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**The struggle for democracy**

**December 1994 - December 1996**

**By KAREN DABROWSKA**

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## Chapter 1

# GEOGRAPHICAL, ECONOMIC & SOCIAL STRUCTURE

“Dawlat al-Bahrain”, the State of Bahrain, consists of 33 islands lying in the heart of the Gulf approximately 24 kilometres off the northeast coast of Saudi Arabia and 21 kilometres to the northwest of the Qatar peninsula.

Almost 85 percent of the country's total land area of some 692 square kilometres consists of the largest island in the archipelago, Awal (also known as Bahrain Island), which is about 16 kilometres wide at the northern end and tapers to a point at Ras al-Barr around 48 kilometres to the south. The capital Manama is found on this island where almost all of the country's arable land is located along with the oil-producing area around Jabal ad-Dukhan.

A causeway joins Awal to the adjacent island of Muharraq to the northeast - on which are located the country's second-largest city Muharraq, the international airport and the docks of the Arab Shipbuilding and Repair Yard. A bridge leads from Awal to the Island of Sitra along its eastern coast; Sitra contains the petroleum loading terminal and tank farm belonging to the Bahrain Petroleum Company.

Climatic conditions on the islands are for the most part severe; from June to September temperatures reach 48 centigrade and the humidity is often 80 percent. During the winter months, temperatures range from 14 - 24 degrees, but humid-

ity often rises to more than 90 percent.

The official language is Arabic, but English is also widely spoken. Almost all Bahraini citizens are Muslims, divided into two main sects: Shi'ites and Sunnis with the Shi'ites making up at least two-thirds of the citizens. According to the 1991 census non-Bahrainis comprised 36.4 percent of the total population.

According to World Bank estimates, Bahrain's gross national product (GNP) between 1991-1993 was \$4,283m, equivalent to \$7,870 per head. During 1985-93 it was estimated GNP per head decreased in real terms at an average rate of 1.0 percent per year. Over the same period the population increased by an annual average of 3.1 percent. Between 1980 and 1990 gross domestic product (GNP) increased by an annual average of 0.7 percent.

Agriculture and fishing engaged 2.4 percent of the labour force in 1991 and contributed to 1.0 percent of GNP in 1993. The principal crops are dates, tomatoes and melons. Total production of vegetables was sufficient to fulfil 75 percent of Bahrain's needs in 1988. Poultry production is also important. In mid-1989 about 7.5 percent of the country's potential fish resources remained unexploited.

In its issue of 21st June 1996, the Economist reported that Bahrain's trade balance went into surplus for the first time in five years in 1995. Preliminary figures published by the Bahrain Monetary Agency showed a surplus of \$466m. This was due to a cash injection from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait. Inflation is expected to be about 3 percent in 1996 and 1997.

Oil production in 1995 was about 40,000 barrels a day (b/d). Revenues were also received from 100,000 b/d produced from the off-shore Abu Saafa oil field shared with Saudi Arabia. Oil revenues in 1985 accounted for about 60 percent of government revenue. From April 1996, Saudi Arabia granted Bahrain revenues from Abu Saafa's entire production of 140,000 b/d. Bahrain also imports about 200,000 b/d of crude oil from Saudi Arabia for refining.

Aluminium is the mainstay of manufactured exports, which in 1995 totalled \$1,515m or nearly 30 percent of total

exports. The country has a capacity of 460,000 tonnes a year (t/y). The current expansion scheme aims to bring capacity to 500,000 by 1997. Secondary industries have also been established including the Gulf Aluminium Rolling Mill Company and Bahrain Aluminium Extrusion Company.

The banking sector experienced rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s with the government decision to allow the development of off-shore financial services. The assets of off-shore banking units totalled \$62,500m in the first quarter of 1996. There were 48 offshore banking units in operation at the time of writing.

Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC) made an operating profit of \$87 million in 1995. It is currently constructing a new urea plant with a capacity of 1,700 t/y of urea granules.

Future industrial developments include a major iron plant to be established by India's Ispat Group at an estimated cost of \$290 m and a port and industrial complex near Hidd in Muharraq. The project will cost an estimated \$200m - 340m. Consultancy bids are currently being evaluated. Companies making industrial investments may be 100 percent foreign owned. There is no personal or corporate taxation and no restriction on capital and profit repatriation. As a result of the code private investment accounts for about 20 percent of GDP against the government's share of 10 percent.

Foreign investors were recently disappointed, however, by the government decision to implement a major power and desalination project itself. The decision came after two years of considering the possibility of using limited recourse finance. Despite the decision, the government has not ruled out private investment in infrastructure in the future.

The opposition alleges that the benefits of Bahrain's relatively diversified economy are not distributed fairly among the population. Government officials deny this is a problem. However, the perception of social and economic, as well as political discrimination is certainly a major aspect of the recent unrest.

Unemployment especially in rural areas, aggravates this. Put officially at 1.8 percent by the Labour & Social Affairs

Minister Abdul Nabil Al-Shuala, diplomatic sources suggest a figure of between 15 - 30 percent. (See Economist Intelligence Unit 3rd Quarter 1996 report on Bahrain).

Al-Shuala maintains that the necessary measures to combat such problems are being implemented. According to Fred Lawson author of *Bahrain: the Modernization of Autocracy* perhaps the most obvious way of characterising Bahraini society is in terms of ethnic or sectarian composition: somewhere around one-third of the islands' citizens follow the tenants of the Sunni branch of Islam whereas the remaining two-thirds belong to the Shia sect.

Sunni predominance is buttressed by the fact that the country's most powerful social forces - notably the ruling Al Khalifah family a majority of the most prominent merchant clans and the Arab tribes allied to the Al Khalifah all identify themselves with this branch of Islam.

Since the last decades of the 18th century when the Al Khalifah migrated to the islands from Qatar, religious authority has been closely tied to tribal authority: towards the end of the 19th century, the ruler appointed a single Sunni jurist to preside over court proceedings involving personal and family disputes among the various tribes residing on the islands.

These divisions belie the simplistic notion that Bahrain consists of a Sunni community and a subordinate Shia majority, the former having firm connections with the Arabian mainland and the latter are strongly drawn to their co-religionists in Iran and southern Iraq. In fact, serious doctrinal differences have on occasion contributed to the outbreak of severe conflicts between the Al Khalifah and the largely Hanbali tribes of eastern central Arabia as well as to sharp disagreements between the established religious authorities on the northern side of the Gulf and those based on the islands. Thus religious orientation plays a significant but not a determinant part in shaping Bahraini social and political affairs.

Bahrain is hence controlled by tribal, ethnic and sectarian polices. Tribally, the Al-Khalifa control all the key ministerial and administrative positions. Out of 18 members in the cab-

inet in 1996 nine are from the Al Khalifa holding all sovereign-related offices.

Ethnically, the "Arab tribes" are given preference over the others. These include those tribes that joined the Al-Khalifa invading Bahrain in 1783. The ruling family started importing many bedouins from Syria and Arabia following the eruption of events in 1994 to counter balance the indigenous population. Next comes the Arab "Howala" who immigrated from the Persian coast to Bahrain and engaged in trade to form a powerful section of the wealthy elite.

At the bottom of the scale come the indigenous "Baharnah" community who form the majority of the population. There is also a forgotten community that is denied all of its rights. It comprises of those people with Iranian origin who settled in Bahrain but have been denied their rights of citizenship. They are termed bedoun (without). All of them identify with no country other than Bahrain.

In general the Sunnis are preferred over Shias to help the tribal and ethnic segregation.

Economically there is the:

- Upper class: Al-Khalifa and their allies.
- Upper Middle class: Wealthy families (Howala) and other traditional Shia families.
- Opportunist middle class: These are people who acquired wealth quickly through winning commissions on imports and projects by establishing good relations with the ruling upper class elite.
- Middle class: The emerging sector of society formed by professionals in all fields.
- The lower class: who came from the downtrodden sections of society in accordance with the tribal and ethnic segregation.

In addition to the indigenous population, Bahrain attracts substantial numbers of foreign workers, on both a short-term and long-term basis.

In 1971 South Asians accounted for almost one-third of the total number of migrant labourers coming into the country and more than one-quarter of all employed foreigners: by 1977, immigrants from India, Pakistan and other Asian coun-

tries represented more than two-thirds of the expatriate workers entering Bahrain.

These workers largely displaced immigrants from other Arab countries, particularly those from Oman and Iran; moderate increases in the number of workers coming from other parts of the Gulf, as well as slightly greater numbers of Egyptians entering the country, failed to offset the large-scale exodus of Omanis from the islands that took place during the 1970s.

By 1981, growing numbers of Korean, Thai and Philippino labourers were arriving in the country, further accentuating the shift away from Arab expatriates and towards south and east Asian workers, Britons and Americans also appear to have been entering Bahrain in increasing numbers in the 1980s.

Most expatriates find employment in the private sectors of the economy, particularly in manufacturing, construction and services. But as the public sector has expanded during the last decade or so, foreign nationals have come to occupy increasing numbers of managerial and technical positions in state-affiliated concerns.

Since the 1980s, Bahraini women participate in the labour force at a higher rate than women in any other Gulf states. For the most part, work outside the home for these women is concentrated during the years between graduation from secondary school and marriage or from the ages of 20 to 24. They tend to cluster in a limited number of occupations such as teaching, nursing and clerical work.

## Chapter 2

### INDEPENDENCE, DEMOCRACY, PARLIAMENT, SUSPENSION OF PARLIAMENT PETITIONS

Bahrain, a tribal Arab monarchy, became a British Protected State in 1820. Under this arrangement it was effectively controlled by the British until 1971. Following a series of territorial disputes in the 19th century Persia (now Iran) made renewed claims to Bahrain in 1928. This disagreement remained unresolved until May 1970 when Iran accepted the findings of a report, commissioned by the UN, which showed the inhabitants of Bahrain overwhelmingly favoured independence rather than union with Iran.

In 1938, a group of leading personalities representing the main trends and sections of society in Bahrain, led a movement calling for the establishment of a parliament, reforming of the newly established police force and other related demands. The leaders of that movement, amongst them Mr Sa'ad Al-Shamlan, were forcibly deported to India (then under the British Crown). A more powerful and broadly-based pro-democracy movement appeared between 1954 and 1956 when a network of 120 dignitaries elected eight representatives to form the "High Executive Committee" representing all sections of society. The movement demanded an elected parliament, a unified written law, formation of an appeal court and the freedom to form trade unions. Both the ruler of Bahrain, Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa and



his British Adviser Sir Charles Belegrove refused to respond to the call for political reforms.

In December 1956, a 'state of emergency' was declared and the British army was deployed, leading to the shooting and killing of several people by security forces during street clashes. Later, the three senior leaders of the movement, Mr Abdul Rahman Al-Bakir, Abdul Aziz Al-Shamlan (son of Sa'ad Al-Shamlan who was deported to India in 1938) and Mr Abd Ali Al-Ulaiwat were all forcibly exiled to St Helena in the Atlantic Ocean. A battle was fought in the British House of Commons as to the legality of British involvement in that forcible deportation. The three were then released in 1961 and given compensation by the British Government, while other leaders remained in detention for the rest of the sixties.

A British officer was appointed to establish and oversee the intelligence department in 1957, and the position has been presided over by a Briton to this day. In 1965 an uprising erupted calling for freedom of speech, the right to form trade unions and other demands of social justice. Again the British army was deployed to suppress the movement and several people were shot dead by police during mass demonstrations. Those who were killed include: Abdalnabi Mohammed Sarhan, Abdulla Saeed Sarhan, Abdulla Hassan Bu-Naffor, Abdulla Saeed Al-Ghanem and Faisal Abbas Al-Qassab. No independent enquiry ever took place. However, in 1966, the Special Branch was restructured and another Briton, Mr Ian Henderson, was called in to head the security apparatus, a position he currently holds. During the reign of Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, who became ruler of Bahrain in 1942, social services and public works were expanded as a result of the flow of oil revenues. Sheikh Salman died in November 1961 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa. Extensive administrative and political changes came into effect in January 1970, when a supreme executive authority, the 12-member Council of State was established, representing the first formal derogation of the ruler's powers. Sheikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, the ruler's eldest brother, was appointed President of the Council.

Meanwhile, in January 1968 the United Kingdom had announced its intention to withdraw British military forces from the area by 1971.

This opened up the question of Bahrain sovereignty as the Shah of Iran resurrected his claims to the islands. The Al Khalifa family felt there is a need for public consensus, and for the first time started dealing with opponents and the Shia population in a different way. Forcible exiles were allowed to return, opponents were promised with public freedoms and the Shia community was re-assured that it would not be subjected to hate-based treatment. The latter was made clear during a visit in 1970 by the ruler Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa to Najaf (the religious city in Iraq) where he met the supreme leader of the Shia, Ayatollah Mohsin Al-Hakim.

In March 1968 Bahrain joined the nearby territories of Qatar and the Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates), which were also under British protection, in the Federation of Arab Emirates. It was intended that the Federation should become fully independent, but the interests of Bahrain and Qatar proved to be incompatible with those of the smaller sheikhdoms and both seceded from the Federation. Bahrain thus became a separate independent state on 15 August 1971, when a new treaty of friendship was signed with the United Kingdom. Sheikh Isa took the title of Amir, while the Council of State became the Cabinet, with Sheikh Khalifa as Prime Minister. A Constituent Assembly, convened in December 1972, produced a new constitution providing for a National Assembly which would contain 14 cabinet ministers and 30 elected members. On 6 December 1973 the constitution came into force and on the following day elections were held for the new assembly.

The 108-article constitution which was ratified in June 1973 states that all citizens shall be equal before the law and guaranteed freedom of speech, of the press, of conscience and religious beliefs. Other provisions include the outlawing of the compulsory repatriation of political refugees. The constitution also states that the country's financial comptroller should be responsible to the legislature and not to the government, and allows for national trade unions 'for legally jus-

tified causes and on peaceful lines.' Compulsory free primary education and free medical care are also laid down in the constitution, which came into force on 6 December 1973, also provided for a National Assembly, composed of 14 members of the Cabinet and 30 members elected by popular vote.

Thirty members were elected for a four-year term by the male electorate. Since political parties are not allowed, all 114 candidates stood as independents but. In practice, the National Assembly was divided almost equally between conservative, moderate and more radical members. In addition to the 30 elected members the National Assembly contained 14 members of the cabinet.

The constitution states in Article 42 that "No law may be promulgated unless it has been passed by the National Assembly and ratified by the Amir." Yet, towards the later part of 1974 parliamentarians were stunned to read in the Official Gazette a law decreed by the Amir without passing through the National Assembly. The law issued on October 22, 1974 and entitled "Decree Law on State Security Measures" empowers the minister of the interior to order the detention of political suspects for three years without charge or trial. Moreover, the laws deny detainees the right of appeal, by virtue of the fact that the Supreme Court of Appeal is the first and last court that passes sentences on political cases, if ever an individual is brought to court. This law is known as the State Security Law and is still being used to detain people today.

All the 30 members of parliament objected to the content of the law and the manner in which it was passed. Hence on June 14, 1975 seven MPs representing all trends within the parliament, including the prominent leader Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri (now adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International), issued a statement which was published by the local press clarifying the final view of the parliament. The statement made it clear that the parliament demanded the abrogation of a law which they saw as unjust. On August 25th, the prime minister withdrew his cabinet from parliament in protest of the MPs refusal to accept the

State Security Law. The next day, 26th August 1975) the Amir issued a decree suspending the parliament and several constitutional articles.

Parliament has not been restored since then and the unconstitutional State Security Law has been implemented since its first day of issue. Without the assembly the ruling family has almost absolute powers.

In 1992, a group of 300 intellectuals representing all trends and sections of Bahraini society submitted a petition to the Amir calling on him to restore the parliament and constitution. He rejected their plea and instead appointed a powerless consultative council known as the Majlis Al-Shura. The Majlis held its third session from October 1994 to May 1995 and began its fourth session in October. The members of the Majlis are evenly divided between Sunni and Shia and are appointed by the Amir. There are no members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family in the majlis and oppositionists were conspicuously absent. The chairman is a Shia who was formerly Minister of Transport. The majlis debated marginal issues. However it does not have the power to introduce legislation, nor can it request to review legislation that the cabinet has not referred to it. When asked to review proposed legislation, the Majlis may recommend changes, but the recommendations are not binding.

In October 1994, another petition, organised by the Committee for the Popular Petition calling for the restoration of parliament was signed by 25,000 people out of a total native population of around 400,000. The first signatories of the petition were 14 personalities, representing virtually all trends in Bahraini society. They acknowledged that the constitution allows for the Amir to dissolve the National Assembly as was done in August 1975, by an Amiri decree. However, they pointed to article 65 of the constitution, which states:

“If the Assembly was dissolved elections for a new assembly must be held within a period not exceeding two months after the date of 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 con-

tinue its functions until a new assembly is elected.”

The ruling family felt as if it was cornered by an informal referendum with a broadly-based and legal framework. The security forces were deployed in a provocative way to invite a “controlled” unrest, thus justifying a clampdown.

However, the security forces grossly miscalculated the strength of frustrations amongst the targeted section of the society.

The Bahrain government sought to create an image of a Shia-led violent movement intent on overthrowing the regime. By doing so, they hoped that the Western powers (especially US and UK) will side with the government against a perceived fundamentalist threat.

On the other hand, clashes and violence between security forces and the Shia community would give the ruling family the opportunity to neutralise the Sunni community.

Hence, the uprising that started on 5th December, 1994 and continues till the time of writing.

## Chapter 3

### THE BEGINNING OF THE BAHRAINI INTIFADAH

"We would like to assure the government that the language of bullets is of no avail. We are calling for restraint in the interest of the people and the government".

- SHEIKH ABDUL AMIR AL-JAMRI

On April 12th 1994, four Bahraini opposition parties: the Popular Front in Bahrain, The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, The National Liberation Front - Bahrain and the Bahrain Freedom Movement, issued a joint statement demanding:

- (1) Abrogating the royal decrees which resulted in the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of the elected National Assembly in August 1975.
- (2) Abolishing the State Security Law and suspending all unconstitutional provisions which suppressed individual and civil rights.
- (3) Releasing all political prisoners and allowing those in exile to return freely and without preconditions.

In September the crack elite forces arrested more than forty young men for taking part in a peaceful demonstration demanding a review of the employment policy in the country which has the highest percentage of unemployed in the Gulf.

With a workforce of more than 242,600 people the Bahrainis represent less than 40 percent of the total manpower. It was estimated that up to 30,000 Bahraini nationals were without jobs in 1990, a figure representing more than 30 percent of the national work-force.

