the popular participation on the basis of Shura (consultation) and justice for the fulfillment of the requirements demanded by the cultural progress of our modern country, and as demanded for laying down the foundation of its institutions with full determination and confidence in its posterity and their ability to shoulder responsibilities for the advancement of the country, peace and stability on the basis of fraternity, solidarity and social cohesion.

Since the dissolution of the National Assembly on 26th August 1975 until today, our homeland had suffered immensely. As a result, grave consequences occurred due to the interruption of the pioneering democratic process undertaken by you when you inaugurated the first legislative session of the elected National Assembly. Your people were keen to provide the opportunities for enriching the experiment of National Assembly.

The consequences after the dissolution of the National

Assembly by the Amiri decree No. 4/1974 has necessitated opening the dialogue with Your Highness on the future of our homeland. A group of citizens submitted the (first) petition to Your Highness on 15/11/1992 which summarized the demands for restoring the National Assembly in accordance with the Constitution.

As Your Highness is aware, the Consultative Council which you had appointed by an Amiri decree does not fill the existing vacuum due to the closing down of the most important and only legislative institution. The reality we now face dictates that we will fail our duty if we do not speak-out frankly to you. Your wise leadership witnesses the incorrect circumstances that our country is passing through amid the changing regional and international environment while the constitutional institution is absent. Had the banning of the National assembly been lifted, it would have enabled overcoming the negative accumulations which hinder the progress of our country. We are facing crises with dwindling opportunities and exits, the ever-worsening unemployment situation, the mounting inflation, the losses to the business sector, the problems generated by the nationality (citizenship) decrees and the prevention of many of our children from returning to their homeland. In addition, there are the laws which were enacted during the absence of the parliament which restrict the freedom of citizens and contradict the Constitution. This was accompanied by lack of freedom of expression and opinion and the total subordination of the press to the executive power. These problems, Your Highness, have forced us as citizens to demand the restoration of the National Assembly, and the involvement of women in the democratic process. This could be achieved by free elections, if you decide not to recall the dissolved parliament to convene in accordance with article 65 of the Constitution which states:

"The Amir has the right to dissolve the National Assembly by an Amiri decree in which the reasons of the dissolution are explained. The dissolution of the Assembly for a second

time and for the same reasons is not allowed. If the Assembly was dissolved, elections for a new Assembly must be held within a period not exceeding two months after the date of the dissolution. If elections were not held during this period, the dissolved Assembly would restore its complete constitutional powers, and shall meet immediately as if the dissolution has not taken place, and shall continue its functions until a new Assembly is elected."

We are confident and hopeful that you will realize the just demands of this petition. We have aimed at encouraging the completion of the structure of our young state, and at offering assistance to your wise leadership on the basis of justice, consultation and faith in the strong foundations which were laid down by our Islamic religion and which had been adopted by your blessed wisdom as stated in the Constitution of our dear Country.

May God keep you for us and grant you health and strong will. May God guide us all to what is good.

Signed by the following leading personalities and circulated for public collection of signatures:

1. Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Mahmmod, University Professor
2. Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, Ex-MP and Religious Scholar
3. Mohammed Jaber Al-Sabah, Ex-MP
4. Isa Abdulla Al-Joder, Religious Scholar
5. Ahmed Isa Al-Shamlan, Lawyer
6. Abdul Wahhab Hussain Ali, Educational Supervisor
7. Ali Qassim Rabea, Ex-MP and General Manager
8. Hesham Abdul Malik Al-Shehabi, Engineer
9. Dr. Abdul Aziz Hasan Ubol, Manager
10. Ibrahim Seyid Ali Kamal-u-Din, Marketing Officer
11. Dr. Moneera Ahmed Fakhroo, University Professor
12. Saeed Abdulla Asbool, Engineer
13. Abdulla Mohammed Saleh Al-Abbasi, Journalist
14. Abdulla Mohammed Rashid, Employee

## **25. The Popular Petition versus the Ruling Family**

The first sheet of signatures contained the above fourteen names. In less than two months the sponsors managed to collect 25,000 signatures from the public in support of the demands stated in the petition. This is a very large number compared to Bahrain's native population (around 400,000), bearing in mind that in 1973 the electorates numbered 17,000. The ruling Al-Khalifa family was angered by this informal referendum and hence ordered its security forces to mount an attack against a section of Bahrain society (Shia Community) with the aim of dividing the national consensus and derailing the peaceful opposition.

The security forces targeted the Shia Community believing that they would be supported by regional and super powers. The assumption is that it will be possible to link the Shia elements of the opposition to Iran. This would guarantee US support as a result of the bad Iran-US relations and would enable the ruling family to frighten the Sunni Community. Months after months the security forces persisted in their attacks on the Shia residential areas igniting the longest uprising in Bahrain history. The broadly-based opposition remained loyal to its constitutional principles based on national consensus. Amongst the main sufferers of the above signatories are:

1. Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri: (Islamist/Shia) Jailed on 1 April 1995, released on 25 September 1995 and re-detained on 21 January 1996.
2. Abdul Wahab Hussain:(Islamist/Shia) Jailed in March

1995, released in mid August 1995, re-detained on 14 January 1996.

3. Saeed Al-Asbool: (Nationalist/Shia) Sacked from his position as an engineering manager (ministry of works) in November 1994.

4. Dr. Munira Fakhroo: (Nationalist/Sunni) Sacked from her university position in August 1995.

5. Ahmad Al-Shamlan: (Nationalist/Sunni) Arrested in February 1996 and kept for two months.

6. Sheikh Isa Al-Joder: (Islamist/Sunni) Prevented from leading prayers in any mosque

7. Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood:(Islamist/Sunni) Remained out of his university work for two years

## **26. "Committee for Popular Petition" Statement of February 1996**

Events in our country (Bahrain) have recently been escalated as a result of the political crisis reaching a dead end. The escalation came as an inevitable result of foreign pressure imposed by some countries on the government of Bahrain. Such pressure comes whenever there looms in the horizon a rational understanding between the government and the opposition seeking political reforms. The latter's objectives do not go beyond the return to 1973 constitution, the reinstatement of suspended articles and restoration of the legislature (National Assembly) through election as was specified by the constitution of the country.

We have evidence that severe foreign pressure has been brought about on our country's government which resulted in sacrificing public freedoms, preventing the raising of any voice calling for the return to democracy and neglecting the sacrifices of the people of Bahrain which prove their loyalty and honesty for the constitutional legitimacy as represented by the present governing system. On the basis of this constitutional legitimacy, broadly-based groups took the initiative to address the problem with the political leadership, by submitting two petitions. The first was submitted on 15 November 1992 and the second one is still waiting for the appropriate time for submission which the events have made difficult. These events inflicted grave damages to the homeland and to the democratic reform process which has no other aim but to restore the 1973 constitution.

The delegation (responsible for submitting the petition) was

not given the opportunity or channel of communication to establish dialogue with the political leadership. Our country and people have suffered immensely for more than a year as a result of the closure of channels of dialogue and the spread of violence waves (from whichever source) that have no justification and which have been rejected and condemned.

Several outsiders have meddled and complicated the crisis by holding the patronizing view that it is too much for Bahrainis to have an elected parliament and to enjoy political freedom based on civil society concepts and bound by constitutional legitimacy. Every misery and pain the country suffered for more than a year had never been expected. Also no one expected the "invention" of a dramatic end full of frustrations and ridicules.