The opposition stressed that when the unemployed

marched in front of the labour ministry, they had no revolutionary agenda, they were merely demanding a fair share of the national jobs. If the government was prepared to give 22 percent of the jobs reserved for expats to Bahrainis there would be no unemployment problem.

The beginning of the Bahraini intifadah was prompted by the detention of a pro-democracy campaigner Sheikh Ali Salman following the campaigning for a petition in October 1994 which called for the restoration of democracy.

Following the sheikh's arrest many inhabitants of Shia villages demonstrated openly for his release. The police raided his home on December 5th 1994 in Bilad-al-Qadeen (five kilometres southwest of Manama) and arrested him: that morning, crowds gathered at the mosques where Sheikh 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. Bahraini 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.

On December 17, two citizens, Hani Abbas Khamis and Hani Ahmad Al-Wasti, were shot dead in Sanabis during a crackdown on demonstrators. The next day, Mrs Zainab Al-Rashed a woman from Daih, was hit in the eye by a bullet fragment as she resisted a police dawn raid before they arrested and detained her son.

Police beat Ali Mohammed Ismael, a 52 year old man from Bani Jamra, breaking three of his ribs. Police guarding the Jedhafs Mosque used clubs and gun butts on Haj Mirza Ali on December 20th leading to his death. On December 17 a senior official from the Ministry of the Interior announced that 13 citizens had been detained, but the Bahrain Human rights Organisation submitted a list of 138 detainees by name and district, and claimed that the total number of detainees was several hundred at least.

Most estimates were quoted in the thousands: the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in New York said in Feb-



ruary 1996 that over 5,000 people have been detained since December 1994 for political reasons. All of the arrests and detentions were carried out under the state Security Law of 1974 - without charge or trial.

Human Rights Watch / Middle East wrote to the Amir of Bahrain on December 19, 1994 expressing concern over the government's response to the peaceful protests. In particular the letter cited the unfair detention of Sheikh Ali Salman because of his encouragement of the peaceful protests and his call for restoration of parliamentary life.

They criticised the indiscriminate use of tear gas and rubber bullets on crowds. Human Rights Watch acknowledged that some individuals committed acts of violence, pointing to the beating to death of a policeman on December 16 and the vandalising of private hotels on December 13. Yet they argued that individuals guilty of crimes should be tried as charged and not be used as a justification for the "use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrations [or] the arbitrary roundup of scores of suspected political activists who were not involved in these acts... "Those suspected of recognisable criminal activity should be promptly charged and allowed legal council", Middle East Watch said.

During the December protests Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri called for restraint and stressed the need for peaceful demonstrations. He was quoted as saying, "We would like to assure the government that the language of bullets is of no avail. We are calling for restraint in the interest of the people and the government".

The Bahraini government deported a BBC correspondent in December 1994, for the manner in which he reported the uprising. Earlier in the year the French news agency AFP was forced to leave the country due to restrictions imposed by the Bahraini Information Ministry. An AFP employee in London said that they were left with a straightforward choice: turn a blind eye to events and issues in Bahrain or close down their offices altogether.

The year ended with the 15th GCC summit in Manama. The delegates staying at the Meridian must have heard the sound of guns and other lethal weapons as they sprayed the

young men who carried their grievances to the streets.

In its issue of January 1995, Voice of Bahrain said that the bullets fired on the demonstrators meant the end of the undeclared truce between the government and the people who have been at virtual war for many years. "It is a war between the pro-democracy constitutionalists and the totalitarian despotic clique that has ruled the country with an iron-fist policy."

As the Amir celebrated his 33rd enthronement on December 16th a complete news blackout was imposed. But the demonstrators made their demands clear in pamphlets and through speeches. These included: releasing Sheikh Ali Salman and all the others detained since the start of the uprising on 5th December; formation of an independent commission to investigate who ordered and started shooting and killing demonstrators and punishing them; return of constitutional life and fixing the date of legislative elections; releasing all political prisoners who were in jail before the uprising; allowing the return of political exiles without any preconditions and abolishing the State Security Law of 1974.

On 17th December, the security forces using live ammunition shot two people dead on Sanabis and Jedhafs, three miles west of the capital. Many people were in a critical condition after being fired on by the security forces and one victim had an operation to remove 50 splinters from his body.

On the morning of December 19th, the National Bank of Bahrain offices in Jedhafs were damaged by police fire. Clashes also took place at Bahrain University as students gathered to mourn the death of Hani Abbas Khamis. Mass arrests were taking place everywhere: on December 23rd for example, dawn raids on Sitra resulted in more than 40 people detained some of them wives and sisters taken hostage to force their relatives to give themselves up.

At the end of December, AFP reported that more than 1600 people had been arrested and the whereabouts of many others remained unknown. Prisoners were reportedly held in concentration camps purposefully constructed with barbed

wire inside the Qala'a fort in Manama. One detainee who was subsequently released reported that various forms of torture were being practised to force detainees to sign false confessions.

## Chapter 4

### DEMONSTRATIONS, ARRESTS, VIOLENCE AND BROKEN PROMISES

The Bahraini government responded in characteristic fashion to any opponents: it deported Sheikh Ali Salman and two other activists Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Sheikh Haidar Al-Sitri. A fourth preacher, Sheikh Adel Al-Shu'la, was deported to Syria.

At that time, Bahrainis did not need visas to enter Britain and the three men were given temporary admission after they arrived on January 17th 1995 until their applications for political asylum were considered. Demonstrations broke out in Bahrain after the deportations. Diplomats reported a tough reaction from security forces.

The Bahraini government blamed the trouble on unspecified "foreign agitators" and said it was facing a campaign of destabilisation. Britain was accused of harbouring "terrorists and saboteurs" involved in civil unrest in Bahrain. The Arab daily Asharq Al-Awsat quoted the Crown Prince of Bahrain as saying: " Britain is a friendly nation and we're puzzled as to how it receives terrorists and saboteurs who work against states that are its friends."

Arab diplomats say the protest movement has proved more durable than the Bahrain government at first believed. The trouble is causing concern in Washington and it is understood that American officials have urged the Bahrain

government to take measures to defuse the unrest by tackling corruption and improving living conditions in the Shia villages outside Manama. The US State Department has advised its citizens in Bahrain to avoid demonstrations and exercise caution in public areas.

On January 23rd the Bahraini Foreign Minister announced that he was starting a tour to Paris and London to counter the opposition's activities. He requested the British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd to intervene and refuse the three sheikhs political asylum but was informed that asylum cases are dealt with independently by the Home Office. The embassy did not reply to a letter from the three deported sheikhs requesting a meeting with the Foreign Minister.

On January 26th, a day before the scheduled meeting between the Bahraini and British Foreign Ministers, the Bahraini opposition held a press conference in the House of Commons. Sheikh Ali Salman outlined the opposition's demands and strategies.

Eighteen British MPs submitted motions No 457 and 458 to the House of Commons. Motion No 457 stated "that this House deplores the emergency visit to London by the Foreign Minister of the Bahraini royal dictatorship Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khalifa, who has demanded a meeting with the Foreign Secretary of Her Majesty's Government to demand the deportation of Bahraini opposition leaders who were illegally expelled by the dictatorships on 15th January, following weeks of rioting in Bahrain, in which demonstrators have been shot dead by the British mercenary led security apparatus SIS which together with Saudi Arabian forces have been employed by the dictatorship to crush demands for human rights and democracy and calls upon Her Majesty's government to stand up to the dictators of Bahrain and inform them that Britain will determine its own decisions on the political asylum of those fleeing persecution in their own countries in accordance with the United Kingdom's international obligations and its tradition of a safe haven for victims of dictatorships." Motion No 458 concentrated on condemning Ian Henderson who presides over the security apparatus.

On 26th January 1995 demonstrations broke out throughout Bahrain: in Sanabis, Abu Saibaa, Daih, Bilad Al-Qadeem and Sitra. Live ammunition was used against the demonstrators and Hussain Ali Al-Safi died from a number of bullet wounds.

During February, the month of Ramadan, a period of relative calm ensued. "See you after Ramadan" became a familiar slogan on the walls in towns and villages throughout the island.

The self-declared truce was broken by a women's demonstration in mid-February in front of the High Court in Manama's diplomatic district. The demonstrators were demanding the release of the prisoners and the restoration of the constitution. They were attacked by police and several were injured.

The government hoped that the continued detention of at least 2,000 people and the campaign of arrests, intimidation and blackmail by the security forces would lead to the collapse of the opposition. In April The arrest of two pro-democracy activists, Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain and Mr Hassan Mushaima'a sparked off student demonstrations throughout the country. Strikes and clashes took place in schools in Duraz, Nuaim, Salmaniya, Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Sitra, Al-Jabreyya, Bilad Al-Qadeem, Jedhafs, Ahmed Al-Omran and others.

Mr Hussain, a prominent leader of the opposition and a member of the committee which campaigned for the pro-democracy petition in November 1992, was arrested on March 17th after delivering a speech in his village of Nuwaidrat inviting the prime minister to initiate a process of dialogue to end the crisis.

During a demonstration in Sanabis on March 16th, the pro-democracy campaigners distributed pamphlets announcing a forth-coming demonstration which took place despite the heavy presence of the security forces. The demonstrators, a third of whom were women, carried placards with slogans in Arabic and English such as we are not saboteurs, get rid of Ian Henderson etc. Photographs of those killed by police were distributed showing the bullet

ridden bodies of previous victims of the state's aggression. The security forces attacked the demonstrators with rubber bullets and tear gas. Another demonstration broke out in the streets of the oil island of Sitra. Once again, demonstrators clashed with the security forces.

Opposition activists estimated that as many as 2000 - 5000 people could be in detention but only 19 have been charged. Under Bahrain's security laws, detainees can be held for up to three years without charge.

The government pledged that what is described as violence, terrorism and sabotage would be crushed. On April 13th, the Gulf News Agency quoted the Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa as saying that 'acts of violence, sabotage and terrorism will end and will be quashed.' His remarks coincided with a statement by the Interior Ministry that 11 suspects accused of murdering a policeman in a village south of the capital would stand trial. The news agency went on to say that Sheikh Al-Khalifa told the country's ruling council that the situation was stable and his ministry was dealing with the riots with "patience and self-control."

Amnesty International said that the State Security Court trials of people arrested during the protests in Bahrain were unfair and should be stopped. "No one should be brought before the court until the defendants' right to a fair and public trial is respected", Amnesty said in a statement on May 5th.

The organisation's call came in the wake of the first sentences passed by the State Security Court at the beginning of May. Sixteen defendants were sentenced to between three and ten years' imprisonment on charges including sabotage and membership of a prohibited organisation. Amnesty confirmed that all the arrests followed protests which began in December 1994 calling for the restoration of democratic rights.

The government also started a dirty tricks campaign. On March 27th the prime minister commissioned one of his men, Ahmed Mansoor Al-Aali to convene a meeting in the village of Aali to elicit condemnation of the opposition. The meeting



failed along with several similar attempts to incite sectarian hatred which were exposed as the work of the intelligence department. In one incident the department distributed a pamphlet signed by a Shia which was exposed by the erroneous use of Shia terminology and the use of non-Shia terms. One of the leaflets distributed by the security forces to incite sectarian hatred threatened foreigners with death or kidnapping if they went out after 6pm.

On April 1st, the first house arrest in the history of the country was imposed on Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, the leading opposition figure who sponsored two petitions calling for the restoration of the constitution. On May 7th the sheikh's daughter, Afaf Al-Jamri, was interrogated by Adel Flaifel who threatened the whole family with torture if she did not convince her father that no one cared about him and that he must sign papers prepared by the security forces.

Afaf Al-Jamri refused and conveyed the opposite message. She was beaten and placed in solitary confinement. Her case, and that of her father, has been taken up by Amnesty International which has called for urgent action on their behalf.

In May two petitions put an end to the government's attempts to confine the pro-democracy movement to Shia Muslims who were singled out for repression since the start of the protests. The first petition, demanding the restoration of the constitution was signed by around 250 people. The second was signed by 300 prominent women from the liberal tendency in the country including Dr Muneera Fakhroo a university professor, Fawziyya Al-Sanadi a poet and Dr Sabika Al-Najjar. The women's petition urged the Amir to restore the constitution, release the political prisoners, end the arbitrary actions of the security forces and grant the women of Bahrain the right to take part in the political process in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. They demanded:

- (1) A halt to the use of bullets to disperse demonstrators, illegal forced entries and mass arrests;
- (2) Dealing with detainees according to the rule of law;
- (3) Creating employment opportunities for all citizens,

ensuring the minimum requirements for livelihood and finding an effective solution to the increase in the foreign work force;

(4) Opening the door for a national dialogue;

(5) Reactivating the constitution of the State of Bahrain, calling for elections to the National Assembly and respecting civil liberties such as freedom of speech;

(6) Including Bahraini women in political decision making and utilising their creative energies in all sectors in the service of their country.

The government demanded a written apology from the 90 women who worked in the civil service. Three of the leading women: Dr Moniara Fakhro, hessa Al-Khumeiri and Aziza Al-Bassam, were dismissed from their jobs.

The government stepped up its propaganda offensive by sending envoys to a number of foreign capitals in an attempt to whitewash its actions.

During a visit to Paris, the Foreign Minister, Mohammed bin Mubarek, registered his government's displeasure with Agence France Presse (AFP) for reporting the widespread protests in December and January.

Tariq Al Moayyid, the Information Minister implicitly warned of a pan GCC decision against AFP. During a visit to Washington in the last week of May, Al Moayyid protested about the activities of the opposition in Washington. The services of a number of Saudi-run or financed newspapers were used to denounce the popular uprising which was referred to in terms of a mob and the term religious Shia fanatics was used to win sympathy in some Western capitals.

In its issue of June 1995, Voice of Bahrain reported that the government has commissioned the ex UK Heritage Secretary David Mellor to whitewash the image of the Al-Khalifa.

Dr Omar Al-Hassan, who runs the London-based Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies organised a half day seminar in the Sheraton Hotel in Manama on May 27th. The meeting was chaired by William Powell, a conservative MP who agreed to take charge of defending the Al-Khalifa after his earlier visit to Bahrain in March. During the visit he was

given all sorts of “gifts” from the ruling family to encourage him in his campaign.

The Al-Khalifa’s desperate disinformation campaign continued. For example, when asked why they did not allow Amnesty to visit Bahrain they replied that permission for a visit by a human rights monitoring team was not denied.

And when asked why they did not speak to the opposition the Al-Khalifa replied that dialogue was already in progress and gave their talks with businessmen who have everything to loose if democracy is established as an example.

The BFM has embarked on its media campaign. In April and May its representatives in Washington met journalists, human rights activists, members of think tanks and politicians to present the case of struggle for democracy in Bahrain.

In June a BFM delegation visited France and “called on the forces of democracy to assist the people in their struggle for freedom and human rights.”

In an attempt to deflect international criticism, the prime minister attempted to shift the blame for the country’s problems onto non Al-Khalifa cabinet ministers. A meaningless cabinet re-shuffle took place: out of eighteen ministers in the “new-old” cabinet, nine are members of the ruling family controlling all key ministries.

The tenth and eleventh days of the first month of the Islamic calendar (Muharram) are celebrated ever year marking the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammed. In July the security forces attempted to halt the procession in Manama and prevent the raising of political demands. Manama was encircled with armoured vehicles and the streets were filled with paramilitary forces.

In June the security forces arrested increasing numbers of people amid government claims that 150 detainees had been released. According to the BFM some 20 people only were released and more than four times that number were detained in their place. The detained were abused and tortured by such notorious people as Adel Flaifel and Abdul Aziz Atyat-Allah Al-Khalifa who described Bahraini youth as a “bunch of insects”. They asserted that they have a

responsibility to "wipe out these insects who dream of some constitution and democracy."

In August the government and the leaders of the popular uprising negotiated the release of prisoners. It was agreed that 150 people would be released on August 16th together with five of the leaders of the uprising. Another 150 would be freed on September 7th, including Mr Abdul Wahab Hussein. Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri would be released on September 30th along with 500 - 600 prisoners. The uprising would come to an end and following the return to normality the government and the popular leadership would enter into negotiations regarding the restoration of the constitution, the return of Bahraini exiles and the release of political prisoners.

But Voice of Bahrain (September 1995) pointed out that there is skepticism among the people of Bahrain about the deal. There is no timetable for the beginning of the negotiations on the main issues, no written pledge to respect the rule of constitutional law, no official declaration on the deal and no inclination to allow the presentation of the people's petition to the Amir, Sheikh Isa Salman Al-Khalifa.

Voice of Bahrain went on to say that since the release of the first group of prisoners, there have been numerous acts of repression. Many people have been arrested, tried or sacked from their jobs. Nevertheless there have been no further protests against the government which has been given the chance to negotiate on the main issues leading to the reinstatement of the constitution.

The BFM organised demonstrations in London and Washington on August 24th. Agents of the government tried to influence the course of events but failed to have an impact on the proceedings. In London, Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, held a press conference in the annex to the Houses of Parliament. Bahraini opposition groups also took part in a seminar organised in Kufa Gallery on August 26th.

Bahrain sent its delegates to the UN Conference on women. The opposition was also represented at the conference by another delegation led by Professor Moneera Fakhroo of Bahrain University. While the conference was in

progress, the government in Manama was busy launching attacks on leading pro-democracy women. Ms Hessa Al-Khumieri, Head of Continuing Education, a department of the Ministry of Education, was sacked on 24th June from her senior position after refusing to remove her name from a petition submitted to the Amir calling for an end to human rights violations and calling for a restoration of the constitution.

Demonstrations continued throughout August. On the 17th August security forces attacked hundreds of people who gathered in Sanabis cemetery for the 40th day commemoration of the martyrdom of Saeed Al-Eskafy the 16-year-old boy who was sexually abused and tortured to death on July 8th by the security forces.

Mass arrests took place in Sitra and other areas of Bahrain such as Abu Saiba'a Duraz and Bani Jamra. The security forces responded by re-imposing a paramilitary siege on the northern and western rural areas as well as Sitra Island.

A new form of punishment - the confiscation of the financial entitlement of some detainees such as Mr Raled Al-Khawajah was also instituted according to a memo issued by the Ministry of the Interior.

It soon became apparent that when it came to the release of detainees and the leaders of the uprising, the government was giving with one hand and taking with the other. The release of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri took place four days before the agreed date at the end of September, on September 25th, the day Amnesty International released its major report on Bahrain. A few days earlier Amnesty had informed the Bahraini government of its decision to publish its report together with a video showing the extent of human rights violations in the country. Both the release and Amnesty's report received extensive media coverage.