The mass Arab media intervened without mentioning for once that there is a problem caused by the suspension of constitution. The parliament was suspended twenty years ago and no one is allowed to call for its return. Instead of mentioning this fact, the untruthful Arab media spoke about a "conspiracy" staged by preachers in mosques instigating violence. The conversion of truth by Arab media resulted in the false accusation of respected religious scholars who have been calling for calm and have requested the public to abide by law and to stick to legitimate means for restoring the parliament.

The question is now raised about the rationale behind this intentional media attack. Those with a conscience are asking who benefits from falsifying events by Arab media. Why did they falsify the legitimate and peaceful demands of our people? Who benefits from the competition of Arab governments to support the suppression and confiscation of freedoms (in Bahrain)? Why do not these ever give an advise (to the government of Bahrain) to put an end to the policy of punishing those who demand their rights? On the contrary, we see them attacking our dear friends in Kuwait who supported our legitimate demands through a letter they

submitted to HH the Amir of the State of Bahrain calling on him to listen to the just demands of people. What do these media attacks and supports of Arab media and governments mean?

The Committee of the Popular Petition denounces falsifying charges against respected religious scholars and our colleagues in the Committee who were detained administratively and the Committee denounces those who imply that there is a link between these jailed opposition figures and some foreign countries. These attempts have one aim: to divert attention of the world public opinion from the reality of the political crisis.

The reality is that there exists in Bahrain a broadly-based national opposition and all these maneuvers are aimed at obstructing the path for achieving its legitimate demands. This is the same crisis which the government attempted to solve by speaking to what was known as the Group of the Initiative (Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues) and this is why some of this group were freed (last August and September) and allowed to travel abroad to calm the opposition outside the country. This confirms that there is a political crisis more than being a security problem or acts of violence.

The Committee of the Popular Petition, while denouncing violence and security abuses, urges all people of conscience in the world to intervene for putting an end to the escalating cycle of terror which primarily aims at extinguishing calls for restoring the Bahraini constitution and National Assembly. We also urge all honest people in the world to do their best to convince the political leadership in Bahrain to initiate dialogue, to release the political prisoners and to save the country from possible disasters.

Let's go forward with our national unity which characterize our experienced people. Let's declare our total rejection of violence from whatever source and under any pretext. Let's call for the abolition of all measure that prevent citizens from

returning to their home and let's call for the release of all political prisoners.

We hope that normal peaceful life would return to our country and amongst our people after this critical and testing period so that our great people continue with their civilized and distinguished contributory role.

The Committee of the Popular Petition (CPP)

Issued in Bahrain on 3 February 1996

*(Note the CPP was formed in October 1994 comprising all tendencies and sections of Bahrain society. They included Shia Islamists such as Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain both of whom are in jail now, Sunni Islamists such as Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood and Sheikh Isa Al- Joder, and patriotic activists such Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan and Mr. Saeed Al-Asbool. The CPP and its supporters gathered 25,000 signatures from the public in support of the petition calling for restoration of the constitution and parliament dissolved in 1975)*

## **27. Arresting Ahmad Al-Shamlan**

The ruling Al-Khalifa family ordered the arrest of the distinguished lawyer Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan on 7 February. The ruling family accused the leading campaigner of "assisting sabotage". Mr. Al-Shamlan was released two months later.

A hundred and seven personalities inside Bahrain issued a statement on 5 March protesting against the arrest of Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan.

"On 7 February 1996, at 5.00 am, the Bahraini security authorities arrested the lawyer and journalist Mr. Ahmad Isa Al-Shamlan, who is one of the members of the Committee for Popular Petition (CPP). The CPP is responsible for the petition that was signed by 25,000 citizens calling for the restoration of 1973 constitution, return of parliamentary life, public freedoms, granting the Bahraini women the right to elect and nominate and allowing exiles to return home. Mr. Al-Shamlan is a known activist for human rights and one who always volunteered to peacefully solve social and political problems that affect the homeland. Therefore, it is surprising that he had been accused of "agitating for violence, igniting fires and contacting outside terrorist organizations".

The defender of human rights and the rejecter of violence can not be transformed to an agitator for violence, arson and sabotage. All what he wrote and all what he stated and signed are evidences proving his national, democratic and

peaceful approach for reforms.

We as patriotic democrats affirm our rejection for violence from what ever source and call for the release of Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan and all political detainees, and call for allowing exiles to return so that they can practice their rights to live on their homeland and to open the channels of democratic dialogue and exchange of views that will save our country from the evils of disunity and hatred and will guarantee the national unity for a dignified and secure life".

## **28. A Call for Democracy and National Unity**

Twelve Bahraini personalities representing opposition forces issued a statement calling for the restoration of the dissolved parliament. The statement issued on 11 September called for "National unity and Democracy", saying:

"Our homeland and nation are facing an escalated danger as a result of the continuation of the political and security crises. This danger necessitates from all of us to shoulder our responsibilities for ending the crises. The most dangerous aspects of the problem lies in the threat to the unity of the people as a result of the discrimination policy on sectarian and tribal bases, as well as the increase in the numbers of deaths, injuries, prisoners and forcible-exiles resulting in the deterioration of security and economic conditions. The unity of our nation faces real dangers as a result of the invention of tribal and sectarian alternatives to the criterion of citizenship. Hence, we affirm the necessity to abide by the constitution as a standing pillar for guaranteeing national unity and rights of citizenship on the basis of equality amongst all sections of the society.

There seems to be a determination by the government for not addressing the core issues relating to the restoration of the constitution and popular participation. There also seems to be a determination to impose appointed bodies, such as the Shura Council , as well as imposing other outdated arrangements. The citizens of the country are urged to stick to the national criteria as outlined in the constitutional petition of 1994, which was addressed to the Amir, calling

on him to tackle the deteriorating situation since abolishing the constitutional establishment in 1975.

The true exit to the current political crisis can only be through the national and constitutional criteria. We call on all political forces, individuals and establishments of the civil society to abide by these bases for ending violence and counter violence and for providing an opportunity for a dialogue between the political leadership and representatives of the popular forces for the restoration of constitutional life to the country".

Singed by: [Ahmad Ibrahim Al Khayyat, Ahmed Ibrahim Al Thawadi, Bader Abdul Malik, Dr. Saeed Al Shehabi, Abdul Rahman Mohammed Al Nuaimi, Abdulla Ali Al-Rashid Al Bin-Ali, Abdul Nabi Al Ekri, Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf, Sheikh Ali Salman, Mohammed Abdul Jalil Al Murbati, Dr. Mansoor Al Jamri, Dr. Yaquob Yousif Al Janahi].

## **29. An Open Letter from the People of Bahrain**

*(The following letter has been signed by 10,000 Bahrainis who were living under the most sever crackdown ever carried out by the Bahraini security forces against the peaceful people of Bahrain). The letter reads as follows:*

"To the leaders of world's governments .. to the free nations of the world Greetings.. You may all know, as has been documented by authentic news media, that the people of Bahrain, over the past several years, have submitted petitions, signed by the general public and by the intelligentsia, to the government of Bahrain, calling for the implementation of political and economical reforms compatible with rapidly changing environment. The petitions have called for positive response to satisfy the aspirations of the Bahraini people by allowing a free environment for political participation and socialization.

In 1994, the people of Bahrain initiated a popular petition sponsored by all sections and trends of the society, calling for the reinstatement of constitutional order in the country and re-establishing the grounds for democratic life through the restoration of parliament and allowing participation in the vital political process. However, the government did not agree to meet with the representatives (members of the Committee for Popular Petition) and consistently refused to listen to demands.

During the detention of leading opposition figures (April-September 1995) a semi- agreement was reached with

the government regarding the demands and the way to handle them. Later, the government denied the existence of any understanding and denied any form of dialogue with leaders of the opposition. This has led the popular leaders to adopt peaceful and constitutional steps to declare their refusal of the government policy that stands against dialogue. Following this encounter, the people responded with restraint in a highly civilized manner, calling for a serious dialogue between the opposition and the government. Nevertheless, the security apparatus responded by arresting the leading figures (in January 1996) as well as thousands of people, young, old and children. Alongside this, the people of Bahrain have been accused of extremism, violence and linkage with outside parties.

The people of Bahrain refuse all these accusations, and re-confirm the peaceful and constitutional approach for the national struggle and blame the intelligence apparatus of committing part of the arson and violence by attacking places of worship and planting explosives (this has led to uncontrolled and spontaneous reactions against these agitating and organized governmental attacks).

The people of Bahrain assure all governments and nations of the world of their peaceful nature and urge free people of the world to support the constitutional demands. We also urge all to intervene for convincing the government of Bahrain to stop its repressive policy and to accept the path of dialogue with the jailed leaders and to study the democratic and constitutional demands already raised. These demands - if implemented- will save the homeland from reciprocal and vicious violent cycle. We wish all just governments further security and stability and we wish for all nations freedom and dignity". (Signed by 10,000 Bahraini citizens)

*(The names and signatures are retained with the Arab Organization for Human Rights - UK Branch. 30 March 1996)*

## **30. National Opposition Declaration**

The concept of democratic dialogue and free handling of problems and issues facing the citizen and homeland have always been the pillars for national consensus. The people of Bahrain have declared their commitment to constitutional legitimacy and their great respect for law. Both the petition of 1992 and the popular petition of 1994 have conveyed the sincere wishes of the public for initiating and consolidating the means of democratic dialogue between the government and the people, and the means for returning to legal frameworks that govern this dialogue as specified by the provisions of the constitution.

While we support any initiative towards the conductance of dialogue by peaceful means to exit the crisis and return stability to the country, we believe that the security agreement which took place between the government and some leading opposition personalities represents a positive step in this direction.

In order for this dialogue to succeed we re-confirm the required bases. The dialogue must include all national and democratic activists so that this dialogue is moved away from sectarian nature and in order to assure its national characteristics. The dialogue must also deal with the primary people's demand of restoring the 1973 constitution. Such dialogue ought to lead to an agreement with a defined programme for the reinstatement of democratic process.

We also consider the releasing of all detainees and the

returning of those dismissed from employment to their previous positions are good starting points and would be appreciated by the people. These should be the pre-requisites for democratic openness represented by the return of parliamentary life and the issuance of a general amnesty for all exiles and political prisoners.

We, as patriots and democrats, emphasize that the acceptance (by the government) to receive the popular petition which has been signed by the widest sections of the society and meeting with the delegation representing the popular petition shall have the greatest influence. The latter represents true dialogue leading to the restoration of democracy by the re-activation of 1973 constitution and reinstatement of those suspended articles of the constitution which specify and control the legislative authority and its scope. This is the demand of all the people of Bahrain, with all their tendencies and sections, regardless of their affiliations. This demand will remain to be raised until the achievement of popular participation that represents the principal pillar for national unity and civic stability."

Signed by 44 Bahraini personalities

## **31. 96 Kuwait personalities call on the Amir of Bahrain to restore democracy**

In an open letter, 96 distinguished Kuwaiti personalities appealed to the Amir of Bahrain to restore democracy to Bahrain. Amongst the signatories were eight members of parliament, the head of the Kuwaiti Human Rights Society, politicians, academics, lawyers, businessmen and pro-democracy activists. The letter to the Amir stated the following:

"HH Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Amir of Bahrain,

Greetings.

It is about one year since the people of Bahrain started their uprising demanding their legitimate and constitutional rights, while the government fails to abide by its promises. There are many Bahrainis in the jails and detentions, there are hundreds of exiles all over the world, and there are many demands, not yet fulfilled, the most important of which are the restoration of constitutional legitimacy and freedom of the people to participate in the political arena through the National Assembly in accordance with the Constitution of the State of Bahrain.

We are keen for the stability of the situation in the Gulf region, particularly in Bahrain, and we appeal to you to fulfill the aspirations of the people of Bahrain by releasing the political prisoners, allowing exiles to return home, and by calling for free legislative election for a new National assembly. In our world of today, violent clashes and

encounters are not compatible with respect of human rights and the principles of modern civil societies.

Our appeal emanate from our concern for the stability of the State of Bahrain which would be reflected positively on the future of the country and the region."

Signed by A Group of Kuwaiti Citizens, December 1995

## **32. British Parliamentary Human Rights Group Correspondence between Lord Avebury and the British Foreign Office**

On the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain. In the summer of 1996, the Parliamentary Human Rights Group in London published 'BAHRAIN - A Brickwall,' a book containing some 140 letters that passed between Lord Avebury and ministers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Members of Parliament and others.

The group, founded in 1976 as an independent forum in the British Parliament concerned with defending international human rights, now contains 130 parliamentarians from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. These members represent all political parties. The group undertakes human rights missions, publishes discussion papers, receives visitors and engages in dialogue with the Foreign Office in London. (see *Bahrain - A Brickwall*, London, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 1996).

The group's chairman and prime mover is Lord Avebury, a champion of human rights around the globe. He has spared no effort to further Bahrain's cause. Lord Avebury, who led many seminars on Bahrain had to admit to "hitting a brick wall" in his dealings with the British Government, which offered little positive response on the issues he raised in his letters. The book's introduction relates that after more than 30 years in this field, Lord Avebury "seems perplexed by the fact that HM Government chose to ignore the plight of the pro-democracy movement in a country that had not long ago been under its direct protection. Bahraini opposition maintains that the British Government has a moral and

political duty to acknowledge its part in establishing the security system in the island and the appointment of Ian Henderson at its top."

Lord Avebury first wrote in May 1993 to the Bahraini Ambassador in London about the application of citizenship laws in Bahrain. In April 1994, the Minister of the Interior replied that he would like to visit Britain when it was convenient to discuss citizenship laws and human rights. On 8 June, the ambassador invited Lord Avebury to visit Bahrain as a guest of the Government.

On 5 August 1994, Douglas Hogg, Foreign Office Minister of State, wrote to Lord Avebury, "We believe there has been a marked improvement in Bahrain's human rights record...We continue to take an interest in the human rights situation. I would welcome your assessment of the situation in Bahrain after your visit."

On 20 December 1994, Lord Avebury wrote to Mr Hogg, "I think people will find it extremely distasteful that the security apparatus which props up the family dictatorship of the Al-Khalifas is commanded by a British citizen, Mr Ian Henderson. It is under his authority that people are arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned indefinitely, shot dead at demonstrations, and tortured while in custody. I know that there are restrictions on our citizens taking service in the armed forces of foreign powers; do you not think that similar rules should apply to the security services of foreign powers?"