Both Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain who was released on September 8th, and Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, who was released on September 25th were given a tumultuous welcome. Around 25,000 people took part in the reception for Mr Hussain and an even larger number turned up to welcome

Sheikh Al Jamri.

Thousands of people attended two seminars held by the released opposition leaders who called for reconciliation talks with the government and pledged to continue raising the banner of constitutionalism in Bahrain. The first seminar was held in Mr Abdul Wahab Hussain's home village in Nuweidrat and the second, attended by more than 3,000 people was held in Karbabad.

The government made encouraging noises and the prime minister spoke of "increasing the scope of the consultative assembly and establishing local councils".

It was agreed that after the first phase of talks political dialogue would take place with the Amir. During this phase, which was implicitly timetabled until the end of September street clashes would cease and a thousand detainees would be released. This would be followed by negotiation on the release of 200 sentenced political prisoners and thousands of Bahraini nationals exiled by the regime would be allowed to return.

By August it became obvious that the proposed dialogue between the government and the opposition was a doomed initiative. Twenty young people who lived in Bahrain since they were born while retaining their Saudi passports were deported to Saudi Arabia after their release and Mohammed Al-Ghatam an unknown military man was appointed rector of Bahrain University to make sure that the iron fist policy against university students who staged pro-democracy marches was firmly implemented.

On October 13th, 44 leading pro-democracy activists issued a declaration calling for dialogue with the government, release of all detainees and re-instatement of employees dismissed due to their political views. They also called on the government to receive the popular petition as a first step leading to the restoration of democracy and a reinstatement of the 1973 constitution and the articles of the constitution which control legislative authority.

On October 16th a leading female political activist, Dr Ibethal Al-Aali was prevented from delivering a talk at the Awal Women's Society.

Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and six other pro-democracy leaders started a hunger strike on October 23 in protest at these violations of human rights. They were supported by a mass walk-out of students throughout the country who wore black shirts as a sign of solidarity.

The hunger strikers demanded:

(1) The release of all political detainees and banning of political trials.

(2) Allowing exiled Bahraini nationals to return home.

(3) Official recognition of the existence of a dialogue between the government and the opposition.

(4) Restoration of parliament.

On 1 November, more than eighty thousand people gathered in front of Sheikh Al-Jamri's house to listen to the declaration of the hunger strike on their last day of the strike. This was the biggest gathering in the history of Bahrain.

A scheduled meeting with the Ministry of the Interior and opposition leaders did not take place.

In its November issue Voice of Bahrain reported that the government retracted on several points of agreement: it stopped releasing prisoners who were scheduled to be set free by 30th September. The Information Minister, Mohammed Al-Mutawwa, repeatedly denied the existence of the agreement and many detainees were taken to the State Security Court. Several Bahraini exiles were turned back when they attempted to return home in August and the government categorically refused to discuss issues relating to the reinstatement of the constitution.

The Ministry of the Interior cancelled a seminar by pro-democracy leaders at which a prominent Sunni opponent was scheduled to speak in order to preserve its no longer effective policy of divide and rule.

At the beginning of November, seven opposition leaders met six security officers at Isa Town Police Headquarters. Sheikh Abdul Aziz Atteyatalla Al-Khalifa, head of the investigation committee which detained 5000 people and killed several youths under torture since December 1994, said that the aim of the meeting was to pass a warning to



opposition leaders that they must not lead prayers in mosques outside their residential areas. They were also told not to contact any opposition group or news organisation inside or outside the country, refrain from issuing statements and organising gathering without the prior permission of the security forces. The security forces warned that they would crack down on any mass gathering.

Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri condemned the 'unacceptable attitude' and pointed out that the opposition has calmed the situation. He asked for the warnings to be put in writing and said: "We do not consider these threats to be the official position of the political leadership".

On November 6th 1995, the Interior Ministry made an announcement via the local press which amounted to the declaration of a state of emergency. It said that any gathering of more than five people would be dispersed and, if necessary, fire arms would be used. Lorries packed with riot police were deployed in all areas where previous gatherings had taken place.

The opposition leaders declared the emergency measures illegal. The government's request for calm and avoidance of street clashes was respected during mass gatherings.

On November 27th, the supreme court approved the death sentence on Isa Ahmad Hassan Qambar aged 27. Lawyers for the defendants told the Appeal court that the verdicts passed on the group accused of causing the death of Sergeant Saidi were out of proportion bearing in mind that about a dozen people were killed by the security forces. The court also confirmed life sentences against the second defendant, Mohammed Ali Hassan Khatam while the other defendants were sentenced to between five to ten years in prison. The security forces attacked a group of students from the University of Bahrain (Isa Town) who gathered after hearing the news.

In an unprecedented move seven judges submitted their resignation to the Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs. The reasons were a mixture of constitutional and personnel demands which included the establishment of the supreme Judiciary Council in accordance with the Constitution Article

102d; the strengthening of judicial authority in line with the powers given to other authorities, the cancellation of housing mortgages / debts so that these would not burden and influence the performance of the judges.

Dr Faisal Al-Zeera, a member of the government-appointed Consultative Council warned opposition leaders that the security forces were planning a blood bath. the opposition had been preparing for the crackdown and all leading figures contacted their lawyers in readiness to defend their peaceful and constitutional demands.

During his speech on Bahrain's national day (December 16th) the Amir threatened the constitutional movement with more violence and killings. Unlike other GCC leaders who often used their national days to soften their relations with the people by releasing political prisoners and promising a better quality of life, the Amir of Bahrain used the stick to frighten people.

The speech was a disappointment even to his closest aides.

## Chapter 5

### HOME GROWN PROBLEMS WORSEN

*It is difficult to see any exit from this quagmire  
except through the gates of dialogue*

The re-detention of Sheikh Abdul Ameer Al-Jamri on January 21st, 1996 triggered major disturbances throughout the country. The government reported that 24 gas cylinders exploded and 43 fires broke out . Some power transformers were damaged.

Prior to the detention, Sheikh Al-Jamri was summoned by the Interior Ministry along with seven other senior figures and warned to "stop using mosques to fan anti-government riots or face legal action".

Sheikh Al-Jamri was arrested with Abdul Wahab Hussain, Hassan Mushaime'a, Ali Ahmed Al-Jedhafsi, Hassan Ali Mohammad Sultan, Ibrahim Adnan Al-Alawi, Ali Abdullah Ashor Al-Satrawi and Hussein Ali Hassan Al-Daihi.

According to the government the eight had "incited crimes of fires and sabotage, broadcasting statements, news and incorrect rumours inside and outside which disturb security and damage national interests using mosques and sermons as well as holding illegal gatherings."

Prior to his arrest, Mr. Mushaime'a explained to the BBC World Service that they had responded to Interior ministry allegations and emphasised their constitutional and peaceful activities. However, the Interior Ministry seemed to have made a decision to crackdown on mass gatherings.

In Manama, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Mubarak Al-Khalifa met separately with the ambassadors of the United States, Britain, Russia, France and China to brief them about the unrest. He told them that his government was determined not to show any leniency to those who are trying "to disrupt security and stability in Bahrain", according to the official Gulf News Agency. Sheikh Mohammed also repeated Bahrain's "rejection of all forms of foreign interference in its internal affairs" and, for the first time, Bahraini papers began accusing Iran of fomenting trouble.

On January 22nd, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak strongly condemned violence in Bahrain and "charged foreign hands were directly involved in stirring trouble". Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Bin Abdelaziz reiterated the Kingdom's full support for Bahrain in its current fight against saboteurs, who were trying to destabilise the country".

The Saudi Press Agency quoted Prince Nayef as telling his Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Mohammad bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa over the telephone that these activities are "being fed from outside and are aimed to ruin stability and security in our region."

Meanwhile the Iranian press dismissed Gulf Arab accusations of involvement in Bahraini unrest "as an old plot to externalise domestic problems and justify the US military presence in the region".

On January 27th more arrests and fresh clashes in a number of residential areas were reported despite a severe government crackdown.

"The people arrested during riots and sabotage which took place recently stood at 180", a statement from the Interior Ministry said. A list of detainees has been sent to the Justice Ministry. The Interior Ministry said it was holding 544 people, including 174 arrested in recent disturbances - the military threatened to impose martial law to end more than a year of riots.

On January 18th, a bomb exploded at the Royal Meridian Hotel where international oil executives were attending a major Middle East energy conference. No one claimed re-

sponsibility for the blast which shattered windows in the three stores in the hotel's shopping arcade.

Sheikh Hamed Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, the Crown Prince and army's commander-in-chief was reportedly concerned that the disturbances were getting out of control after riots spread to the middle-class, suburbs named after him. The unrest had previously been confined mainly to Shia villages outside Manama.

Reporting for the Guardian on January 23rd, Kathy Evans said that army intervention would be unprecedented in the country's history. Its army numbers only 8,000 men and is smaller than internal security force which numbers 12,000. Moreover the army has no experience in dealing with civil unrest.

"Any move to introduce the army into the situation would be an escalation of the conflict", a Bahrain Freedom movement spokesman in London said. "It also shows that the government's current tactics in suppressing the uprising are not working."

Both Amnesty International and Liberty for the Muslim world criticised the Bahraini government for arresting demonstrators simply for expressing their political opinion.

In a letter to the Bahraini government on January 23rd, Amnesty International sought urgent assurances that all those detained are treated humanely and are allowed access to families, lawyers and medical attention if necessary. The organisation also requested information about political detainees, including charges against those accused of recognised criminal offences, with assurances that they be given fair and prompt trials in accordance with international standards. Liberty pointed out that it will do the Bahraini government no good to claim that foreign regimes or external elements have been behind the recent disturbances. The causes of the crisis are domestic and the solution will have to be domestic. Had there been a genuine transition to democracy in Bahrain none of these disturbances would have occurred. Had there been justice and freedom of speech in Bahrain and had human rights been sanctified and protected no citizen would have resorted to violence to draw the world's atten-

tion to the plight of his or her people, Liberty said.

In mid-January a further petition was sent to the Amir by 37 prominent Bahraini lawyers and intellectuals appealing for a return to democracy and the 1973 constitution. It referred to an earlier petition by 96 Kuwaitis (not MPs) who had made similar demands.

At the beginning of February, the Committee of the Popular Petition denounced false charges against respected religious scholars and 'our colleagues in the committee' who were detained administratively. The committee also denounced 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 world public opinion from the reality of the political crisis.

The Committee of the Popular Petition, while denouncing violence and security, urged 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 the 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", the committee said in a statement.

The call for democracy was also made by a Bahraini lawyer and poet, Ahmed Al-Shamlan. He became the first Sunni Muslim out of more than 2000 Bahrainis to be picked up by the Bahraini security police for "conspiring to light fires and carry out sabotage", claimed the official statements. Three months earlier, Mr. Shamlan was interviewed by Qatar Radio and had to pay 500 dinars as a fine for doing so.

"The rights of citizens are put aside by authoritarian action - what the Bahraini people are demanding is the return of the constitution, political rights, freedom of expression, and elections", Mr Shamlan announced to astonished listeners in Bahrain where the programme is equally popular. "Words like 'democracy' or 'reform' are regarded as illegal - if Gulf citizens were given their full rights, there would be no more problems here. Instead of protecting the legal rights

which [Bahrain's] citizens are demanding, the government aborts our demands by igniting sectarian conflicts, creating troubles and complaining about foreign intervention".

On February 11th, an explosion rocked the Diplomat Hotel in Manama shattering windows, causing \$75,000 worth of damage and injuring three people according to official statements.

Opposition forces said they did not know who was behind the bombings and denied the authorities' allegations of involvement in the terror campaign.

An opposition statement read: "We think these bombs are being planted by the government intelligence agencies to prepare the people for long jail sentences being imposed on our leaders currently in detention". Another statement said: "violence has been condemned by all leading opposition figures inside the country and outside. The government exacerbated the situation by attacking mosques and detaining more than 2000 people. The government played with fire and unfortunate developments were bound to happen. We firmly believe in peaceful solution for the political crisis in Bahrain and urge the government to behave rationally by ending arbitrary forms of governing and by restoring constitutional law to the country."

The violence continued on February 14 in Isa Town (south of Manama) near the market. The Bahrain Freedom Movement commented that Bahrain "entered a new phase in the political crisis with violence taking over from rational peaceful approaches".

After the latest outbreaks of violence humanitarian workers in Bahrain said they could not understand why Sheikh Issa did not make concession to those opponents who demand only a return to the democratic parliament dissolved in 1975. They said it was quite clear that the Amir was trying to stop the rioting in an undemocratic way.

On February 20th, the first day of Eid (celebrations at the end of the month of Ramadan) security forces attacked mosques around the country in a bid to preempt gatherings and arrested many people. The residents of Manama's main districts and villages around the country who had par-

ticipated most actively in the uprising boycotted the celebrations.

The people also responded to calls for boycotting the Eid celebrations by wearing black clothes as a sign of protest and visited the families of the "martyrs who were killed or tortured to death by the security forces".

The government announced that they had arrested a group of people who confessed to membership of Hibzollah, an organisation which the BFM doubted its existence. "The government is trying hard to convince the outside world that it exists in a desperate attempt to blame home-grown problems on foreign influences", the BFM said in a statement.

One opposition spokesman acknowledged that Bahraini Shias listen to Iranian radio news but added that "they also listen to the BBC Arabic and Monte Carlo services because they cannot hear the truth on Bahrain radio".

When the government realised it could not face the political consequences of the present movement, it sought to sponsor a wave of violence to undermine the peaceful nature of the constitutional movement and to smear the image of the peaceful opposition.

Earlier in January a car belonging to the editor of the Bahraini daily Al Ayyam, Nabil Al Hamar, was set alight. The BFM claimed that the over reaction from various political quarters including some Arab governments suggested an orchestrated anti-opposition campaign.

On February 24th, the Bahraini press published the names of four people who the Interior Ministry claimed were responsible for planting explosive devices. The revelations were made to give the impression the government was firmly in control as businessmen from Western and Gulf countries were planning to attend a major conference in mid-March.

In January the Interior Ministry announced the names of three people with the same initials of Redha and blamed them for planting an explosive device in a shopping centre on New Year's Eve. The three Redhas were a sample from the many people who had been arrested having the same initial name in the Manama district of Makharga.

At the end of February the security forces attacked the vil-



lages of Dair, Abo-Gowa, Jannossan Duraz and Bani Jamra. House to house searches were conducted and two mosques were ransacked. Mona Habib, Sheikh Al-Jamri's the daughter-in-law was among those arrested.

Another petition was signed by 107 personalities at the beginning of March protesting at the arrest of one of the main pro-democracy leaders, Mr Ahmad Al-Shamlan, a lawyer, poet and columnist accused of "encouraging sabotage." Mr Salman was released, awaiting verdict, on May 4th but was immediately put under surveillance.

Petitions, a favourite tool of the opposition, were also used by the the ruling family. The Kuwaiti paper Al-Talea reported that 30 members from the lower ranks of the ruling family, submitted a letter to the Amir and Prime Minister requesting them to equate their privileges and monthly payments with those of the higher-ranking family members.

The signatories were reprimanded by the head of the ruling family council, Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa. They were also threatened that the title of Sheikh could be removed if they persisted.

Demonstrations for the restoration of the constitution continued on March 26th. In a 40 minute news analysis file on four, BBC Radio interviewed citizens whose houses had been ransacked as part of the collective punishment to which the security forces have resorted. Saeed Al-Eskafi's father gave the BBC a moving account about how his son was sexually abused and tortured to death. The Foreign Minister responded by accusing the opposition of being linked to "fundamentalism" and refused to answer questions about whether an investigation had been conducted with the aim of disciplining the officers responsible for Al-Eskafi's death.

In the same BBC programme, David Mellor- ex-British Heritage Secretary confessed that he had never spoken to ordinary people in Bahrain. Yet he found it in his interests to defend the Bahraini government on Radio Four's programme.

British Middle East specialist Professor Fred Halliday told Radio Four that if the ruling family persisted in its attempts to crush the modernisation movement a more radical al-

ternative would emerge seeking to overthrow the government. Mr Jassim Murad, a member of Bahrain's dissolved parliament said that his Sri-Lankan servant had the right to vote in her country while he as a Bahraini nationals did not.

At the beginning of March, the Bahraini Crown Prince, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa visited London and Washington. US circles advised him to resort to dialogue with the opposition and Lord Avebury, Chairman of Britain's Parliamentary Human Rights Group proposed an initiative to resolve the crisis which the Crown Prince refused.

In mid-March the government claimed that five masked men fire-bombed a restaurant in a Manama suburb killing seven people. Agence France Presse (AFP) described the attack as the worst since anti-government protests began 15 months ago. The victims, all Bangladeshi, died in upstairs sleeping quarters as flames swept through the restaurant at dawn.

After a meeting held in March between Bahraini opposition groups (the Popular Front of Bahrain, the National Liberation Front of Bahrain, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the Bahrain Freedom Movement) the opposition movements issued a statement saying that the political crisis could only be brought to an end through the abandoning of repressive policies and not blaming outsiders for the country's problems. The opposition's demands were summarised as initiating a process of dialogue, releasing all political prisoners and detainees, allowing those forcibly exiled to return home, compensating the victims of oppression, revoking the State Security law and certain articles in the Penal code and laws concerning gatherings and assembly.

The demonstrations and clashes continued. A bomb exploded in the international hotel in the Qudeibeya district of Manama.

On March 18th, students in several secondary girls school who staged a protest denouncing the government and calling for the restoration of parliament were attacked by the security forces. Following their arrest they were tortured, stripped naked and intimidated by police officers. This prompted a mass protest at Sannibis Cemetery. Hundreds of women de-

nounced the security forces and declared that there is no turning back from the demand to restore the elected parliament.

On March 28th the first execution since the unrest started 16 months ago was carried out. Mr Isa Ahmed Hassan Qambar, accused of killing the police sergeant last March was shot by firing squad.

The killing sent shock waves throughout the island. Speaking to the Financial Times a member of one of Bahrain's leading Sunni merchant families said: "This sort of action-reaction is leading us nowhere. Solutions will become impossible if the gap continues to grow between the rulers and the people of this island and not just the Shia." The security forces were well prepared for the clashes which followed the execution by sealing off Shia villages near the capital Manama.

Throughout April, daily warnings were issued by the American and British embassies in Manama for their citizens not to appear unnecessarily in public and to avoid certain locations.