"We are one of Bahrain's closest allies, and we may be presumed to have some influence with them. As with all the autocracies of the Gulf, we can either try to persuade them to move with the tide of history towards participatory democracy, or we can support their creaking feudal systems until they finally disintegrate in explosions of violence and anarchy. Surely it is in Britain's interests, from the business point of view as well as from a human rights angle, to use our influence to the utmost in favour of peaceful reform. I

hope that you might respectfully suggest to the Emir that after 20 years, it is about time he considered giving back to the people the representative institution he arbitrarily dissolved in 1975."

In 9 January 1995, Lord Avebury referred in a letter to Mr Hogg to a peaceful demonstration in Bahrain three days earlier. "The main demands were the restoration of the constitution and the release of political prisoners, but the demonstrators also wanted to make it clear that they were not anti-foreigner, as had been suggested in some quarters. The demonstration had been going peacefully for some 45 minutes when the riot police appeared, encircled the demonstrators and used tear gas, rubber and plastic bullets against them, quite unnecessarily. Some 15 people were taken to Salamaniya Hospital". He thought prisoners had increased to a commonly accepted total of 1,500.

In a letter dated 10 March 1995 to William Powell MP, who was shortly to visit Bahrain, Lord Avebury said, "It would be useful if you could urge the Bahraini Government to allow a delegation to present the petition to the Amir; to lift the state of emergency; to end the use of live ammunition against demonstrators; to free all those who are arbitrarily detained; to end forcible expulsion of Bahraini citizens; to allow those previously expelled to return in peace to their homes and families; to guarantee full participation of all sections of society, including women, in the political process as stated in the Constitution; and to allow free access for international human rights NGOs to assess and report on the human rights situation."

In connection with meetings held by the Amir with Shia and Sunni groups, Lord Avebury wrote on 2 May 1995 to Mr Hogg that "obviously the idea of dialogue at all levels should be supported, but the limited extent of the processes described comes nowhere near meeting the needs of the country. If the Amir is genuinely interested in national reconciliation, he could begin with some confidence-building

measures which would demonstrate the Government's willingness to allow the expression of peaceful suggestions of reform. Those who were sacked from their jobs for signing the petition could be reinstated. The teachers who were suspended from their appointments without any kind of legal process could be reinstated and their arrears of salary paid to them. On the occasion of the Grand Islamic Eid, on 10 May, there could be an amnesty for those detained without charge, including particularly Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and Mr Abdulwahab Hussein. and all the women and children presently detained."

On 6 June 1995, Lord Avebury informed William Powell MP about his meeting in London with Mr Al-Gosaibi, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had told him that "the people of Bahrain were happy with the political system they have. Bahrain has no taxes, free health and education, and free housing, and this was better than democracy. The culture of Bahrain was different from that of Britain, and a Westminster-style parliament would be unsuitable for them. The people were not asking for the restoration of democracy, he said."

Lord Avebury added that he asked about the petition signed by 25,000 people and Mr Al-Gosaibi said it did not exist. "I also asked him about the women's petition and he professed to be unaware of that too, He did not know that the signatories of the women's petition had been threatened that they would be sacked if they did not withdraw their names and he said that could not be so. I told him that Professor Munira Fakhro had told me on the telephone on Saturday that she had been called in by the President of the University and told that she would lose her job unless she recanted, but she had refused."

Addressing Mr Powell, Lord Avebury continued, "You say the Bahrain authorities believe that much of the information I receive is false or distorted. I can only say that I am in direct contact with a number of people in Bahrain itself, and with

many more exiles and visitors. But if I am getting the wrong impression, why are the authorities not willing to let me go there and see for myself? I couldn't get a clear answer from Mr Al-Gosaibi to that question, or to the question as to why they would not allow Amnesty to visit the country."

Writing to Foreign Office Minister Baroness Chalker on 6 June, Lord Avebury set out the text of the women's petition in Bahrain:

"We were alarmed as Bahraini citizens by the recent escalation of incidents and the use of the language of violence instead of the language of dialogue. The continuation and spread of violence will touch everyone sooner or later. Experiences of other nations have proved that violence is a vicious circle that generates resentment, deepens hatred and entrenches violence and in the end we will all be losers and our beloved country will be inflicted with wounds that will not heal for a long time. We were also alarmed as citizens and others by the practices of the security and anti-riot force towards the citizens who dwell in the villages: practices which ranged from insults and severe beating of young men, women and children to killing defenceless demonstrators including pupils and university students with bullets. We present to Your Highness this statement requesting Your Highness' personal intervention to break the circle of violence and open the door to dialogue..."

On 24 August 1995, Baroness Chalker told Lord Avebury, "Throughout our correspondence, I have made clear that we regularly raise our concerns with the Bahraini authorities in a way which we believe most likely to be effective in securing improvements in human rights. We were pleased to hear that a further 150 detainees were released last week."

On 7 January 1996, Lord Avebury drew to the attention of Foreign Office minister Jeremy Hanley MP "a renewal of the use of violence by the security forces against peaceful demonstrators in Bahrain... Scores of people were detained

and many injuries were reported, some of them serious...This is not the first time I have warned you of the dangers of supporting the status quo in Bahrain (and the same argument applies to other hereditary dictatorships in the Gulf). In my opinion, you are not looking after Britain's interests when you give unquestioning support to medieval autocracies, whose actuarial life span cannot be much longer than your own government's."

On 7 March 1996, Lord Avebury addressed the heir apparent, HH Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, stressing "that it has grieved me to witness the problems which have arisen in the country, and on becoming aware that Your Highness is going to be here next week, I am writing to offer my services in attempting to break the impasse you are facing." I know that ministers at our Foreign Office have urged that the current problems of Bahrain should be addressed by dialogue and this must surely be the route towards the restoration of harmony and unity between the people and their rulers, The question is, who should participate in the dialogues and that subjects should be on the agenda? ...As a tentative sequence, I would propose the following steps:

The release of all women and minors from detention. A statement by the opposition welcoming this conciliatory gesture. A decree allowing all the political exiles to return, within a period to be decided. Initiation of a wide debate on means of repealing the state security law and restoring the constitution.

Repeal of the state security law on the National Day in December 1996, and the promulgation of a decree permitting freedom of political activity, subject only to limitations required for the preservation of public order.

When the Consultative Council comes to the end of its term of office in December 1996, preparations to begin for the election of a new Parliament in December 1997."

On 20 March 1996, Lord Avebury wrote to Nicholas Soames MP, British Armed Forces Minister, seeking information about a statement made by the heir apparent after his visit to Britain.

Shaikh Hamad had said talks with Mr Soames were "useful and fruitful. We agreed, within the framework of the Bahraini-British Military Committee's annual meeting, on a number of points, including increasing joint exercises and the number of places allocated to the Defence Force's personnel at British military colleges, in addition to supplying the Bahraini defence force with their military needs."

On 9 May 1996, Lord Avebury catalogued current events in a letter to Donald Anderson MP: "Arbitrary detention of hundreds of people, including women and children, incommunicado and in some cases accompanied by torture. Security force raids on villages, involving unnecessary battering down of doors, destruction of household property and intimidation of residents, as a form of collective punishment. Closure of Shia mosques, arrest of preachers and now, the assumption of control over the appointment of Imams which strikes at the heart of Shia customs. Total boycott by the ruling family of the recognizable leaders of the opposition. Every one of them is in prison, and the government have refused to speak to them or to discuss their modest demands. Criminalised the transmission overseas of any information about the activities of the democracy movement inside the country, and rigid control of the media within Bahrain, Forcible exile of dissidents."

### **33. Conclusions**

Throughout ten-thousand years, since settlement first by the Sumerians, Bahrain has survived, forcing the departure of invaders and conquerors. In our present restless world, society must react to the challenge of progress or perish.

In a world embracing great expectations and passions, the people of Bahrain aspire to reforms. A global obsession by the name of democracy is one Bahrain shares. At first, the British authorities stimulated desire for change, but then feared the reforms and began to stop them, particularly during Charles Belgrave's years as adviser to the Bahraini Government. But having tasted freedom and democracy, the people could not retreat. Their aspirations forced the British to retreat and allow Bahrainis their independence. Momentous strides, the creation of the Constitution and the National Assembly in 1973, were cancelled out by the extraordinary decision of the Amir to return to the past and rule as a dictator, unhampered by a parliament with limited powers which might match him in decision making.

Before 1971, the British presence acted as a buffer between Amir and democratic forces. Since 1975 confrontation between the two has been direct. Naturally, questions emerge. How long will confrontation continue? Will the Government make concessions? What is the future of the state? Many factors are involved in finding a solution - internal pressures, the situation in the Gulf region, the international situation, oil, and the behaviour of Iraq.

Given a restless and aggressive Iraq, a strong Iran, strategic military interests and fears of capture of Gulf oil by hostile forces, democratic problems will be solved only with great difficulty.

Opposition forces must be prepared for years, perhaps decades, of struggle to secure the democratic ideals that influence the West. If the USA, Britain, France and others who are interested in stability can be convinced that Bahrain's Opposition put democracy before Arab patriotism and nationalism, then it is possible they will help speed up the democratic reforms in the Gulf and in Bahrain.

I am certain that life in Bahrain will not stand still. The opposition forces are determined to pursue their struggle to the very end. The Government face a choice - uproot all the people, an impossibility, or satisfy the aspirations of the democrats.

## 34. Appendix



### US Government Views

In its report on Human Rights Practices for 1996, released by the US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor on January 30, 1997, the following was stated:

"Bahrain is a hereditary emirate with few democratic institutions and no political parties. The Al Khalifa extended family has ruled Bahrain since the late 18th century and dominates its society and government. The Constitution confirms the Amir as hereditary ruler. The current Amir, Shaykh Isa Bin Sulman Al Khalifa, governs Bahrain with the assistance of a younger brother as Prime Minister, the Amir's son as Crown Prince, and an appointed cabinet of ministers. In 1975 the Government suspended some provisions of Bahrain's 1973 Constitution, including those articles relating to the National Assembly, which the Government disbanded in the same year. There are few judicial checks on the actions

of the Amir and his Government. Bahrainis belong to the Shi'a and Sunni sects of Islam, with the Shi'a comprising over two-thirds of the indigenous population. The Sunnis predominate because the ruling family is Sunni and is supported by the armed forces, the security service, and powerful Sunni and Shi'a merchant families. Bahrain experienced considerable political unrest throughout the year, including bomb and arson attacks on public and private property.

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for public security. It controls the Public Security Force (police) and the extensive Security Service, which are responsible for maintaining internal order. The Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) is responsible for defending against external threats; however, during the year it was called upon to deal with civil unrest. The security forces committed numerous serious human rights abuses.

Bahrain has a mixed economy, with government domination of many basic industries, including the important oil and aluminum industries. Possessing limited oil and natural gas reserves, Bahrain is intensifying efforts to diversify its economic base and has attracted companies doing business in banking, financial services, oilfield services, and light manufacturing. The Government has used its modest oil revenues to build an advanced transportation and telecommunications infrastructure. Bahrain has become a regional financial and business center. Tourism, particularly via the causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia, is also a significant source of income.

The Government's human rights record worsened in 1996. The main human rights problems continue to include the denial of the right of citizens to change their government; political and other extrajudicial killings; torture; deteriorating prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention; involuntary exile; limitations on or the denial of the right to a fair public trial, especially in

the Security Court; infringements on citizens' right to privacy; and restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and worker rights. Domestic violence against women and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, and sex remain problems.....

During the year, in an effort to control civil disturbances, measures taken by the police and security forces resulted in the deaths of five persons. In at least one case, the police may have beaten to death a young man in custody. Most of the deaths occurred when police used force on crowds of antigovernment demonstrators.

On January 5, during a peaceful demonstration in the Al-Qafool area of downtown Manama, security forces shot an unidentified 16-year-old male in the leg who was then fatally struck by a vehicle when he attempted to flee the scene. On May 3, Fadhel Abbas Marhoon of the village of Karzakkan was fatally shot by a patrolling BDF unit. On July 2, 17-year-old Ali Taher was shot and killed by security forces during a demonstration in Sitra. On July 23, 53-year-old Zahra Kadhem Ali reportedly suffered a fatal heart attack when security forces arrived at her home in Bani Jamrah to arrest her adolescent son. On August 15, 19-year-old Seyed Ali Amin from the village of Karbabad died in police custody, reportedly after being beaten and tortured during interrogation at the police station in the village of Khamis. To date the Government has not investigated or prosecuted any police or security force personnel for these incidents.

Seven expatriate laborers died on March 14 when antigovernment protesters barricaded them in a restaurant in the village of Sitra and set the building on fire. One expatriate was also killed under similar circumstances in a separate arson attack in September....

Torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited by law. There are credible reports,

however, that prisoners often are beaten, both on the soles of their feet and about the face and head, burned with cigarettes, forced to endure long periods without sleep, and in some cases are subjected to electric shock. At least one death probably occurred as a result of torture during detention (see Section 1.a.). The Government has difficulty in rebutting allegations of torture and of other cruel, inhuman, or degrading practices because it permits incommunicado detention and detention without trial. There were no known instances of authorities being punished for human rights abuses committed either this year or in any previous year.

Opposition and human rights groups allege that the security forces sometimes threaten female detainees with rape and inflict other sexual abuses and harassment on them while they are in custody. These allegations are difficult either to confirm or deny.

One death and one injury resulted from opposition bombing attacks on hotels and businesses in 1996. On June 30, a man was killed when an explosive device he was allegedly planting at a banking site detonated prematurely. On March 19, a female employee was severely injured when an explosive device detonated at a downtown hotel.

Prison conditions are reportedly deteriorating. There are credible reports that, because of overcrowding, the Government is now experiencing difficulties in providing prisoners with adequate sanitation, sleeping areas, food, water, and health care.

At the Government's invitation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) sent a delegation to inspect the prisons in November. ICRC inspections are reportedly to continue into 1997....