According to the BFM this indicated how serious the situation had become. "The people of Bahrain certainly do not want their country to become a fortress, but the government has escalated the situation in the hope that by raising the stakes, it may win the battle that has cost it dearly", the BFM said in its April newsletter.

The Amir issued two decrees on 20 March widening the powers of the State Security Court and empowering it to look into any case which interior ministry officials consider to be security-related. The decrees also make it easy for the unconstitutional State Security Court to rush the passing of tougher sentences without any right of appeal.

Mass demonstrations continued in response to a call by the opposition. Demonstrators in Sanabis released balloons carrying slogans in support of the jailed leader Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and blaming the security forces for committing arson against innocent citizens. Helicopters were used to bring down the balloons and semi-martial law was imposed on Sitra island preventing people from leaving their

homes until after mid-day.

Three young people were brought before the state security court on March 27th and sentenced in accordance with the newly-issued decrees.

Adel Al-Tal (23) was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and fined around \$80,000, Abbas Moftah (27) and Abbas Salim (26) were sentenced to five years imprisonment. These arbitrary measures had no legal back-up or justification. The trial was one of the fastest ever and it took the court less than an hour to rubber-stamp sentences. Lawyers were prevented from properly defending the accused and had not been allowed to meet with the defendants. Many young persons in detention were given the choice of staying in jail or leaving Bahrain. Some left for neighbouring Gulf countries which have begun to arrest Bahrainis for no apparent reason.

The cycle of violence, ignited by the government's crack-down on residential areas and mass jailing and sentencing of young, innocent people, continued. On April 7th an explosion wrecked a complex belonging to the Sheraton Hotel in the heart of Manama damaging three shops but causing no injuries.

On the 40th day commemoration of Isa Qamber's execution events flared up and several cities, including Manama, Muharraq, Riffa'a were wrecked by some 20 fire bombs, ignited simultaneously after mid-night.

On May 5th a couple and their three-year-old son were killed and four people injured when a blast demolished a house in a Manama suburb. The official Gulf News Agency said that rescue teams dug out the dead and wounded from under the rubble of the house in Sanabis. The opposition accused the security forces of blasting the house and killing the family, fulfilling promises made by members of the ruling family that they will wipe out villages. Editorials of Al-Ayyam and Akhbar Al-Khalij hinted in March that villages would be "wiped out".

The daily Al-Ayam said that two people were injured when an explosive device went off at a bus stop on May 6th. Arson attacks the day before destroyed two shopping malls and badly damaged shops in different areas of Manama. A

government official described the fires as terrorist acts while the opposition attributed much of the violence to agents provocateurs.

Police defused a booby-trapped packet of cigarettes at a large shopping and business centre in the capital while a time bomb exploded at a bus stop on May 6th wounding two people. The authorities publicised warnings to inhabitants to beware of cigarette packets and other objects that may contain explosives or incendiary material. The political crisis was getting worse by the day.

"If the government is rational, talks would be the next step", said an opposition campaigner. However government officials are more reticent and see no need for talks. For the time being, the government has rounded up thousands of people and put them away. The long-term question of political change and stability may not be so easily resolved.

The government intensified its repressive measures by tightening the ruling family's grip on social, religious and political affairs. For this the government announced the creation of a Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs aimed at removing the religious rights of the Shia community which it enjoyed for 1400 years. The council was denounced by Shia religious authorities.

In an article published in the Times on May 11th, Sue Lloyd-Roberts who went to Bahrain under cover with a video camera under her robes spoke to one former MP who could not give his name since talking to journalists is an offence explained: "We don't want to change the government. The Al-Khalifas can stay. We just want political reform. We need checks on them to stop the corruption and bring about social justice and the fair distribution of wealth. But the situation is horrible now. We are living in a state of fear".

Opposition sources told Sue Lloyd-Roberts that 5,000 people have been arrested over the past two years and 2500 are still being detained.

"They come in the night and grab us from our houses", one former prisoner said. "As soon as we get to the prison, we are suspended from a bar and they beat the soles of our feet until they are swollen".

“Many are forced to sign confessions claiming links with Hezbollah and Iran before they are released. A graffiti war has broken out in the villages and every wall bears the scars. At night, young men with cans of paint spray slogans such as we are not terrorists, we want our rights and parliament is the solution. During the day, police paint over the graffiti”.

Sue Lloyd Roberts commented that popular anger is best illustrated by the fact that the women of Bahrain, brought up to act with constraint and show indifference to politics have become noisy activists and have suffered for it with dozens detained.

“They took me to the police station and interrogated me, hitting me with a hose-pipe at every question”, said 16-year-old Fatima. “You must admit your crimes, they say and make us sign false confessions. I was kept for 29 days. One night they striped us naked and made us stand outside until five in the morning. They came to look at us and taunt us and threatened to rape us”.

In an attempt to present a different face to the world, Shaikh Isa announced that the current shura (consultative council) would be expanded both in numbers and scope. This echoed statements by Crown Prince Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa who said in February that the government would “study a number of options concerning elections”. Shaikh Hamad, speaking in an interview with the Saudi daily Asharq Al Awsat, also said Bahrain could not adopt reform that was “alien to Gulf societies”.

The confrontation took a dramatic turn when, on June 3rd, the government announced that it had foiled a plot by radical Islamist forces, to overthrow the regime of Shaikh Isa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa. This announcement contrasted with earlier official statements that played down the significance of groups seeking constitutional change.

According to the government version of events, a group named “Hizbollah Bahrain” with links to Iranian-backed organisations elsewhere in the Arab world, has been plotting the regime’s downfall since 1993. A total of 56 Bahrainis, all of them Shia, have been arrested over an unspecified period. The government says that 34 have admitted to being involved

in the plot to overthrow the ruling Al-Khalifa family. Some of them were forced to appear on TV to make confessions. Iran has strongly denied that it was involved in any such plot, as has the Lebanese Hizbollah group. However, by blaming an external element to the troubles that have beset the island, the Bahraini authorities have linked the local crisis to wider regional security issues. In this, they have, as expected, received the wholehearted support of the GCC, which has issued fresh warnings about the supposed dangers of Iran's military might. Messages of support have also come from other Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, as well as from the US and the UK.

Prominent members of the opposition questioned the veracity of reports about a coup. "I do not believe there was any conspiracy, nor any coup attempt", said Mansoor Al-Jamri who leads an opposition campaign from London. Al-Jamri said he had never heard of Hizbollah Bahrain and goes so far as to accuse the government of fabrication. He also denied that his father, the jailed Shia cleric Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri has ever had any contacts with any alleged plotters, as stated in one of the televised confessions.

On June 3rd, Bahrain recalled its ambassador from Tehran and down graded diplomatic relations to charge d'affaires level.

In mid-June, a decree was issued announcing that Bahrain would be divided into four governorships. Administration in these areas will fall under the country's interior ministry and the governors will be appointed and dismissed by the prime minister for renewable four-year terms. Their mission will be to develop the governorships in security and economic areas.

The government, used the pretext of uncovering a coup attempt and began rounding up scores of Bahrainis and resorted to the divide and rule policies through a chauvinistic media campaign targeting the Shia community.

After confessions were extracted by the police without the presence of lawyers, the BFM challenged the government to permit lawyers to meet prisoners during interrogation.

In a article in the Arab daily Al-Quds, Abdul Rahman Al-Nuaimi, the Secretary-General of the Popular Front in Bah-

rain said: "We never thought the government would come-up with such a play (the fabricated story of an attempted coup). We thought that the government had decided to announce that half of the Shura Council would be elected in a tricky way to avoid restoring the constitution. It did not cross our minds that the minister of information would announce the discovery by Ian Henderson of 'a coup attempt'.

Kuwaiti MP Abdul Mohsin Jamal described the story of the coup in Bahrain as 'a cheap joke'.

During a press conference organised by the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, Sue Lloyd Roberts spoke about her visit to Bahrain. "I saw people with affections to the British and many of them were nostalgic about the time they spent in the UK. They admire the UK for such things as the Hyde Park Speakers' Corner and Spitting Image. I met with businessmen who were wondering where Bahrain is heading at the end of the 20th century. All those I met spoke of the demand for democracy..."

Channel Four journalist Sarah Shah, who was in Bahrain last February, told the press conference that she visited Sanabis two days after a security operation. "I saw how the houses were systematically raided one by one after they were marked with an 'x'. I saw an old lady with a broken arm after she had been clubbed to prevent her son being arrested. In the end the police let the boy go. I saw a person who had been arrested, blind-folded, tortured and released without being asked a single question. His body was covered with burns a little bigger than the size of a cigarette. I saw how a government can turn an entire community against it...."

The protesters returned to the streets during the 40th day commemoration of the martyrdom of Fadhil Abbas Marhoon who was shot dead by the security forces in Karzakkan. Fadhil was buried by the police who prevented his family from attending.

On July 15th mass processions were held throughout the country. The people chanted slogans demanding the release of jailed leaders and calling for an end to the arbitrary sentencing and the restoration of parliament.

The security forces continued their campaign against in-



nocent civilians. Scores of people were arrested in dawn raids on houses in the Sitra district. Houses were also raided in Malkeya village, west Bahrain and 25 private cars were damaged. Village inhabitants were stopped at random and intimidated. The raids were accompanied by a number of arbitrary arrests.

At the end of July the security forces clashed with demonstrators in several residential areas. Helicopters were deployed against unarmed civilians .

The graffiti war intensified after a new police unit was provided with equipment for painting over pro-democracy slogans. But the slogans are re-appearing as quickly as they are erased. Local people have called one of the walls in Karbabad, facing one of the main highways 'the wall of freedom'

The opposition held another conference in Britain on the 25th anniversary of Bahrain's independence. Lord Avebury commented on the double standards evident in the British government's handling of the violation of human rights in Bahrain and noted the stark contrast to the way in which the Foreign Office reacts to similar abuses "in a country other than Bahrain". The UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, chaired by Lord Avebury, published a report: "The State Security Court of Bahrain" based on the corroborated survey of the court system. It concludes: "there appears to be overwhelming agreement by impartial international observers on the lack of due process within the Bahraini State Security Court (SSC)".

Collective punishment has accompanied the government's arbitrary arrests and torture of opponents, many of whom have not returned from detention alive. More than 23,000 people had their telephone lines cut in Sitra. On September 22nd the residents of Duraz also had their lines cut for some time.

A spokesman for the BFM pointed out that "the situation is deteriorating because the ruling family has failed to grasp the basics of the problem and continues to mismanage the country by relying on outdated practices based on tribalism, sectarianism and racism. There is one way out that is compatible with the civil society of Bahrain: the restoration of

constitutional law to the country”.

At the end of September, the prime minister delayed the announcement of the names of the individuals whom he selected for the unconstitutional Shura Council as he failed to find individuals who would win the respect of the general public. In its quarterly report on Bahrain, the Economist Intelligence Unit pointed out that since the detention in January of a prominent Shia opposition leader, Sheikh Abdel-Amir Al-Jamri and six other key government opponents, many disenchanting Bahrainis have rallied around the BFM. A BFM call to show solidarity with jailed leaders by refraining from using electricity, water and telephones for five minutes at noon on July 26 was reportedly highly successful, particularly in Shia areas. The call for a boycott of petrol stations on that day was also widely supported. The public also refrained from paying utility bills and shopping was kept to a minimum.

The Amir opened the first session of the Shura Council on October 1st. The government-sponsored ‘talking shop’ consists of 40 hand-picked recruits whose main task will be a white-washing of the dictatorship. Reuters reported that the opening of the council was attended by the Iraqi Charge D’Affairs, Ahmed Al-Taef. Iran’s Charge D’Affaires, Sayyed Mohammed Ahmadi, was also present. A picture of the 40 government members was captioned “Ali Baba and the forty thieves” and was widely circulated around the country.

At the beginning of October, Bahrain’s State Security court jailed 15 people for terms ranging from six months to five years for arson and making and possessing explosives. In his address to the 51st session of the UN General Assembly on October 3rd, Bahrain’s Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, pleaded for coordinated efforts and co-operation to combat what he described as the scourge of terrorism.

“The State of Bahrain would like to express its gratitude and appreciation to the sisterly and friendly states that have lent their support during the period when it was targeted by foreign-aided terrorist acts aiming at disturbing the security and stability enjoyed by this state and by other Gulf states”,

the Foreign Minister said.

Bahraini personalities continued their campaign of peaceful protest. In mid-September 12 Bahraini personalities representing opposition forces issued a statement calling for the restoration of the dissolved parliament. A statement issued on 11th September called for "national unity and democracy", saying our homeland and nation are facing escalated danger as a result of the continuation of the political and security crises.

In mid-October news of the ill treatment of Sheikh Al-Jamri in detention since January, once again sparked demonstrations. Sheikh Al-Jamri has only been allowed one family visit and his lawyers have not been allowed to see him.

The intelligence department placed a Pakistani informer in control of the grand Al-Sadiq mosque in Qafool (Manama). The elderly man, Abudlla Al-Ebrik, who was in charge previously was detained and harassed for seven days prior to his forced resignation. The opposition pointed out that this insult is exacerbating the situation and that the people of Bahrain will not be prepared to allow the intelligence department to abuse the country's holy places.

Bahrain suffered a set back in October as a result of the government's arrogance that left no choice for business but to leave the country. The Swiss Bank corporation (SBC) and British Airways decided to move to Dubai. Banque Indosuez had dismissed the 35 employees and closed down. There was also news that Bank of America might be considering closing down its off-shore banking unit.

On October 22nd, the US bank, Core States Bank N.A. announced that it was opening a representative office in Dubai instead of Bahrain. The bank's regional manager, Thomas Kirker said: "Dubai is considered the commercial and financial center of the Middle East because of its strategic geographic location and the stability of its government". The statement was made after Moody, a credit rating agency, marked Bahrain down on the political stability index. Several foreign companies have moved out of Bahrain since October 1996.

The opposition pointed out that the Al-Khalifa govern-

ment opted for a show-down with pro-constitution campaigners hoping that the movement would be crushed by October. The ruling family also managed to extract monetary donations from other Gulf states on the promise that it would be able to crush the democratic aspirations of the people.

On October 22nd the people in areas where popular protest frequently erupted marked the first anniversary of the hunger strike staged by the jailed pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and his colleagues by switching off all the lights in houses and closing their shops from 7.00pm local time. This was the first in a series of protest activities which lasted for 10 days until November 1st. Sheikh Al-Jamri staged a 10-day hunger strike in protest against the back-sliding of the Interior Ministry on an agreement to calm down the situation.

On the night of October 20th, the international media reported a large blaze in "Savola" oil plant in Sitra which slightly injured five people and resulted in a loss of about ten million dinars. The fire spread to a nearby factory belonging to Omega Chemical Industries. Reuters stated: "Savola Bahrain is 60 percent owned by the Jeddah-based Savola Company of Saudi Arabia, and is the main supplier of cooking oil in the kingdom". The government-controlled paper Gulf Daily News said on 22nd October that "security officials are continuing to investigate the cause of the fire in the Savola cooking oil plant".

The opposition's call for a strike was widely observed in schools around the country on October 30th. The military officer installed as Minister of Education ordered the Bahrain Training Institute (BTI) and other schools to put up posters stating that students reported absent would face disciplinary action. Following the strike, two BTI lecturers, Dr Mirza Ali and Mr Ali Al-Jabar, who had been arrested several days ago were freed after being tortured and subjected to humiliating treatment. Clashes were reported near Bilad Al-Qadim School where riot police used rubber bullets and tear gas and damaged private cars while trying to quell the protest.

On November 3rd a member of the ruling family presided

over a security court which sentenced three citizens to three years and one citizen to six months imprisonment after they were accused of clashing with security forces in Bilad Al-Qadim. A fourth accused was accused of possessing political pamphlets.

A religious scholar from Abo-Quwna, Sheikh Abdul Aziz was detained by the the security forces on November 3rd after he made a speech in Momin Mosque in the capital Manama which highlighted the constitutional aspects of the popular struggle and called for the release of jailed opposition leaders who defused the volatile situation last year.

During an interview with the Egyptian daily Al-Ahram on November 5th, the Bahraini Prime Minister attempted to tarnish the image of the pro-democracy struggle by stating: "Terrorism aims to halt growth. that is why we call on the Arabs to stand together in facing it and we support the call to hold an international conference to combat terrorism because it is a disgraceful activity".

The opposition pointed out that similar language was used to justify the dissolution of parliament.

Writing in the Washington Post on November 1st, 1996 John Lancaster said that "the autocratic governments in Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia face varying degrees of internal opposition: they would rather blame terrorism and unrest on foreign culprits than admit to home-grown problems".

When asked about the situation in Bahrain during a seminar held under the auspices of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, in Qatar, Riad al-Rayyis a renowned Arab publisher said: "The struggle in Bahrain is civilised and democratic and is not related to sectarianism. I wish the movement to succeed in achieving a freely elected parliament in Bahrain".

The organisation's Secretary General, Mr Mohammed Faeq said: "We call on the government of Bahrain to restore the constitutions, reinstate real democracy and pave the way for dialogue with the people. A meaningful dialogue is needed and this is a legitimate right for the people".

On November 8th, the Bahraini Prime Minister, Sheikh

Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa held scores of private meetings with members of the so-called Shura Council and other prominent individuals to sound out their reaction to three recent executions which were approved by the Cessation court last July. The sentence was criticised by the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales which appealed to the Amir on November 4th saying: "We write now as a matter of urgency following the ruling of the Court of Cessation on 27th October, 1996 in a matter over which it has no jurisdiction. The committee has previously expressed its concern about imprisoning detainees without charge or trial and the trial procedures of the State Security Court.

Reporting from Bahrain on November 8th, Reuters said: "Women in black shawls and teenagers knelt on the dirt and sprinkled rose water on the grave of Isa Qamber. They raised their fists and shouted slogans in support of their imprisoned and exiled leaders. Minutes later a few helmeted security men in green uniforms arrived clutching rifles at Bahrain's Al-Houra Cemetery. The crowd fell silent. Three youths were lined up against a wall and struck with a truncheon by one of the security men. The crowd was ordered to leave.

Reuters went on to say that influential leaders such as Sheikh Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri remained imprisoned along with scores of activists. Diplomats estimate that the government has rounded up to 1000 political prisoners. Opposition circles put the number at around 2500.

In November a number of businesses left Bahrain including the Japanese National Oil Company, Midas Kapiti International, spices board of India and GBR Bank. Several airlines stopped flying to Bahrain including Lufthansa, Air Brunei and Royal Air Maroc.

On November 30th, the detained opposition Leader Sheikh Amir Al-Jamri went on hunger strike. The 58-year-old sheikh was detained once again on 21st January and kept in solitary confinement until November. He was transferred to hospital three times in November and his family was only allowed to see him briefly once.

On December 7th, the riot police attacked Markh village using live ammunition and a new type of smothering gas

which produces white clouds that cause difficulty in breathing. Men, women and children were trapped in confined spaces and scores of people were injured. The security forces also smashed 25 cars.

The security forces mounted fresh attacks on November 11th on the residential areas in Duraz. The day before they renewed their attacks on religious assembly halls (matams) and mosques in Sitra, Sehla, Bani Jamra and Adhari .

On December 13th the grand mosques in Duraz, Qafool, Khawaja and Momin were closed.

On December 18th and 19th, Sanabis, Daih, Karbabad and Bilad Al-Qadim witnessed intensive clashes which followed the outbreak of demonstrations during the commemorations on the Day of Martyrs for innocent civilians killed or tortured by the regime's security apparatus.

On December 16th, 1994 live ammunition was used for the first time since independence against the Bahraini people. Hani Abbas Khamis and Hani Al-wasti were the first two casualties of the use of live ammunition.

During the commemoration, the security forces attacked citizens and fired indiscriminately injuring at least two women and several young people. Scores of people were arrested. Rubber bullets were used by the security forces during the clashes. Khalil Al-Jibal was wounded by one of these bullets and arrested. Several mosques were closed and their gates were padlocked. In Momin mosque in Manama worshippers demanded an end to the brutality.

All shops and restaurants were closed and students boycotted classes.

## Chapter 6

### HUMAN RIGHTS: A SCANDALOUS CATALOGUE OF INJUSTICE

Since the dissolution of parliament in 1975 and the enforcement of the State Security Court, international human rights organisations and the opposition have documented a scandalous catalogue of injustices characterised by:

- Holding detainees incommunicado without charge or trial
- Torture and ill-treatment of detainees
- Deaths in custody
- Use of ammunition to quell protests
- Extrajudicial executions
- Forced exile and denial of entry to Bahrain for those attempting to return
- Denial of a trial or holding of unfair trials
- Denying suspects the right of access to relatives and defence lawyers
- Failure to set up investigations into any allegations of torture or into incidents involving killing of demonstrators
- Failure to provide the names of those arrested and their places of arrest
- Prohibition on transmitting news abroad without authorisation from the Ministry of Information
- Denial of treatment to wounded protesters



- Use of tear gas in confined spaces
- Discrimination on the basis of religious, sect, ethnic origin and tribal affiliation

The government of Bahrain has denied that forces under its authority have committed widespread violations of human rights. It has sought to maintain, Amnesty International concluded in its 50-page report issued in September 1995, that it acted within the law with regard to arrest and detention procedures, that the rights of detainees in custody were respected and that those convicted received the benefit of fair trials. Furthermore, the government has sought to justify its strong-arm tactics in quelling demonstrations by pointing to acts of violence which it accused "extremist" elements of having perpetrated. It has stated publicly that such acts of violence were carried out at the instigation of hostile foreign powers.

But Amnesty goes on to say that the government, has failed to provide the evidence to support its public statements, both with regard to the question of foreign involvement in the current political unrest and with regard to the manner in which the authorities have handled the mass protests.

It has failed to make known the names of those arrested and their places of detention, and has denied the vast majority of them access to relatives and defence lawyers. Most of those convicted were tried in camera before the State Security Court, the proceedings of which fall far short of international standards for a fair trial.

To Amnesty's knowledge the government has failed to set up investigations into any allegations of torture or into incidents involving the killing of demonstrators. No one has been brought to justice for these crimes.

Moreover, the government continues to deny Amnesty International access to the country to investigate these allegations or to observe ongoing trials. Thousands of appeals were sent by Amnesty International members on behalf of individual detainees remained unanswered.

Amnesty International pointed out that a disproportionate number of victims of human rights violations have been Shi'a

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 trials.

Some of them were charged with membership of prohibited political organisations said by the Bahraini government to be supported and financed by Iran.

In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war a changed political climate brought about some improvements in the human rights situation in Bahrain. Dozens of political detainees were released, as were an estimated 20 convicted political prisoners who had served their sentences. Scores of Bahraini nationals, including entire families, who were forcibly exiled in previous years were allowed to return. These positive developments did not endure however, as detention without charge or trial on political grounds continued and there were renewed fears that detainees might be tortured.

Hundreds of victims of forcible exile continued to be denied entry into their country. Widespread discontent and anger among the population about the denial of fundamental civil and political rights, and the unwillingness of the government to tackle the causes of discontent, created a potentially explosive situation.

In June 1994, thousands of unemployed youths gathered in front of the Labour Ministry demanding employment. The youths demanded jobs but the security forces attacked and arrested many of them. A young cleric, Sheikh Ali Salman, was briefly detained then released on an accusation of supporting the demands of the unemployed in his sermons. On 25th November 1994 a group of people protested against a marathon organised by the Rotary Club. The event stirred religious sensibilities as many of the female runners, wearing sports clothing, passed through villages inhabited largely by Shia Muslims. Requests made through religious figures in the community to the authorities to have the route altered seem to have been ignored.

According to one account a group of young people were said to have carried banners against the holding of the mar-

athon and staged a peaceful protest. At the Jidd Hafs roundabout, according to accounts received by Amnesty, several intelligence personnel attempted to photograph them. The young people responded by throwing stones at them. Shortly thereafter, security forces arrived and reportedly used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse them.

The following day arrests were carried out in Al-Qadam, Karrana and other areas close to the Budayyi Highway and some 15 -20 youths were taken into custody. During the ensuing days tensions were running high and a number of Shi'a Muslim religious scholars spoke out in their sermons against the tactics used by the authorities in response to this incident as well as against the marathon generally.

This coincided with attempts by a group of prominent Sunni and Shi'a Muslim personalities in Bahrain to present a petition to the Amir calling for the restoration of democratic rights.

On December 5th, 1994 Shaikh Ali Salman who was briefly detained last June, was among those voicing public criticism of the government was arrested. His arrest sparked off widespread protests in a number of areas calling for his release.

These incidents led to a chain of events involving clashes with the security forces, the killing of unarmed civilians using live ammunition and hundreds of arrests.

On January 15th, 1995 the government forcibly exiled Shaikh Ali Salman and two other religious scholars, Shaikh Hamza Al-Dairi and Sayyid Haidar al-Sitri. The government's response to these events effectively ensured the continuation of widespread protests demanding the release of detainees, the return of those exiled and the restoration of democratic rights.

The scale of human rights violations perpetrated by government forces since 1994 has been unprecedented in Bahrain, and once again, the overwhelming majority of victims have been Shi'a Muslims. For the first time, women and children as young as nine or ten years' old have been systematically targeted for arrest and ill-treated while in custody. This period has been marked by the brutality with which the

authorities sought to quell the protests and demonstrations: the repeated use of live ammunition to disperse crowds and the consequent killing of unarmed civilians , and unprovoked attacks on peaceful gathering such as funeral processions which have been become an everyday occurrence.

Human Rights Watch World Report for 1997 detailed violations of human rights in Bahrain. The extensive report said: "The end of the 1995 and beginning of 1996 saw a resumption of widespread street demonstrations and clashes with security forces, mainly over issues of plitical reform. Serious, extensive and recurrent human rights abuse continued in the form of arbitrary detention, abusive treatment of prisoners, and denial of due process rights. Virtually all those detained in connection with the political unrest belonged to Bahrain's majority Shia community. However the ruling al Khalifa family's broad denial of basic civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly, affected all Bahraini citizens.

### **State Security measures**

In its 1995 report on Bahrain, the American State Department pointed out that under the State Security Act of 1974, persons may be detained for up to three years without trial for engaging in activities or making statements regarded as a threat to the broadly defined concepts of national harmony and security. Both Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have criticised the 1974 Decree Law on State Security Measures which remains in force, as well as Amiri Decree No 7 of 1976 which established a State Security Court. This court denies the most fundamental rights of persons deprived of their liberty, as recognised not only in international human rights standards, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also in Bahrain's own constitution and legislations, including the 1976 Code of Criminal procedure. These violations were amply demonstrated during the early 1980s and in later years following the arrest and detention without charge or trial or after unfair trials of

hundreds of people perceived to be a threat to state security.

The strong-arm tactics used by security and intelligence personnel of the Ministry of the Interior to deal with such perceived threats has only served to increase tensions.

The principal apparatuses are the Public Security Directorate (PSD) Idarat Al-Amn Al'Amn to which the police forces, anti-riot squads and intelligence services are answerable. This is headed by Major Ian Henderson.

The following are also part of the PSD: The Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) Idarat Amn Al-Dawla, headed by Major General Ian Henderson, a British national and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Idarat Al-Tahqiqat Al-Jina'ioyya, headed by Colonel Muhammed Al-Dawwadi, a Bahraini national. In February 1996, the Bahrain Minister proposed an amendment to the unconstitutional Penal Code of 1976 to enable the State Security Court to rush the passing of unjust sentences against hundreds of opposition members held in administrative detention centres. The measures taken by the Bahraini government in response to the widespread protests and the serious human rights violations committed by the security forces in that context received significant media coverage abroad.

The American State Department pointed out that government security forces use the State Security Law regularly to detain persons engaging in anti-regime activities and those attempting to exercise the rights of free speech, association or other rights in opposition to the Al-Khalifa regime. The state Department reported that security forces are believed to have held approximately 2700 people in detention in 1995 including some who were arrested, released and arrested again. In many cases, the suspects were released with a warning. By then about 250 were tried in the Security Court; fewer than 750 were tried in criminal courts and the remainder were released without charge. Under proceedings used by the Criminal Court, police may detain a suspects for up to seven days of questioning before filing charges.

Activities that lead to detention, questioning , warning or arrest include: membership in illegal organisations or those deemed subversive; painting anti -regime slogans on walls,

joining anti-government demonstrations; possessing or circulating anti-regime writings; preaching sermons with a distinct anti-regime political tone and harbouring or associating with persons committing such acts. Of those detained for more than a few days, most were held for participating in demonstrations and skirmishing with police.

In addition 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 investigatory 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 the Interior.

When a team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited Bahrain in November 1996 the security forces began implementing punishments on the spot: they attacked Al-Anwari mosque in Daih on November 11th and ransacked it. Traditional programmes held in mosques throughout the country have also been interrupted.

### **Ian Henderson**

In his first interview with *The Big Issue* (December 28th, 1996 - January 8th 1997 edition), Ian Henderson spoke of his hopes to give up his role as Bahrain's director of Intelligence and spend his final days in Scotland.

But, as *The Big Issue* pointed out, his retirement plans could be his downfall as Henderson could be arrested and tried for a catalogue of alleged crimes if he sets foot in Britain.

Human rights campaigners and Bahrainis fleeing persecution claim Henderson master-minded a reign of terror by the security forces - including torture, detention without trial and forced exile. Legal experts say the UN Convention Against Torture places an obligation on Britain to arrest or extradite him.

Henderson, known as "the master torturer", has never spoken before of his role as a hired gun for the oppressive regime - he was decorated for fighting the Mau-Mau in Kenya

before signing up as a mercenary in Bahrain.

The well-spoken 69-year old poured scorn on calls for his arrest saying: "That would be a big mistake. They wouldn't have a legal let to stand on".

Henderson admits "vigorous interrogation" is common, but denies torturing or directing torture adding "I've never lifted a finger against anyone or asked officers to do so".

Lord Avebury UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group Chairman said Henderson was "awash with blood".

One victim Zaki Khalifa, seeking British political asylum, spoke about how Henderson's men trussed him, hung him by his arms, beat him for days and kept him standing for 72 hours. Henderson allegedly threatened Halifa, who is now almost crippled, that he would never leave jail. The 25-year old said: "Henderson is a monster".

Since pro-democracy demonstrations flared in 1994, Henderson has ordered interrogation leading to death through torture, according to the Bahrain Freedom Movement (BFM).

The issue has been raised at ministerial level with Bahrain. however, Britain does not accept responsibility for Henderson's actions despite his UK citizenship.

The Bahrain Embassy refused to comment on Henderson's role claiming it could not "divulge information concerning internal security".

BFM believe Henderson has a security company working for him in London spying on Bahrain exiles.

Exiled BFM leader Mansoor Al-Jamri, whose father has been jailed and sister detained and tortured, said Henderson was personally responsible for direction repression. "Henderson is ruthless. Even the king can't save you from him. Torturers cannot act with impunity. Britain must arrest him when he arrives".

### **Curbs on freedom of information and expression**

Under the law, the Ministry of Interior is empowered to authorise 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 widespread.

On 4th April 1995 one of Bahrain's daily newspapers, Al-Ayam, published a statement issued by the then Minister of Information, Tareq Al-Mu'ayyed, containing the following: "The ministry wishes to draw attention to the fact that no citizen is permitted to transmit news abroad without obtaining authorization from the ministry..." and that those who do so may be liable to legal action.

The threat of legal action had no basis in law since no decree to that effect had been issued by the Amir. Nevertheless, shortly thereafter a number of people were summoned by government officials and ordered to refrain from giving interviews to the media and transmitting information aboard on the situation in Bahrain. Among those summoned were Ahmad 'Issa Al-Shamlan and 'Abd Al-Shahid Khalaf, both well-known lawyers who together with others were undertaking the defence of many of those brought to trial in connection with the protests.

As many as 5000 people may have been arrested in Bahrain since the outbreak of protests in December 1994. Over 1000 of these detainees are believed to have been held for a matter of days only for questioning. Hundreds of others were held in detention without charge or trial for several months.

Most of those arrested as prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or because of their relation to others sought by the authorities.

Those targeted included prominent personalities associated with the petition to the amir calling for the restoration of democratic rights. Religious scholars who were accused of inciting people to engage in anti-government protests were also arrested.

The American State Department pointed out that while the constitution provides for the right "to express and propagate opinions" Bahrainis are not, in practise free to express public opposition to the Al-Khalifa regime in speech or writing. Press criticism of ruling family personalities and of government policy regarding certain sensitive subjects - such as



sectarian arrest and the dispute with Qatar over the Hawar Islands - are strictly prohibited.

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. There was no coverage of domestic unrest, for example, of pro-democracy demonstrations. The government does not condone unfavourable 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.

Two American journalists were denied visas during the anti-government protests in mid 1995 while others only received visas after foreign diplomatic intervention. International news agencies such as AP, UPI, and AFP frequently complain about press restrictions. In March Canal France Internationale, the French-language cable television station, was taken off the air for several weeks because of government anger over the French media's coverage of the demonstrations.

A number of signatories of pro-democracy petitions, including Ahmed Shamlan, Dr Monira Fakhro, hessa Al-Khumeiri and Aziza Al-Bassam and Saeed Al-Asbool were detained or suspended from their jobs.

Citizens do not have the right or ability 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 organisations. The Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa, makes all appointments to the cabinet.

The ordinary citizen may attempt to influence government decisions through submission or personally written petitions and informal contact with senior officials, including appeals to the Emir, the Prime Minister and other officials at their regularly scheduled public audiences, called majlis.

The submission of several petitions, bearing the sig-

natures of a cross section of Bahraini society, calling for the restoration of parliament and compliance with constitutional provisions, has been greeted with bullets, arrests, in camera trials and other forms of repression.

Dr Monira Fakhro was dismissed because she delivered a paper on the Bahrain uprising.

Pass rates are no longer the determining factor in student selection and members of security-related quarters are taking the places of capable students.

A seminar on democracy and shura organised by the leading Al-Orooba Club in Manama in February 1996 was cancelled by the Intelligence Department which learned that it was due to be addressed by Mr Ahmad Al-Shamlan, Dr Abdul Latif Al-Mahmood and Dr Ali Al-Oreibi.

In the same month eight Kuwaiti MPs were banned from entering Bahrain after sending a letter to the emir urging him to listen to the Bahraini people's just demands and condemning the attitude of the government.

"If we, as members of a legislative authority in a sisterly state are being treated like this for merely submitting a plea how about the people on the ground?" Adnan Abdul-Samad asked in an interview with Reuters.

Bahrain's security laws are extending their tentacles into every aspect of professional life. There are now 22 statutes governing lawyers in matters ranging from qualifications to discipline. Additionally Law 21 of 1989 prohibits any society from involvement in "politics or financial speculation". This provision effectively prevents members of the Bahraini Bar Society from taking part in public discussions on human rights matters. Commenting on issues of human rights generally seems to fall under the definition of "political activities". The Bar Society has challenged this clause.

The Inter-parliamentary Union has rejected Bahrain's application to register the powerless and government appointed Consultative Council. The president of the union rejected the application by the Bahraini government made in May 1996 because it had abolished the elected parliament in 1975 and suspended constitutional political establishments.

## **Arrests of students**

In many school strikes were staged in support of the protesters to which the security forces responded by raiding schools and arresting the students. In late April 1995 security forces and riot police attacked students on the campus of the University of Bahrain in order to break up protests. Both live ammunition and tear gas were used during the attack and scores of students were arrested. Students continue to be arrested, beaten and tortured by the security forces.

After the arrest of two lecturers from the Bahraini Training Institute more than 200 members of the security forces raided the institute on October 28th, 1996 accompanied by jailed lecturers Dr Mirza Ali and Mr Ali Al-Jabal. The students witnessed clear signs of torture on the faces of their lecturers and decided to go on strike in protest at these atrocities.

The activities of students have been further restricted by the Higher Youth and Sports Council which is headed by the Crown Prince. It acts as a rubber stamp body for the government.

## **Harassment of women**

The Bahraini government also started arresting women. Among those arrested in the first half of 1995 were a number of women and young girls. Shortly after the outbreak of protests, women were subjected to beatings and threats for participating in demonstrations or for attempting to prevent the arrest of their male relatives. On 11th February 1995 for example, a group of women staged a protest outside the High Court building in Manama after learning that their detained male relatives were to be put on trial. One woman who joined the protest later told Amnesty International: "We were about 20 women calling for our relatives to be released. The whole area was surrounded by police. They ordered us to leave the area but we refused. I was beaten and carried by six policeman and forced onto a jeep, but I managed to jump

out again. One woman had her clothes torn and her chest was exposed. Another woman was pregnant. They humiliated and insulted us”.

The British Parliamentary Human Rights Group also drew attention to the government's abuse of women who have become very involved with political issues. The authorities are concerned about the increasing involvement of women in the political struggle which is not often witnessed in the Gulf.