The 1974 Constitution stated that "no person shall be arrested, detained, imprisoned, searched or compelled to reside in a specified place...except in accordance with the

provisions of the law and under the supervision of the judicial authorities." In practice, however, in matters regarding arrest, detention, or exile, the 1974 State Security Act takes precedence. Under the State Security Act, persons may be detained for up to 3 years without trial for engaging in activities or making statements regarded as a threat to the broadly defined concepts of national harmony and security, and the Government continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain citizens. In March the scope of the State Security Act of 1974 was expanded to include any case involving arson, explosions, or attacks on persons at their place of employment or because of the nature of their work. Detainees have the right to appeal such detentions after a period of 3 months and, if the appeal is denied, every 6 months thereafter from the date of the original detention.

Government security forces used the State Security Act regularly during 1996 to detain persons believed by the Government to be engaging in antiregime activities, as well as those attempting to exercise their right of free speech, association, or other rights deemed to be in opposition to the Government. Activities that can also lead to detention, questioning, warning, or arrest by the security forces include: membership in illegal organizations or those deemed subversive; painting antiregime slogans on walls; joining antigovernment demonstrations; possessing or circulating antiregime writings; preaching sermons considered by the Government to have an antiregime political tone; and harboring or associating with persons committing such acts.

In addition to overseeing the security service and police, the Ministry of Interior also controls the Office of the Public Prosecutor, whose officers initially determine whether sufficient evidence exists to continue to hold a prisoner in investigative detention. The Ministry is responsible for all aspects of prison administration. In the early stages of detention, prisoners and their attorneys have no recourse to any authority outside the Ministry of Interior. The authorities rarely permit visits to inmates who are

incarcerated for security-related offenses and such prisoners may be held incommunicado for months, sometimes years. Prisoners detained for criminal offenses, however, generally may receive visits from family members, usually once a month.

The number of women detained for questioning or placed under arrest for antigovernment offenses increased during 1996. However, credible sources within the legal profession state that the authorities do not as a rule hold women in detention for long periods.

Security forces are estimated to have held over 3,000 people in detention in 1996, including some who were arrested, released, and then arrested again. At year's end, as many as 1,500 detainees still remained in detention.

Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, a prominent Shi'a cleric, longtime opposition activist, and one of the original 14 signers of the 1994 petition to the Amir calling for the restoration of the National Assembly, was arrested on January 21 and remains in detention....

While the authorities reserve their right to use exile and the revocation of citizenship to punish individuals suspected of, or convicted of, antiregime activity, there were no reports of exile orders issued in 1996. In the past, the Government has revoked the citizenship of nationals who are considered security threats. The Government considers these individuals to have forfeited their nationality under the Citizenship Act of 1963 because they accepted foreign citizenship or passports, or engaged in antiregime activities abroad. Bahraini emigre groups and their local contacts have challenged this practice, arguing that the Government's revocation of citizenship without due process violates Bahrain's 1973 constitution. According to the emigre groups, as many as 500 Bahrainis continue to live in exile. This figure includes both those prohibited from returning to Bahrain and their family members who voluntarily live abroad with them.

Security cases are tried in secret by the Supreme Court of Appeal, sitting as the Security Court. Family members are usually not permitted in the court until the final verdict is rendered. Procedures in the security courts do not provide for even the most basic safeguards. The Security Court is exempt from adhering to the procedural guarantees of the Penal Code. Defendants may be represented by counsel but seldom see their attorneys before the actual day of arraignment. Convictions may be based solely on confessions and police evidence or testimony that may be introduced in secret. There is no discovery. Defense lawyers complain that they are rarely given sufficient time to develop witnesses. There is no right to judicial review of the legality of arrests. There is no judicial appeal of a State Security Court verdict, but the defendant may request clemency from the Amir. Over 117 Security Court convictions were publicly acknowledged by the Government by year's end, compared with fewer than 50 the previous year.

The number of political prisoners is difficult to determine because the Government does not release data on security cases, such cases are not tried in open court, and visits to prisoners convicted of security offenses are severely restricted. The Government denies that there are any political prisoners, claiming that all inmates incarcerated for committing security offenses were properly convicted of subversive acts such as espionage, espousing or committing violence, or belonging to terrorist organizations....

Under the law, the Ministry of Interior is empowered to authorize entry into private premises without specific judicial intervention. Domestic and international telephone calls and correspondence are subject to monitoring. Police informer networks are extensive and sophisticated.

During the year, the Government infringed on citizens' right to privacy on a broad-scale, using illegal searches and arbitrary arrests as tactics to control political unrest. Security forces routinely raided villages at night, entered private

homes without warrants, and took into custody residents who were suspected of either participating in or having information regarding antigovernment activities. While conducting these raids, security forces frequently confiscated, damaged, or destroyed personal property for which owners were not compensated by the Government. Security forces also regularly set up checkpoints at the entrances to villages, requiring vehicle searches and proof of identity from anyone seeking to enter or exit. In many villages, although there were no official curfews, security forces routinely arrested villagers who ventured outside their residences after sundown. On one occasion, at least two villages were locked down completely by security forces, with residents unable to enter or leave for several days. For a period of months in the early part of the year, the Government disabled all public telephones to prevent outside communications. The Government generally jams either in whole or in part foreign broadcasts that carry antigovernment programming or commentary. In May the authorities jammed a satellite transmission of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) program Assignment because it contained a report on the political unrest that was critical of the Government. A government-controlled proxy prohibits user access to Internet sites considered to be antiregime or anti-Islamic .....

While the Constitution provides for the right "to express and propagate opinions," Bahrainis are not, in practice, free to express public opposition to the Government in speech or writing. Press criticism of ruling family personalities and of government policy regarding certain sensitive subjects--such as sectarian unrest and the dispute with Qatar over the Hawar Islands--are strictly prohibited. However, local press coverage and commentary on international issues is open, and discussion of local economic and commercial issues is also relatively unrestricted. Many individuals express critical opinions openly on domestic political and social issues in private settings but do not do so to leading government officials or in public forums.

The Information Ministry exercises sweeping control over all local media. Bahrain's newspapers are privately owned but routinely exercise self-censorship of stories on sensitive topics. In January the Government changed its policy of withholding information from the public regarding incidents of unrest and permitted more, albeit slanted, articles to be published in the local press. The Government does not condone unfavorable coverage of its domestic policies by the international media and has occasionally revoked the press credentials of offending journalists. Since the Ministry also sponsors foreign journalists' residence permits, this action can lead to deportation. There were no deportations of journalists during the year. Ahmed Al-Shamlan, a local columnist and attorney, was jailed in February for his antigovernment writings but was released in April when the charges against him were dropped. The Government generally afforded foreign journalists access to Bahrain and did not limit their contacts on the island, nor did they penalize reporters afterward for unfavorable stories.

Although there are no formal regulations limiting academic freedom, as a practical matter academics try to avoid contentious political issues. In 1996 the Government introduced a new university admissions policy that appears to favor Sunnis and others who pose no question of loyalty and security, rather than focusing only on professional experience and academic qualifications. This policy was accompanied by a major shakeup in the university's administration that removed many Shi'a from senior-level positions....

Despite the Constitution's provision for the right of free assembly, the Government prohibits all public political demonstrations and meetings and controls religious gatherings that may take on political overtones. Unauthorized public gatherings of more than five persons are prohibited by law. The Government monitors gatherings that might take on a political tone and frequently disperses such meetings.