Sheikh Ali Salman, pointed out that in the Gulf Arab 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. This 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.

One Bahraini woman, now exiled from the country, said that it was very awkward for the male security forces to forcibly detain females, due to the traditional customs of the country. She went on to say: “We women didn't plan to involve ourselves in the democratic struggle to such an extent. We were thrown into it because of the situation... the situations of our sons, husbands, our families and country.”

In a 13 page report issued on July 16th Amnesty International denounced the ruling family for its use of women and children as hostages to force male relatives to surrender. “For the first time in the recent history of Bahrain women and children as young as seven, have been arrested, beaten and threatened in custody - a disturbing pattern that is set to continue”, Amnesty said.

‘Afaf ‘Abd Al Amir Al-Jamri, the daughter of prominent political activist Sheikh Abd Al-Amir Mansur Al-Jamri, was considered an “urgent action” case by Amnesty after she was reportedly beaten by female police officers after meeting her father who was held in solitary confinement in June 1995.

## **Unfair trials, arbitrary detention and death penalty**

In March 1995, trials began of detainees arrested in connection with their alleged participation in widespread protests and in related acts of violence. Three separate courts have been involved in hearing these cases: the Supreme Civil Court of Appeal in its capacity as a State Security Court the criminal chamber of the High Court and the Juveniles Court.

Arbitrary sentencing has been extensively used as a means of punishing Bahrainis seeking political reforms and the ruling family has staffed its courts with members of the Al Khalifa. The president of the court of cessation, for example, is Sheikh Khalifa Bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa a member of the ruling family and brother of the under-secretary for the Interior Ministry. All security courts are presided over by members of the Al-Khalifa family.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded a report on September 17th, 1996 by saying: "The detention of Shaikh Abd Al-Amir Mansour Al-Jamri, Sheikh Hassan Sultan, Sheikh Hussain El-Deihi, Sheikh Ali Bin Ahmed Al-Jedhafi, Sheikh Ali Ashour, Seyeed Ibrahim Adnan Al-Alwai, Hassan Meshma'a, Salah Hussein is declared to be arbitrary being in contravention of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and falling within Category 111 of the principles applicable in the consideration of cases submitted to the working group.

In February 1996 the UN Human Rights Sub-Committee on Arbitrary Detentions expressed its concern about the situation in Bahrain. It declared that the detention of more than 500 persons was "arbitrary in contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Articles 9 and 10 and Articles 9 and 14 of the convention on Civil and Political Rights". The sub-committee called on the Bahraini government to take the necessary steps to remedy the situation in order to bring it into conformity with the principles incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## Torture and ill-treatment of detainees

Torture remains rife in Bahrain's prisons, and is most frequently inflicted during the initial period of detention when suspects are undergoing interrogation. While in many cases the aim is to extract "confessions" which may subsequently be used as the basis for conviction in court, torture is also used to force detainees to sign statements undertaking to renounce their political affiliation, to desist from anti-government activity in the future or to force them to co-operate with the authorities by reporting on the activities of others.

In other cases, torture or ill-treatment is inflicted simply as punishment, or to instil fear in both the detainees and government opponents generally. The impunity with which such practices are carried out, and the absence of any official accountability, has resulted in torture being regarded as an apparently legitimate method of interrogation.

Four cases, Hussain Qambar, Sa'id Abd Al-Rasul Al-Iskafi, Mahmoud Abdul Latif and Seyid Ali Amin Mohammed, of torture and subsequent death illicitly widespread protests in Bahrain and were reported in detail by Amnesty International.

On 4th January 1995 the body of Hussain Qambar was returned to his family. The victim, a driver of Iranian origin employed at an aluminium factory, was believed to have been arrested in the second week of December 1994 during a wave of arrests of suspected demonstrators. His fate and whereabouts remained unknown to his family until his death. According to reports received by Amnesty International his family was told to bury him quietly without public mourning. His body allegedly bore traces of torture, including the extraction of his fingernails. Amnesty International called on the government to investigate the circumstances of Hussain Qambar's death but no such investigation is known to have been carried out. Officials have apparently denied all knowledge of any person by that name.

Sa'id Abd Al-Rasul Al-Iskafi, a 16-year-old secondary school student from al-Sanabes died ten days after his arrest.

According to information received by Amnesty International, he had been summoned for interrogation by State Security Intelligence on 29th June 1995 in connection with his alleged participation in anti-government protests. He was reportedly suspected of having sprayed graffiti on walls near his home.

Amnesty International received photographs of the victim's body taken shortly after his death and submitted them for examination by an expert forensic pathologist at Guy's Hospital in the United Kingdom. His report, dated 9th August, 1995, refers to "a number of areas of apparent injury and abnormalities resulting from injury seen in the photographs", including on the victim's upper chest, upper and lower thoracic regions, the right loin, the right forearm, hand and wrist, the left arm and both thighs. Amnesty International also received reports that Sa'id Al-Iskafi had been sexually assaulted while in custody.

On May 8th, 1996 young people from Daih clashed with members of the intelligence department and had to call for reinforcements. When the troops arrived they could only find Abdul Amir Hassan Rustum who was severely beaten. He died the following morning after dragging himself home despite his severe injuries.

In November 1996, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) sent a team to Bahrain to conduct preliminary investigations into the conditions of prisoners. The selection of the ICRC rather than another human rights organisations was based on the condition that it does not question the legality of the arrests. The opposition pointed out that in the last two years there appears to be a decentralised approach to imprisoning people. Some citizens are held by one police station when another security department raids their houses to arrest them again. There are many detainees throughout the country and there is no central registrar of those in detention. It is therefore possible for the Interior Ministry to prevent the ICRC from making contact with many of those arrested.

In November 1996, the opposition drew attention to rising concerns that the ruling family has recruited more security men for raping young boys in custody.

The opposition appealed to the ICRC to investigate the case of Hussain Isa Al-Jaziri who was transferred to a psychiatric hospital on November 13th following three months of torture.

### **Extra-judicial executions**

Between December 1994 and May 1995, ten civilians were shot dead by security forces and riot police. Most were killed during demonstrations described as peaceful, with the participants calling on the government to restore democratic rights. Security forces and riot police repeatedly used live ammunition to quell the protests, as well as rubber bullets, "birdshot" pellets and tear gas. On a number of occasions, demonstrators were shot from helicopters brought in to assist ground forces.

On November 5th, 1996 three opposition groups in Bahrain: the Bahrain Freedom Movement, the popular Front in Bahrain and the National Liberation Front of Bahrain issued a joint statement stating: "The popular protests against the arbitrary sentencing to death of three citizens continue at the same time when lawyers submitted all evidence proving the inadequacy of the trial and the innocence of the accused. Our people are struggling for a just cause: the reinstatement of the constitution, the restoration of parliament, political openness, return of all forcible-exiles and release of all political prisoners".

On July 1st 1996 a security court ignored statements of more than 50 witnesses which proved the innocence of eight persons who were charged in relation to a fire which was said to have resulted in the death of seven Bangladeshi workers. Three innocent citizens: Ali Ahmed Abdullah Al-Asfoor, Yousif Hassan Abdul Baqi and Ahmed Khalil Ibrahim Hubail were sentenced to death.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International issued a joint statement appealing to the emir to halt the execution of the three citizens sentenced to death after an unfair trial. The two organisations said "this trial did not meet the minimum



standards of fairness". They also said the government has the responsibility to try the men "before an open criminal court in which they can exercise their rights to counsel and to examine the witnesses against them and whose judgment they can appeal to a higher court".

Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, also raised the case of death sentences in a letter to the British Foreign Office on 29th October.

### **Denial of treatment to wounded protesters**

An unknown number of protesters, including women and children, were injured as security forces sought to quell numerous demonstrations. Measures were taken by the authorities to prevent many of the wounded from receiving medical treatment in hospitals and clinics, including by stationing security forces at the government-funded Al-Salmaniya Medical Centre.

According to information received by Amnesty International, doctors at the medical centre were warned by security authorities that if they treated any of the wounded they would suffer repercussions.

By contrast, at Bahrain International Hospital which is privately-owned, the wounded were admitted for treatment although security forces were stationed at the entrance to the hospital and were said to harass and intimidate those seeking treatment. A large number of those wounded were afraid to seek hospital treatment for fear of arrest, and were consequently treated in secret at their homes by sympathetic doctors from both the Bahrain International Hospital and Al-Salmaniya Medical Centre. Minor operations were performed as well as treatment for burns.

According to a number of testimonies submitted to Amnesty International ambulances were also prevented from taking some of the wounded to hospital.

## Use of tear gas in confined spaces

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that the security forces have deliberately used tear gas in enclosed spaces, such as houses and mosques. At least two people are said to have died following exposure to tear gas namely Sakina Al-Ghanimi and 'Aqil Salman 'Ali Al-Saffar.

Sakina Al-Ghanimi was a 60-year-old woman who was exposed to tear gas on 12th January 1995 and died three days later. "Aqil Salman 'Ali Al-Saffar, an 18-month -old infant died on February 8th 1995 when tear gas was dispersed into the family home.

Tear gas and live ammunition were also used on 13th January 1995 during the funeral of 'Abd Al-Qader Muhsin Al-Fatlawi who had been shot during a demonstration. According to eyewitness accounts, hundreds of riot police had surrounded the cemetery where the victim was to be buried and without provocation began shooting at those assembled.

A 19-year-old student who was at the cemetery told Amnesty: "We were taken aback at the sudden shooting by the riot police. First there was shooting from a helicopter and then the others began firing. I was among the people in the maghsal (a room where bodies are washed before burial), most of the others were inside the mosque. The riot police entered the courtyard of the maghsal and threw three tear gas canisters through the air conditioning vent. They took the others who were outside and placed plastic handcuffs on their wrists. An officer came and ordered that they be taken into the maghsal and then they used tear gas and shot the people inside with birdshot pellets..."

In February 1995 a two-and-a-half year old infant, Aqeel Salman Ali Al-Saffar was smothered to death by a newly deployed type of gas which causes vomiting and breathing difficulties. The gas canister was thrown into his house by the security forces.

## Forcible exile and revocation of citizenship

Bahrain is probably the only country of the world which strips its own citizens of their nationality and sends them into forced exile for anti-regime activities.

In its report on Bahrain, the US State Department reported four deportations in 1995: Shaykh Ali Salman Ahmed Salman, Shaykh Hamza Al-Sitri and Shaykh Haydar Al-Sitri to the Arab Emirates on January 15th. They travelled onward to London the next day. Shaykh Adel Al Sho'ala was deported on January 18th. He is believed to be in Damascus. The government deported these four clerics because they instigated an attack on a charity marathon in November 1994 in which several participants were beaten and stoned and because they encouraged anti-government rioting.

On Bahrain's National Day, 16th December 1993, Amnesty International issued its first major statement on the forcible exile of Bahraini nationals by their government. The statement provided some background to Bahraini politics, contained the names of many of those exiled and pointed out that forcible exile is expressly proscribed under Article 17 (c) of Bahrain's own constitution, which provides that it is forbidden to expel Bahraini citizens from the country or prevent them from returning to Bahrain. Amnesty is calling on the Government of Bahrain to respect these provisions and issue a public declaration that all Bahraini nationals are entitled to return to Bahrain.

The Bahraini government has revoked the citizenship of nationals who are considered security threats. It considers these individuals have forfeited their nationality under the Citizenship Act of 1963 because they accepted foreign citizenship or passports, or engaged in anti-regime 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 those prohibited from returning to Bahrain and their family

members who voluntarily live abroad with them.

Bahraini 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 three per cent of the indigenous population, mostly Persian-origin Shia, do not have passports and cannot readily obtain them, although they be issued travel documents as Bahraini residents.

Bahrainis living abroad who are suspected of political or criminal offences 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.

Non-citizen residents, including bidoon of Iranian origin, may also obtain Bahraini "laissez passers" (temporary passports) usually valid for two years and renewable at Bahraini embassies overseas. Laissez passer holders also require visas to re-enter Bahrain.

## **Religious & social discrimination**

In its report of March 1996, Speak Together of Freedom the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group pointed out that the Shi'a of Bahrain are banned from senior positions in the Foreign, Defence, Interior and Justice Ministries and have recently been sidelined in service industries such as Health, Transport, Water and Electricity. As a result unemployment in the Shi'a community has soared to 25,000 - 35,000 people while there are more than 100,000 foreign workers in Bahrain.

Social and municipal services in most Shia neighbourhoods, particularly in rural villages, are inferior to those found in Sunni urban communities.

The Islamic Enlightenment Society, one of the leading educational institutions in the country with three girls schools

and two university-level courses was closed in February 1984. In 1994 however it was expected to pay municipality rates. The school was in fact charged for its closure and Mr Abdul Hussain Al-Mutghawwi was accused of running anti-government activities from the premises and sentenced to seven years in prison.

A group of approximately 9000 to 15,000 mostly Persian-origin Shia 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 those individuals are officially unable to buy land, start a business, or obtain government loans.

The law does not address the citizenship rights of persons who are not registered with Bahraini 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 in finding employment.

## Correspondence

The government of Bahrain has received numerous letters of protest from human rights organisations and foreign governments drawing attention to its abysmal human rights record and calling for reform.

On September 28th, 1995 the American congress wrote a letter to Muhammed Abdul Ghaffar Abdulla the Bahraini ambassador to Washington. They told the ambassador that as chairmen of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, they were aware of the challenges the Bahraini government faces. They nevertheless urged the government to uphold the

international standards of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of assembly and the right to a fair trial.

The letter went on to say that the caucus received widespread reports from sources such as Amnesty International that those individuals supporting the reinstitution of the National Assembly and the Constitution are subjected to forced exile, detention without trial and death under torture. At least seven civilians have been killed in current incidents and over 2700 arrested.

The caucus urged the ambassador to seek the prompt release of all those arrested in the "civil disturbances" unless charges of recognisable offences are brought against them. "We also encourage you to ensure that those arrested are treated humanely. Those arrested should be provided with a fair and open trial, and should be given immediate access to relatives, lawyers and independent doctors in accordance with international standards.

American-based Human Rights Watch / Middle East wrote to the Amir of Bahrain on December 19th, 1994 expressing concern over the government's response to peaceful protests calling for the restoration of democracy and the release of prominent opposition leaders.

In particular the letter cited the unfair detention of Sheikh Ali Salman because of his encouragement of the peaceful protests and his call for restoration of parliamentary life. They criticised the indiscriminate use of tear gas and rubber bullets used against crowds.

Human Rights Watch acknowledged that some individuals committed acts of violence, pointing to the beating to death of a policeman on December 16 and the vandalising of private hotels on December 13th. Yet they argued that individuals guilty of crimes should be tried as charged and not be used as justification for the "use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrations or the arbitrary roundup of scores of suspected political activists who were not involved in these acts. Those suspected of recognisable criminal activity should be promptly charged and allowed legal council".

Bahrain was severely criticised during the 53rd meeting of

the UN Commission on Human Rights held between March 18th and 26th April, 1996 by the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters, France Libertes, Liberation, Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists, International Federation of Human Rights and Pax Christi International. The UN Rapporteurs on involuntary disappearances, torture and arbitrary executions and detention were all concerned about human rights violations in Bahrain.

In April 1996 Lord Avebury, Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group sent a detailed programme to Bahrain's Crown Prince who visited London and Washington during the previous month. He received no response. The pleas of the Kuwaiti Prime Minister and the Saudi Crown Prince for dialogue also fell on deaf ears.

## Reforms

At the end of its report issued in September 1995 Amnesty International submitted the following recommendations to the government of Bahrain:

- (1) Conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all incidents involving the killing of demonstrators in strict accordance with the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. The investigations should be conducted by a body which is independent of those allegedly responsible for the killings and the methods and findings of these investigations should be made public immediately.
- (2) Issue clear instructions to the security forces and other law enforcement personnel to abide by the UN Basic Principles of the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which prohibit the international lethal use of firearms except "when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life". Clear instructions should also be given to the security forces as to the safe use of tear gas.
- (3) Conduct thorough, prompt and impartial in-

vestigations into all reported incidents of torture, including cases of death in custody. The investigations should be independent of those allegedly responsible and the methods and findings of these investigations should also be made public immediately. All investigations of deaths in custody after alleged torture should be consistent with the strict standards in the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions.

(4) Bring to justice law enforcement personnel responsible for reported extra-judicial executions, torture or other human rights violations. All investigations and trials should be held before ordinary criminal courts in accordance with international standards for a fair trial.

(5) Expressly prohibit all extra-judicial executions and torture and ensure that any such violations are recognised as criminal offences and are punishable by penalties which take into account the gravity of the crime. Such penalties should be consistent with international standards and exclude the death penalty and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

(6) Repeal the 1974 Decree Law on State Security Measures, this law should be amended to ensure that it conforms with international human rights standards, in particular by ensuring that detainees in all cases are brought promptly before a judge. That all the people under any form of detention have the right to take proceedings before a court in order that the court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of the detention and order release. Lawyers have the right to represent their clients effectively at every stage of the proceedings. Detainees must also be given prompt and regular access to relatives, lawyers and independent medical doctors as necessary.

(7) Ensure that all detainees are held only in officially recognised places of detention and that accurate information about the arrest, detention and whereabouts of any person is made available promptly to relatives, lawyers, doctors and the courts.

(8) Ensure that all confessions which were induced by tor-



ture, ill-treatment or coercion and all statements obtained in the absence of a lawyer or otherwise illegally obtained, be excluded as evidence, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made. All persons who have been tortured should be given fair and adequate compensation and those responsible should be brought to justice.

(9) Establish and maintain local and central public registers of all detainees in accordance with international instruments such as Rule 7 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and Principle 12 of the UN body of Principles on the Protection of all Persons Under any form of Detention or Imprisonment to be updated on a frequent and regular basis and made available on request to relatives, ministry of justice officials, judges, lawyers and representatives of human rights organisations.

(10) Retry all persons by the State Security Court. Since the trials before the State Security Court were unfair, all defendants convicted by this special court should be retried by an ordinary criminal court in accordance with international standards for a fair trial. All trials in the State Security Court should be halted and cases transferred to ordinary criminal courts. The State Security Court should be abolished.

(11) End the practice of forcible exile, which contravenes Article 13 92) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which is expressly proscribed under Article 17 (c) of Bahrain's constitution. The government of Bahrain should issue a public declaration that all Bahraini nationals are entitled to return to Bahrain.

(12) Provide fair and adequate compensation to the victims of human rights violations and their families.

(13) Ratify human rights treaties without limiting reservations. Bahrain should ratify human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights together with its first Optional Protocol and Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

## Chapter 7

### BAHRAIN'S NEIGHBOURS: FEW FRIENDS IN NEED

Virtually every Arab regime has rallied to Sheikh Issa bin Salman al-Khalifa who is facing a popular uprising against his increasing autocratic rule.

Not one Arab government has questioned Bahrain's indictment of foreign involvement as the cause of the increasing home grown unrest. The Gulf Co-operation Council - six conservative monarchies led by Saudi Arabia - formally endorsed the view of the ruling family.

After all, in 1975 the Saudi Arabia insisted on the suspension of what he saw as Bahrain's dangerously radical new legislature.

The Arab League spoke only of disturbances "alien to our Muslim and Arab society". But President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt accused "Tehran of starting a fire in Bahrain" that will spread.

Even King Hussein of Jordan, who is courting the Gulf, has rallied to Sheikh Issa. According to the Saudi press, he has offered to send troops to the island.

Yasser Arafat, emulates King Hussein. It is ironic that, fresh from the electoral triumph that consecrated him "president" of his state-in-the-making, this former revolutionary should condemn another Arab people for simply aspiring to elections.

It is not just the Arabs. The United States too sees "Iranian elements" as villains and Britain has not raised its voice in support of democracy in Bahrain.

Not one single "validated" proof has ever been presented to corroborate the allegations of the ruling Al-Khalifa family that the people of Bahrain needed a "foreign excitement" to go out on the streets demanding their constitutional rights.

### **Gulf Co-operation Council**

The Gulf Co-operation Council's Secretary General Jameel Hujilan met Amir Sheikh Isa Bin Sulman Al-Khalifa and the Crown Prince Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa on October 14th to try and persuade Bahrain to attend the GCC summit of December 7th.

Bahrain boycotted the summit because of its dispute with Qatar over the Hawar islands (see section on Qatar).

The GCC summit on 7 December did not condemn the pro-democracy movement as it did the preceeding year.

### **Iraq**

On November 15th Bahrain, sent a high-level delegation to Iraq. The opposition saw this move as part of a developing adversary relationship with the Kuwaitis.

A senior member of the ruling family Salman bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa headed a group of businessmen who visited Iraq in mid-November and met with the Iraqi Industry and Minerals Minister, Adnan Abdul Majid.

The Iraqi News Agency reported that Sheikh Salman stressed the Bahraini people's support for their brethren in Iraq". This move is similar to a birthday message sent by the Bahraini Prime Minister to Saddam Hussein in 1993.

The Kuwaitis expressed their concern that the monetary assistance given to Bahrain ended -up in "private funds". The latest political adventure angered the Kuwaitis and an internal quarrel has developed within the ruling Al-Khalifa

family circles.

## Iran

Relations between Iran and the Gulf states, especially Bahrain, have been strained since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, because of the Gulf rulers paranoia about the Iranian Shia threat. This has led to persecution of Shia communities in most Gulf states including Bahrain, which accuses Iran of fomenting dissent.

Relations between Bahrain and Iran reached an all time low in June 1996 when Bahrain launched a scathing attack on Iran charging its leaders with a plot to overthrow the government and to create a regime similar to the one existing in Iran.

In an interview with the Kuwaiti Daily Arab Times on June 9th, 1996 Bahraini's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Mubarak al Khalifa ridiculed Iranian claims that recent events in Bahrain were a purely internal affair.

The two countries recalled their ambassadors after Tehran was accused of backing a plot by Bahrain-Hezbollah to topple the government. The opposition said there is no such organisation in Bahrain.

Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati called for dialogue between the Bahraini government and opposition leaders to end the unrest.

The Bahraini daily rejected Iran's offers of mediation with the opposition. "No, Mr Velayati, Bahrain's capital is Manama and not Tehran", Al-Ayyam responded sarcastically.

On 27th September, Bahrain's Foreign Minister met with his Iranian counterpart in New York. This was the first high-level meeting since the ruling family claimed it discovered an Iranian-backed plot to overthrow its rule.

A spokesman for the opposition said that Bahrain's intelligence department invented a plot against the ruling family and attempted to involve outside factors in Bahrain's internal problems in a desperate bit to neutralise the Sunni community and attract support for its oppression from the

United States. They failed and the security forces found it hard to subdue the popular uprising.

## **Qatar**

Bahrain's relations with Qatar have been poisoned by a territorial dispute which has been taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Qatar took the dispute over the small barren but potentially valuable Hawar Islands which have been controlled by Bahrain since the 1930s but claimed by Qatar to the ICJ. The islands are believed to contain rich oil and gas reserves. It said it would only withdraw the court case if Saudi Arabia's mediation succeeded in resolving the dispute.

King Hussein of Jordan offered to mediate in the dispute when he visited Bahrain at the end of November 1996.

In a provocative move in September, Bahrain announced that it was setting up a wild life protection zone on the Hawar islands: "In accordance with the stipulations of Law 2 for the year 1995 in connection with protecting the ecologies of all types of sea and land fungi, especially the rare types of fungi or those threatened with extinction. The opposition emphasised that this move was linked to earlier manoeuvres aimed at stirring up regional troubles.

The border dispute has been lingering on for more than half a century between the al Khalifa of Bahrain and the Al Thani of Qatar.

In 1939, the British, who had a long-standing relationship with both sheikhdoms, decreed that the Hawar Islands belong to Bahrain. The Qataris never acknowledged this ruling and have always insisted on their sovereignty over them.

Bahrain on the other hand, has always considered parts of Qatar belong to it, especially Zebara, a derelict town that had for almost a century been the home of the Al Khalifa family before they invaded Bahrain.

The two tribes have never been on good terms. When the Al Khalifa finally settled in Bahrain a century ago, the rising sheikhdom of the Al Thani has always been viewed with hos-

tility and rejection by the Al Khalifa.

There are four main areas of dispute at present. Whilst Qatar claims the islands of Hawar which are nearer to its borders than to Bahrain, the Al Khalifa have laid claim to Zebara, Fasht Al Dibel and Jarada. The first is a shanty town near the north eastern tip of the Qatar peninsula. The other two are coral reefs which are submerged at high tide. The whole exercise so far has been to decide whether the ICJ can take up the case or not. Having decided to look into the matter in 1994 the court is now proceeding with its investigation of the case.

In 1986 a major dispute developed when Qatari boats and aircraft attacked Fasht Al Dibel where Bahraini authorities were building a monitoring post. A total of 29 workers were taken prisoner by the Qataris and the Saudis had to intervene forcefully to bring about a hasty arrangement which allowed the Bahraini workers to be released.

Two Qataris were arrested in Bahrain on November 30th because of spying charges and are expected to appear before the State Security Court whose verdicts are not subject to appeal.

Qatar denied that Salwa Jassim Mohammad Fakhri and Fahd Hamad Abdullah Al-Bakir were involved in espionage and accused Bahrain of seeking to torpedo the GCC summit.

The two were sentenced to three years imprisonment and fined \$2650 each but were released three days after they were sentenced on 28th December 1996. The next day a member of the ruling Al-Khalifa family fled to Qatar in a helicopter and sought political asylum. Lieutenant Nasser Majid Al-Khalifa warned of deep-rooted corruption sweeping the defence forces.

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa accused Qatar of backing opponents of his government.

On October 7th, he told the London-based Al-Hayat that Qatar was co-operating with the "enemies of another country and showing them on television to attack a sisterly state. The attack came after an interview with two Bahraini opposition leaders was broadcast on Qatari television. Qatar

has urged Bahrain to start a dialogue aimed at defusing the political unrest.

The border dispute between Qatar and Bahrain was not tackled at the GCC summit which ended on December 9th almost a year before this interview.

## **Kuwait**

Kuwait is understandably concerned about Bahrain's rapprochement with Iraq.

The people of Bahrain continue to be inspired by the Kuwaiti parliamentary experiment and followed the Kuwaiti elections with great interest.

Bahrain's government-controlled press attempted to tarnish the image of the Kuwaitis by claiming that the elections could result in the selection of "non-suitable" people.

In December 1995, 96 distinguished Kuwaiti personalities appealed to the Amir of Bahrain to restore democracy. 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 leading opposition newspaper Al-Talea continued its support for the pro-democracy movement. Shaikh Sa'ad, the Crown prince, called for dialogue between the Bahraini government and the opposition.

## **Saudi Arabia**

At the beginning of 1996 Saudi Arabia warned the opposition in neighbouring Bahrain against trying to change the country.

The official Saudi paper Okaz said: "We do not allow any party to plot against Bahrain and we warn against any attempt to create a new reality in this country".

Riyadh has denounced "the acts of violence" in Bahrain which have resurfaced and the Saudi leadership has contacted the Bahraini authorities about them.

Saudi Arabia seems to have put its oil where its mouth is. In March 1996 it pushed for a crackdown in Bahrain and partly through fear that the agitation could spread into the kingdom's adjoining eastern province where the Shia predominate, has pledged the entire production of a shared oil-field to Bahrain's rulers. The deal reportedly started in April 1996. Bahrain will draw the current 140,000 barrels a day output of the offshore Abu Sa'afa field which straddles the two countries' maritime boundary.

It was also reported that the Saudi National Guard had supplied back-up troops during periods of political unrest.

## UAE

On September 17th 1996, the Crown Prince called in the UAE's special forces to conduct manoeuvres with his special forces. News reports indicated that a group of UAE Special Forces arrived in Manama on September 14th to take part in a joint exercise with the Special Forces Unit of the Bahraini Defence Force.

Out of the seven Emirates, the ruler of Abu Dhabi staunchly supported the ruling Al Khalifa family.



## **Chapter 8**

### **BAHRAIN AND THE WEST: PROFITS BEFORE PRINCIPLES**

Western states seemed to be happy to back the ruling family or to keep quiet about gross human rights violations. Bahrain has a useful geographical location and a developed economy which Western interests can exploit. As in the case of Iraq, human rights violations aside, its been a matter of business as usual. But brave dissident voices have made themselves heard in America, the United Kingdom and throughout the European Union, highlighting the plight of the Bahraini people.

#### **United States**

When Bahrain became independent, the traditionally excellent US-Bahrain relationship was formalised with the establishment of diplomatic relations and granting of Jufair naval base to the US forces. The US embassy in Manama was opened on September 21st and a resident ambassador was sent in 1974. The Bahraini Embassy in Washington DC opened in 1977. In October 1991, the Emir visited Washington and other American cities.

In 1977 an agreement confirming Bahrain as the home of the US Navy's Middle East force (Mideastfor) was to be ter-

minated. However arrangements have been made that allow Mideastfor ships to call at Bahrain and the naval base was renamed an administrative support unit. The US Department of Defence-sponsored Bahrain School remained. A new military agreement was signed following the liberation of Kuwait.

After the Gulf war, close co-operation between the two nations has helped to stabilise the region. Bahrain expressed a willingness for co-operation with proposed plans for joint exercises, increased US naval presence in the Gulf and future co-operation on security matters.

US-Bahrain economic ties have grown steadily since 1932 when Americans began to help develop Bahrain's oil industry. Currently many American banks and firms use Bahrain as a base for regional operations. In 1986, the US displaced Japan to become the top exporter to Bahrain.

In March 1995, former US President George Bush condemned the unrest which is shaking Bahrain and praised the government's efforts to maintain order. He called for the international community to join forces in the fight against terrorism and accused Iran of financing terrorist activities in Bahrain.

But many voices in America have also been raised in support of freedom and democracy.

In August 1995 the American ambassador, Mr David Ransom, met numerous pro-democracy figures from the opposition.

On 28th September, 1995 a letter of protest which was signed by 18 members of Congress stated: we are concerned about the human rights situation in Bahrain. We are aware of the challenges your government faces, but we urge you to uphold the international standards of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial.

In December 1995, a US Working Group on International Women's Human Rights, a bi-partisan group comprising of 11 senators and 35 representatives, sent a letter to the Amir protesting about human rights violations. It highlighted the case of Dr Munira Ahmad Fakhro who was suspended from her teaching position at the University of Bahrain due to her refusal to withdraw support for a petition calling for a great-

er degree of democracy and women's participation in the political process.

A report in January published by the pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat stated that Robert Pelletreau, the US Assistant Under-Secretary for Near East Affairs, had spoken to the Bahraini Crown Prince, Sheikh Hamad, twice in one week, advising him to create greater employment for Shias.

A Bahraini exile in Lebanon, Abdulla Al-Binali commented: "The Americans talk about human rights but they go on supporting the government of Bahrain. There have been contacts between our people and the US embassy in Bahrain and we have met officers at the State Department in Washington. Always the Americans say to us that if there is any movement for human rights in Bahrain, they will support us. But they don't. They talk about employment opportunities then just go on supporting Sheikh Issa".

## United Kingdom

At government level, support for democratic forces in Bahrain has not been forthcoming.

In August 1995, the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Herd raised eyebrows when he declared his support to what he termed as "old friends" in Bahrain.

But pro-democracy activists have highlighted the ugly face of the Bahraini regime.

Twenty-eight members of the British parliament submitted the following notice of motion on 28th June 1995:

That this house expressed 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 Fatema Abdullah Abu Edress, 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 thugs. Since then they have been systematically

abused in prison and dismissed from their positions at the school. This House 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.

In November 1995, a petition was handed to the Charge D'Affaires at the Bahraini Embassy in London signed by 45 members of parliament and more than 300 political figures and members of the academic community. It called on the Amir of Bahrain to reinstate the constitution, allow the return of exiles and respect the rights of women.

The petition stated: We the undersigned residents of the United Kingdom, re-affirming our commitment to Article 21 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides that:

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedure”:

- (1) Declare our support for the people of Bahrain who are calling for the restoration of their constitution and democratically elected Assembly, which was abrogated by the Amir on August 26th, 1975;
- (2) Call for the right of peaceful expression and assembly to be honoured in Bahrain;
- (3) Appeal for all citizens expelled from Bahrain to be allowed to return freely to their country, in accordance with international law.

Lord Avebury of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, has been a tireless champion of democracy in Bahrain. On 24th August, 1995 he chaired a press conference held in the annex to the Houses of Parliament marking the 20th anniversary of the suspension of the constitution. Lord Avebury commented that unlike its position vis-a-vis other countries, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has shielded the Al Khalifa of Bahrain in a way that is both shameful and unprincipled.

At the end of November 1995, the Bahraini Embassy held its annual dinner at the Cafe Royal in London. The

guest speaker was supposed to be Nicholas Soames, Defence Minister. But he was not able to attend and Sir David Steel spoke instead expressing concerns about respect for human rights in Bahrain. "I would however recall the 1992 petition presented to HH the Amir and signed by 281 leading personalities, lawyers, university professors, religious scholars, artists and notables expressing popular concern for the restoration of parliamentary life. I hope Bahrain may progress beyond the Consultative Assembly and join Jordan and Kuwait in following cautiously in that path, the best bulwark against extremism and fundamentalism", Sir David said.

On December 14th, human rights parliamentary spokesman Lord Rea of Eskdale presided over a press conference in the Houses of Parliament to mark the first anniversary of the pro-democracy uprising. He said that the embassy declined his invitation to attend and had urged him not to take part in the meeting. Lord Rea described the Khalifa regime's record on constitutional and human rights issues as "an outrage". Increasing pressure must be put on the ruling family to restore the constitution and national assembly for the sake of Bahrain's economic future", he said.

Despite noble attempts to highlight the atrocities of the Bahraini regime, Britain's record as a champion of human rights has been spoilt by Conservative MP David Mellor who visited the country in March 1996 as part of his work to defend the despotic rule. He accused the media in the West of "distorting the truth". Another Conservative MP, William Powell, was being probed by the British House of Commons and by the media for possible breach of law by allying himself to Omar Al-Hassan, who is working for the despotic rulers. Al-Hassan had earlier been expelled from the Arab League because of financial irregularities.

Lord Avebury the Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, is probably the most active human rights campaigner, who has embraced the Bahraini cause. A "history" of his attempts to raise issues of human rights violations and the suppression of democracy is contained in the book Bahrain a brickwall - correspondence between Lord Avebury and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the

British Government on the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain.

The publication points out that human rights activists have received little positive response from HM government on the issues they raised in their letters. Lord Avebury has often said that he is hitting a brick wall as the British Government, which left a legacy to Bahrain of its notorious security system, has constantly refused to express any view on the general, political or human rights situation in the first eighteen months of the uprising.

Lord Avebury, as is clear in some of his letters, is perplexed by the fact that HM government chose to ignore the plight of the pro-democracy movement in a country that was not long ago, under its direct protection.

## European Union

Western governments with long-standing cordial relations with the government of Bahrain have been pressing on the Al Khalifa family the need to establish dialogue with the opposition. The Bahraini government has been told of the possibility of the situation getting out of control in the future if it persists in its refusal of the just and moderate demands of the opposition. Incidents where procrastinating monarchs have been swept away by constitutional movements were mentioned to them in order to bring home the idea that a negotiated settlement of the crisis was the only solution available to the authorities.

On 15th February 1995 the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the government of Bahrain to restore the constitution, release the prisoners, and respect the human rights of its own citizens. It also calls on the British government to order Ian Henderson, Head of the SIS to leave Bahrain.

Resolution (Rule 47, ref: B4-208/95/RC1, B4-276/95 RC1) stated that: The European Parliament:

A: Having regard to the repeated protests since 5 December 1994, in which large parts of the population have been en-

gaged in peaceful protests expressing demands for the establishment of constitutional democracy, the participation of women in the political process, a solution to unemployment, the release of political detainees and prisoners and the return of deportees;

**B:** Shocked that the Bahrain Government has resorted to the ruthless use of force by the security forces resulting in several deaths, many injuries, the detention of hundreds of persons and the deportation of prominent personalities;

**C:** Shocked that the security forces in Bahrain are to a large extent directed by a British officer, Ian Henderson;

**D:** Stressing that the Government of Bahrain resorted to the Decree Law on State Security of 22nd October 1974, which entitles the Minister of the Interior to detain political suspects for up to three years without trial; recalling that the National Assembly, dissolved in 1975 refused to pass the State Security Law and that, since laws required their approval under the constitution, the State Security Law is of doubtful legality;

**E:** Drawing attention to the admission of the Ministry of the Interior that 400-500 prisoners have been held under the State Security Law;

**F:** Shocked by the deaths which have resulted from this repression, and from the repeated opening of fire on crowds of civilians;

**G:** Shocked by the fact that the families and lawyers of those injured or detained were not allowed by law to visit them in hospital or in prison;

**H:** Alarmed by the numerous reports of torture of prisoners, which in the case of Mr Hussain Qambar was fatal and by the dismissal of Dr Habib Traif and his Irish wife from the military hospital for giving medical treatment to wounded people in their homes;

**I:** Believing that the only motive for this wave of repression is the anger of the authorities that a petition calling for the restoration of the constitution suspended in 1975 was sponsored by 14 people representing both the Shia and Sunni communities and secularists and was signed by a woman, Dr Moneera Fakhroo, representing the movement of women's rights;

1. Affirms its full support for the people of Bahrain who are demonstrating for their political, economic and social rights;
2. Condemns the attitude of the security forces to the demonstrations and demands that the government release all political prisoners;
3. Further demands that the Government of Bahrain declare its commitment to the restoration of the constitution and to holding of free and fair general elections and to abolish the State Security Law and other articles of laws restricting liberties and human rights;
4. Demands that an independent inquiry be instigated into allegations of murder and torture;
5. Calls on the Bahraini Government to allow the hundreds of Bahrainis deported or living in exile for political reasons to return to their native land;
6. Calls on the British Government to order Ian Henderson to leave Bahrain;
7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the council, the government of Bahrain and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council.