On a regular basis from January through July, the security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets, and, occasionally, live ammunition to disperse gatherings during which protesters called for the reestablishment of an elected parliament and the release of prisoners; objected to Al Khalifa rule; denounced police brutality; protested foreigners in the security forces and in the labor force; and demanded increased employment opportunities. After each of these incidents, suspected leaders and active participants were arrested.

The Government prohibits political parties and organizations. Some professional societies and social/sports clubs have traditionally served as forums for discreet political discussion, but they are restricted by law from engaging in political activity. Only the Bahraini Bar Association has been granted an exemption to the regulation requiring all associations to state in their constitutions that they will refrain from political activity. The Bar Association successfully argued that a lawyer's professional duties may require certain political actions, such as interpreting legislation or participating in a politically sensitive trial. Other organized discussions and meetings are still actively discouraged. Permits are required for most public gatherings, and permission is not routinely granted.....

Citizens are free to move within the country and change their place of residence or work. Passports, however, may be denied on political grounds. Approximately 3 percent of the indigenous population, the "bidoon," or stateless persons, mostly Persian-origin Shi'a, do not have passports and cannot readily obtain them, although they may be issued travel documents as Bahraini residents (see Section 5). About 150 Sunni bidoon, mostly from the Arabian Peninsula, were granted citizenship in 1995, and about 15 Egyptian citizens resident in Bahrain also received citizenship.

Citizens living abroad who are suspected of political or criminal offenses may face arrest and trial upon return to

Bahrain. Under the 1963 Citizenship Law, the Government may reject applications to obtain or renew passports for reasonable cause, but the applicant has the right to appeal such decisions before the High Civil Court. The Government has also issued temporary passports, good for one trip within a year, to individuals whose travel it wishes to control or whose claim to Bahraini nationality is questionable. Noncitizen residents, including Bidoon of Iranian origin, may also obtain Bahraini laissez passers, usually valid for 2 years and renewable at Bahraini embassies overseas. Laissez passer holders also require visas to reenter Bahrain.....

Citizens do not have the right or ability peacefully to change their government or their political system, and political activity is strictly controlled by the Government. Since the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1975, there have been no formal democratic political institutions. The Government permits neither political parties nor opposition organizations. The Prime Minister makes all appointments to the Cabinet. All other government positions are filled by the relevant ministries. About one-third of the cabinet ministers are Shi'a Muslim, although they do not hold security-related offices. The ordinary citizen may attempt to influence government decisions through submission of personal written petitions and informal contact with senior officials, including appeals to the Amir, the Prime Minister, and other officials at their regularly scheduled public audiences, called majlises.

In 1992 the Amir establish by decree a Consultative Council (Majlis Al-Shura.) Its members are evenly divided between Sunni and Shi'a and are appointed by the Amir. They are selected to represent major constituent groups, including representatives from the business, labor, professional, and religious communities. There are no members of the ruling Al Khalifa family or religious extremists in the Majlis. In September two Amiri decrees amended the Council's structure and mandate to allow for an expanded membership--from 30 to 40--and increased powers, including debate on issues not submitted to it by the Cabinet. The

Majlis may also summon cabinet ministers to answer questions, but its recommendations are not binding on the Government. The Majlis held its fourth session from October 1995 to June 1996 and began a new session on October 1. The chairman is a prominent Shi'a who formerly was Minister of Transport and Communications.....

Detentions and arrests of juveniles, some as young as 7 years old, increased in 1996 in connection with the political unrest. These children were generally released without charges within several days of their arrests. However, those juveniles charged with security offenses received the same treatment as adult prisoners, i.e., incommunicado detention and trial before a state security court.....

A group of approximately 9,000 to 15,000 persons, mostly of Persian-origin and Shi'a, but including some Christians, are stateless. They are commonly known as bidoon and enjoy less than full citizenship under the Citizenship Act of 1963. Many of the bidoon are second or third-generation residents whose ancestors emigrated from Iran. Although they no longer claim Iranian citizenship, they have not been granted Bahraini nationality. Without citizenship these individuals are officially unable to buy land, start a business, or obtain government loans, although in practice many do. The law does not address the citizenship rights of persons who were not registered with the authorities prior to 1959, creating a legal problem for such persons and their descendants and resulting in economic and other hardships. The Government maintains that many of those who claim to be bidoon are actually citizens of Iran or other gulf states who have voluntarily chosen not to renew their foreign passports. Bidoon and Bahrainis who speak Farsi, rather than Arabic, as their first language also face significant social and economic obstacles, including difficulty finding employment....

## **The Restive Sheikhdom**

The coverage of the US press was less than that of the UK. An example of such coverage is the following article from the Wall Street Journal by Peter Waldman, (The Wall Street Journal, Monday June 12, 1995, p A1)

MANAMA, Bahrain -- On Friday, armored vehicles rolled through the streets of this offshore-banking capital, as thousands of troops staged a show of force to keep angry Bahrainis at bay.

The crowds were gathered for Ashura, an occasion when Shiite Muslims flagellate themselves in public to mourn the martyrdom of the prophet Mohammed's grandson. The day passed peacefully. But the transformation of downtown Manama into an armed camp was a grim reminder that this tiny island has recently been the site of the worst civil unrest to hit any of the Gulf Arab monarchies in years

In the past six months, Shiite youths have been rampaging through their villages, setting electricity substations on fire and igniting canisters of cooking gas in giant fireballs. On Saturday night, three cars were burned near Bahrain's big U.S. military base, headquarters of U.S. naval operations in the Persian Gulf. The ruling family has responded by unleashing their foreign mercenaries, who have pulled young people off streets at random, beaten and jailed them.

For U.S. policy makers worried about security in the Persian Gulf, the strife in Bahrain could be a harbinger of turmoil to come. The island is connected to much larger and richer Saudi Arabia by the King Fahd causeway, and perhaps more. The same conditions that have spawned instability here -- economic decline, uneven distribution of wealth, a hated monarchy -- are also serious problems in Saudi Arabia, which has a large, disadvantaged Shiite population in its oil-rich Eastern Province.

The Bahraini riots show no sign yet of jumping to the Saudi mainland, but the unrest raises touchy questions about U.S. strategy in the region. At a time of expanding democracy in the world, is it prudent, Gulf experts ask, for the U.S. to maintain its unwavering support for the unpopular oil monarchies?

There are two worlds in Bahrain. One is home to the gated compounds of diplomats and Western bankers, who help make Bahrain, in terms of assets, one of the biggest banking centers in the world. Here are the beach resorts of wealthy Arabs, who come to drink alcohol, visit their money and be waited on by about 250,000 foreign workers.

But the other world, where a large share of the 350,000 native Bahrainis live, is a parched island of mud huts and poverty.

This year's rioters have been mostly unemployed youth from Bahrain's Shiite majority, who are demanding jobs and the restoration of Bahrain's Parliament. The ruling family, the al-Khalifas, who follow the rival Sunni sect of Islam, aren't budging.

Since December, their security forces, composed of British and Pakistani mercenaries, have killed about a dozen unarmed Shiite youths, detained thousands of islanders without charges and besieged the Shiite villages with light tanks. The Saudi government has sent helicopters and cash to Bahrain, which has only small oil reserves of its own.

Recently, as residents of the fishing village of Diraz protested during the mourning for a 17-year-old boy killed by government troops, soldiers blew off the head of an 18-year-old. 'Dogs in the United States have more human rights than we do,' says one young man in the village.

Last month, the 31-year-old daughter of Sheik Abdel-Amir al-Jamri, a leading Shiite preacher and member of the

deposed Parliament, disappeared, only to turn up several weeks later. She had gone to visit her ailing father in prison, Amnesty International reported, and was abducted and beaten there by women officers.

In London, meanwhile, Bahraini and Saudi dissidents recently held their first joint public meeting -- hosted by the House of Commons -- to express their complaints. Last summer, about 25,000 Bahrainis -- both Shiites and Sunnis -- signed a petition calling for the restoration of Parliament and other rights. Bahrain's emir, Sheik Isa Bin Salman al-Khalifa, refused to accept it.

The emir once gave democracy a chance. In 1973, he issued a constitution authorizing an elected legislature. But he abolished it two years later, when the body refused to approve some draconian security laws.

Today, the main grievance of Bahrainis echoes a rising complaint heard in other Gulf states: the gut feeling that local rulers have conspired with outsiders -- whether American oil companies, arms makers and the Pentagon, or offshore bankers and Asian labor suppliers -- to divvy up the spoils of oil for themselves.

This suspicion is particularly prevalent in Bahrain. It is fueled by the fact that the entire southern part of the island, home of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, is off-limits to Bahrainis. For the past two decades, the emir and his brother, the prime minister, have ruled by decree, with a cabinet of hand-picked ministers. As the Khalifa family has grown, so have their assets -- a source of bitter resentment.

The rulers developed many of the major hotels and office buildings, including the H-shaped Hessa complex, named for the emir's wife. The family also has taken large tracts of beachfront property for their own use, blocking age-old routes to the shore for many inland villages.

'You can't get permission for any project now without giving a percentage to the Khalifas,' contends Abdul Latif al-Mahmoud, a popular Sunni cleric whose passport and university post were revoked in 1991 after he spoke out in favor of democracy. 'This is why all Sunnis and Shiites are angry. But what can we do?'

In an interview, Tariq Almoayed, Bahrain's minister of information, says discontent on the island is isolated to 'a small number of people' who have 'received instructions from outside.' The unrest, he claims, 'does not make sense to Bahrainis.'

As proof, he says, 'there has not been a single hour of work lost in the government or private sectors; not a single person has been injured -- Bahraini or non-Bahraini -- who is not related to the rioters or the police. The world knows Bahrain is safe and secure.'

The man in charge of Bahrain's security, a Briton named Ian Henderson, lives in the shadows: seldom seen, rarely photographed, widely feared. Last of a breed of British colonials who once ran the Gulf, Mr. Henderson, 67, is chief of internal security for the Khalifa regime. Before assuming the post in the mid-1960s, he earned a police medal for helping quell the Mau Mau rebellion in the jungles of colonial Kenya.

Bahrainis blame Mr. Henderson for devising the regime's brutal response to the recent unrest. Dissidents also accuse him of persecuting democratic activists over the past 20 years and authoring Bahrain's 'Precautionary Law,' which permits detention of political prisoners for three years without trial. Some Bahrainis who claim to have been tortured in Mr. Henderson's jails say their Arab interrogators worked from questions written out in English.

Yet, others who knew him in prison say he is almost charming. 'He tells you, 'I'm only a policeman carrying out

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orders," says Hassan Radi, a lawyer whom Mr. Henderson jailed in the 1970s for participating in pro-democracy activities.

Mr. Henderson declined to be interviewed. His secretary says, 'Mr. Henderson doesn't meet journalists.'

Nothing conjures up colonialism, however, like Sheik's Beach, the emir's partly public garden on the Gulf. At the entrance, Pakistani guards check cars for contraband. No cameras, no Arabs, no South Asians, a guard says: 'White people and Japanese only.'

What about the Indian ambassador? someone asks.

'Indian people -- ambassador, minister -- not allowed,' the guard says. 'Arab people, not allowed. Emir's orders.'

Inside, dozens of white families lounge under soaring palm trees by the sea. An oil engineer from Texas tosses a football with his son. Sodas are free, and sometimes, Sheik Isa shows up with gold chains and other gifts for his guests. Once, when executives of Banque Indosuez of France were entertaining a potential new hire from London at the beach, the emir asked them where they were planning to dine that night, and sent a bottle of champagne.

Westerners, including the 3,000 or so Americans in Bahrain, have been unscathed by the riots so far. Unlike South Asian laborers, who tend to live near the poor Shiite villages and have become targets of attacks for allegedly taking locals' jobs, other foreigners have remained outside the fray. Westerners' main complaint is the dearth of official information about the unrest, which they know is out there from hearing explosions and helicopter noises in the night.

Bahrain's media is barred from covering the conflicts, and Mr. Almoayed, the information minister, has ordered all Bahrainis not to speak to foreign journalists. According to

Western bankers, investment activity has dropped, but Westerners aren't fleeing.

Asian expatriates have fared much worse. Business in the Manama bazaar, dominated by Indians and Pakistanis, has fallen 80% in recent months, traders say. Some Asians, afraid for their lives, have left.

'It has never been this bad; Bahrain was so peaceful,' says one electronics merchant, whose family moved here from India in 1920. 'I don't know what to do. This island is my home.'

Opting for the iron hand, the Khalifas have refused dialogue. Instead, the regime has introduced cosmetic reforms, such as giving more publicity to Bahrain's 'consultive' council, a group that is supposed to advise the government on matters concerning citizens, but is largely powerless.

The government is also renewing promises to replace low-wage Asian laborers with Bahrainis. But limiting foreign workers is proving difficult. Under Bahraini law, employers can only import laborers on specific contracts for limited jobs. But many companies simply bypass the law, by purchasing 'free' visas directly from members of the ruling family or their associates. Today's going rate: \$1,350 a head.

The quest for democracy in Bahrain has united the Muslim sects. This spring, prominent Sunnis and Shiites requested a joint meeting with the emir to discuss the unrest, but were rebuffed. Instead, rulers met separately with elders from each sect. The groups were given very different messages, according to participants in the meetings: Sunnis were reassured the Shiites were under control. Shiites were ordered, in unusually tough terms by the emir, to stop the violence at once, as a condition to discussing any concerns.

'The regime has always pitted Sunnis and Shiites against each other,' says Sheik Mahmoud, the Sunni cleric. 'But it's not

working this time. The problem is between the people, who want democracy, and the government, which doesn't.'

The U.S., which uses Bahrain's strategic location to police the Persian Gulf, seems to have sided with the government. In March, as the riots were raging, Defense Secretary William Perry visited Bahrain's rulers and made no public mention of the unrest, which locals interpreted as clear support for the regime. Earlier, when U.S. Ambassador David Ransom met a group of Bahrainis at the embassy, he told them the U.S. couldn't interfere in Bahrain's affairs, say people who attended the meeting. An embassy spokesman declines to comment.

In the villages, the outrage shows no sign of easing. In one home in the village of Diraz, four brothers -- ages 13 to 21 -- were recently taken by troops from their beds in the middle of the night; they were held for a month before being returned to their family. Says the youngest son: 'We will fight until we get our rights.'

## BAHRAIN: The Drive for Democracy

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