In February 1996, 15 Swedish MPs and representatives of political parties wrote to the Amir, urging him to restore democracy in Bahrain. This plea came at a time when many international human rights organisations expressed their concern at the atrocities committed by Bahraini security forces. The anti-torture Geneva-based SOS organisation issued a statement condemning the detention and ill-treatment of members of the opposition.

Western embassies have remained silent on the growing unrest in the country. Bahrainis are convinced that Western powers prefer the present regime to the alternative of a parliament dominated by religiously inspired politicians.

"This may happen but democracy would cleanse it in time", one leading secularist businessman told Guardian reporter Kathy Evans when she visited Bahrain in April 1995. "We do not want to overthrow our government but we want democracy to return".



Tragically there are many in the West who hold the view what when you think about Bahrain and the Gulf you have to think differently. You have to forget about civil society, forget about parliament, forget about public accountability and forget anything that relates to a modern way of life.

Charles Belgrave, the advisor appointed by the British (1926-1957) claimed that the Bahrainis would not need a parliament for another century.

The image of a traditional, benevolent Arab ruler taking care of his subject like a father takes care of his family is totally misplaced in the case of the Al-Khalifa; they are despotic rulers who place the gains of their family and tribe before the welfare of their country and people. The West's support of this clique is an insult to the concepts of democracy and human rights to which it claims to subscribe

## Chapter 9

### THE OPPOSITION

Bahrain's rulers have faced serious political challenges from different directions. The trades union movement, which played such a central role in the conflicts of the mid-1950s continued to pose the greatest threat to the regime throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. But with the forcible suppression of the wave of strikes that swept the islands in the spring and summer of 1974 Bahrain's labour movement has become markedly less active as a political force.

An assortment of revolutionary vanguard parties played a more modest part in local politics during this period. Although membership in these organisations remained relatively small, their manifestos and communiques articulated many of the demands of the more radical wing of the labor movement.

Finally, after 1990 opposition to Bahrain's rulers became organised along community-based lines. Traditional religious associations based in the poorer districts of Manama and its western suburbs began to undertake a number of sporadic demonstrations protesting against corruption and exploitation in Bahraini society. The regime has resorted to force to suppress dissent. Bahrain's second period of widespread labour protest - after the turbulent years of the mid-1950s - was precipitated by a strike against the Bahrain Petroleum

Company that broke out on 9 March 1965. This action grew out of a series of dismissals of experienced workers at the refinery that resulted from the firms attempts to automate production.

Smaller less well organised protests occurred periodically over the next seven years.

The first half of 1974, saw 24 major strikes on the islands, with the drydock workers holding out the longest against government pressure to arbitrate their demands. This strike led to the imposition of the infamous State Security Law which authorised the Minister of the Interior to arrest and imprison anyone suspected of "endangering or .... planning to endanger the security of the state or disturb public order".

Leftist political organisations have been active in Bahrain since the early 1960s but have generally been less successful than the labour movement in mobilising broadly based popular opposition to the regime.

Between 1968 and 1974, local activists associated with the Arab Nationalist Movement merged with cadres in Oman. Qatar and the Trucial states to form the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG). This organisation split in 1974 with the Bahraini section reconstituting itself as the Popular Front in Bahrain (PFB).

Support for PFLOAG / PFB has come primarily from disaffected professionals and intellectuals. The other significant clandestine organisations in the country, the National Liberation Front - Bahrain (NLFB) and the local branch of the Ba'th party, differed from the PFLOAG / PFB less in terms of principles - all of these organisations have claimed to be working towards the creation of a non-exploitative, egalitarian society on the islands - than with regard to more practical matters.

The NLFB evidenced pronounced communist, even pro-Soviet, leanings during most of the 1970s and drew its primary support from the more radical trade unionists. The Ba'th, on the other hand, looked to Baghdad for direction and remained a party composed predominantly of the in-

telligentsia. Such tactical differences prevented the leaders of these movement from co-operating with one another, even when the country's rulers appeared most vulnerable. The Ba'th ceased to be part of the opposition with its senior members opting for high positions within the ruling establishment.

Towards the end of 1979, the PFB began negotiating with the NLFB in an attempt to find some basis for joint action. These negotiations lasted more than a year and produced a document entitled "A common political platform", published in January 1981. The platform called for the restoration of parliamentary government and the establishment of independent trade unions. It reportedly has produced some degree of co-operation between these two organisations and the underground labour movement, the Bahrain Workers' Union.

In Bahrain, populist Islam has taken two distinct forms: one advocating a relatively moderate, reformist social programme and another calling for the overthrow of the existing order, by violence if necessary.

The Populist Sunni-based Islamists includes the Society for Social Reform (Jam'iyyat al-Islah al-Ijtima'iyyah) and the Supporters of the Call (Ansar ad-Da'wah) whose members are drawn from the islands' Sunni community.

In February 1984, the security forces closed down the Shia-based islamist group "The Islamic Enlightenment Society" together with two girls schools and one high-studies circle, thus bringing to an end 12 years of peaceful and open activities.

The Bahrain Freedom movement (BFM) has come to the forefront of events following the out break of demonstrations in December 1994. It is concerned with promoting representative political participation and respect of human rights in Bahrain.

It is a mass movement founded in 1982 bringing together political activists, intellectuals and professionals, amongst others, from the diverse sections of Bahraini society.

The movement takes its roots from the parliamentary experiment that existed in the period between 1972 and 1975.

Following the dissolution of the elected parliament and suspension of key articles of the constitution by the Amir, pro-democracy activists went underground.

BFM reflects the aspirations of Bahraini pro-democracy tendency and shares the vision of reviving the rule of constitutional law. The movement is an integral part of the popular and general pro-democracy trend in Bahrain. It strikes a balanced line of thought and action that integrates Islamic values with pluralism.

BFM believes that a Bahrain ruled by constitutional law, as existed in the early seventies, is the most secure route for stability in the country. This in turn can guarantee the interests of the State of Bahrain as well as respecting regional and international frameworks of relationships.

Bahrain can only prosper through the continued diversification of the economy. Growth of business and development of market economy require a stable political environment. This, the BFM believe, can only be achieved through the respect of the will of the people of Bahrain and their rights as specified by the constitution of the country.

BFM aims at freeing the people of Bahrain from repression and lack of civil liberties. A key objective is the restoration of the parliament based on the constitution which was enacted in 1973.

BFM believes that the constitution represents the national consensus and the will of the citizens of Bahrain. Civil liberties, freedom of speech and assembly and the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Islamic values are regarded as ideals by the BFM. The BFM believes that attaining its principled goals shall be through peaceful means.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain IFLB came to be known following the 1981 events in which the Bahrain government claimed that it uncovered a plot to overthrow the government through the use of force. The IFLB's main inspiration comes from the religious teachings of a cleric who resided in Bahrain in the early seventies; Seyed Hadi Al-Modarrasi.

The authorities deported Al-Modrassi in 1980 and many

IFLB members and supporters were jailed or fled the country during the two years of tension in the early eighties. The IFLB called for changing the Al-Khalifa ruling family and has in recent years adapted its targets in line with mainstream politics.

The Bahrain Human Rights Organisation is an independent voluntary non-governmental body, established in 1989.

The organisation was formed to expose human rights violations and to call for democracy in Bahrain, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other related conventions such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

On 11th March, 1996 a meeting was held between Bahraini political forces, at the end of which a statement was signed by the Popular Front of Bahrain, the National Liberation Front of Bahrain, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the Bahrain Freedom Movement.

The statement said : "The opposition forces believe in the national consensus which views the only exit out of the current political crisis is for the regime to be courageous and rational in its approach. This can be achieved through abandoning the repressive policy and by not blaming the outside for the problem. What is needed can be summarised as: initiating a process of dialogue, releasing all political prisoners and detainees, allowing forcible-exiles to return home, compensating victims of oppression, revoking the State Security Law as well as some articles in the Penal Code and laws concerning gatherings and assembly".

On April 12th, 1994 the four main opposition groups called for the abrogating of the royal decrees which resulted in the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of the elected assembly in August 1975, the abolishment of the State Security Law and the release of all political prisoners.

In April 1994 greeting cards were distributed to private and foreign firms and banks outlining the demands of the Bahraini people for the restoration of parliamentary life and their demand for the respect of human rights.

On December 16th, the Bahrain Freedom Movement, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain and the Coordinating Committee of the Popular Front in Bahrain and the National Liberation Front of Bahrain agreed to co-ordinate their efforts inside and outside the country on all levels. Their joint activities will focus on the release of all political prisoners and detainees, allowing forcible exiles to return home without any pre-conditions, restoring parliament, guaranteeing political rights of women, abolition of all types of discrimination and putting in place plans to contain unemployment.

A delegation of human rights activists led toured the countries of the European Union in March and April of 1994. It was invited by the Head of the European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Mr Ken Coats. The sub-committee was presented with a comprehensive survey on human rights violations in Bahrain, including forcible exile of hundreds of Bahraini citizens. The survey also highlighted the state of repression caused by the suspension of constitutional articles related to the elected national assembly and other basic rights.

In Brussels the delegation met the Head of the Middle East Section in the Belgian Foreign Ministry, Mrs Christine Stevens.

In France the delegation met Mr Geynot, Director of the Arabian Gulf and Peninsula at the French Foreign Ministry. It also contacted a number of human rights organisations including France-Liberte, where matters of joint concern were discussed.

In the United Kingdom the delegation was received by Dr Phillip Robins of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Middle East Programme) and Mr David Torrance of the Foreign Office. It also met representatives from Amnesty International, Index on Censorship, Article 19, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights and the Bar Society.

The French Socialist Party issued a statement on January 11th 1995 in support of the popular uprising in Bahrain. The communique issued by the National Secretariat, expressed its support for the demands of the Bahraini people and the res-

toration of the constitution and parliamentary activity. The communique also called for the release of political prisoners, an end to arbitrary detention, torture and forcible deportations.

The Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights issued a similar statement in February 1995.

Representatives of the Bahrain opposition attended the 51st session of the UN commission on Human rights held in February-March 1995 and met with NGO's and government delegates.

In October 1994, a petition was sponsored by 14 pro-democracy leaders: leftists, Islamists (both Shia and Sunni) secularists and liberals and was signed by around 25,000 male and female Bahraini citizens who called for a restoration of the constitution.

Joint statements continue to be issued. On November 6th, 1996 the Bahrain Freedom Movement, the Popular Front in Bahrain and the National Liberation Front of Bahrain issued a statement pointing out that "popular protests against the arbitrary sentencing to death of three citizens continued at the same time when lawyers submitted all evidence proving the inadequacy of the trial and innocence of the accused. Our people are struggling for a just cause: the reinstatement of the constitution, the restoration of parliament, political openness, return of forcible exiles and the release of all political prisoners".



## Conclusion

Save for the Arab-Israeli conflict, the tiny emirate of Bahrain suffers from almost every problem that the Arab world is heir to; the seeds of revolution have been sown by immense wealth alongside destitution; a growing demand for democracy under an autocratic ruler and an American naval base that attracts suspicion.

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 centres in the world. Here are the beach resorts of the ruler and other wealthy circles, who come to drink alcohol, visit their money and be waited on by about 150,000 foreign workers.

But there is another world, the world where a large share of the 400,000 native Bahrainis live in a parched environment of deprivation from the echelons of power, wealth and influence.

The people of Bahrain are no longer prepared to tolerate the exploitation of their country's resources for the benefit of the ruling family.

Since the attempts to reach a peaceful resolution to the political tension between the Bahraini government and the opposition reached a deadlock in 1995, increasing violence

has marked the relationship between the two sides. While condemning the use of violence as a means of settling disputes, human rights organisations warn that further state repression and persecution will only generate more frustration and hence more violence.

It would be disastrous to allow the Algerian syndrome to afflict the Bahraini community while there is still room for reconciliation and for the restoration of calm. Just as in Algeria and to a lesser extent Egypt, so many innocent people have fallen victim to the current wave of violence. What truly causes concern is that the authorities in such violence-ridden countries continue to evade the one and only remedy for salvation and deliverance: namely political reform.

In Bahrain the forward-looking constitution which guaranteed freedom of speech, the press, conscience and religious beliefs, was abrogated and one of the few democratically-elected national assembly's in the Middle East was suspended on 26th August, 1975.

The tireless campaign for the restoration of democracy and parliament and the abolition of the notorious State Security Law which entitles the detention of political suspects for three years without charge or trial has continued since 1975 and has embraced all sectors of Bahraini society.

Its most obvious manifestation has come through the Committee for the Popular Petition calling for the restoration of parliament.

The ruling family has failed to respond to these demands. Human rights violations including torture and ill treatment of detainees, use of live ammunition to quell protests, extrajudicial executions and forced exile and denial of entry to Bahrain for those attempting to return continue to stain the name of the ruling family and its foreign staffed security services headed by the Briton, Ian Henderson.

Change is inevitable. But judging by present developments it may not be peaceful, manageable, evolutionary and within a constitutional framework and may involve much chaos and disruption.

In the words of the Economist Intelligence Unit: "The government will continue to rely on the baton and the barrel

of the gun to suppress dissent. It is unlikely to come up with any imaginative policies to tackle opposition demands. The most it will do is tinker with a government-appointed Consultative Council as a way of diffusing the call for reinstatement of the democratically elected National Assembly dissolved by the ruling family in 1975”.

## Update: 1997

The first month of 1997 did not see any respite from the regime's repressive practices: the security forces continued to prevent Bahraini citizens from entering mosques, religious assembly halls were stormed and searched in military-style operations, the State Security court continued jailing Bahraini citizens arbitrarily. In one incident a well-known social figure, Mr Hassan Habib Hassan, was beaten in front of the worshipper in Bani Jamra.

On January 1st, 1997 clashes took place between Bahraini youth and security forces who used rubber bullets and tear gas. About twenty tyres were burned around Dress and the main Budaya Highway was blockaded during the clashes.

On January 5th the French News Agency (AFP) reported that the "Bahrain authorities have arrested more than 100 people after a fire at a bakery which killed one person and injured two others during anti-government protest the previous week".

On January 7th a young Bahraini, Ali Hussain Mohammed Ali Draboh, who arrived home from Abu Dhabi where he works was arrested while his family was waiting for him in the arrival hall at the airport.

A particularly ominous sign was the formation of a National Guard on January 7th, to boost security and increasing

collaboration with the UAE in security matters. The chief of staff of the UAE armed forces Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nayhan has made several visits to Bahrain since the announcement of the guard's formation.

The formation of the National Guard was outlined in several articles of an amiri decree. Article 1 of the decree stipulated the establishment of an independent regular military armed force which shall be called the National Guard. Article 2 stipulated that the Amir is the supreme commander of the National Guard and Article 3 that the national guard shall be considered a military back up for the Bahrain Defence Force and a security shield for the Public Security Forces to protect the homeland and safeguard its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Another decree issued shortly afterwards named one of the Amir's sons, Mohammed Bin Isa as its commander with the rank of minister.

The opposition speculated that the creation of the National Guard could tilt the balance of power towards the Crown Prince, Hamad bin Isa, but would not alter the fact that such forces could not solve the political crises of Bahrain. The opposition believes that these top-heavy forces would waste most of the cash injections received from the neighbouring Gulf states but would never be able to humiliate the citizens of the country who are not prepared to sacrifice their constitutional rights.

Hundreds of families from the Syrian and Jordanian deserts have been granted Bahraini citizenship. The opposition fears that they could be use by antagonistic wings of the Al-Khalifa family in their internal feuds. The ruling family is attempting to return to its practices at the beginning of this century when members had their own armed groups known as fedawya responsible for assassination and looting.

While the Prime Minister left the country for an extended period the crown prince made several changes in the ruling clique to consolidate his power base.

The people of Bahrain continued to pay their respects to Saeed Al-Eskafi the 16-year old boy tortured to death by Ian Hendersor's men in 1995. On January 23rd the security forces attacked a gathering at his grave in Nua'im Cemetery.

One of the latest victims of the regime's aggression was is Jaffer Yousif Ahmed who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in 1980. He was transferred to hospital suffering from a serious neurological problem.

The Security Court, presided over by a member of the Al-Khalifa family arbitrarily sentenced three men to ten years imprisonment. They were Nader Habib, Taher Mobarak and Shafiq Ahmad Salman.

The opposition called for a period of commemoration between January 15th - 21st to coincide with the forcible exile of three pro-democracy campaigners (Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hamza Al-Deiri and Seyed Haider Al-Setri) in 1995 and the re-detention of Sheikh Al-Jamri.

On January 25th, security helicopters flew over Sar area after a loud explosion. Columns of fire were also seen along the residential areas stretching from Sar to Duraz and Bani Jamra. The security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets in their attacks on mosques and residential areas.

On January 29th the Geneva-based Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (CIJL) issued a press release stating: "The CIJL intervened today with His Highness Sheikh Issa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, expressing its deep concern over the continued detention of Judge Abdul Amir Al-Jamri. Judge Al-Jamri, a former member of the dissolved National Assembly and a judge of the Bahrain courts, was suspended from duty in July 1988. His detention seems to be related to the fact that he supported pro-democracy petitions calling mainly for the restoration of the National Assembly and all constitutional provisions relating to parliamentary life".

On January 30th a group of British MPs submitted the following motion to the House of Commons: "This House notes with concern the urgent action called by Amnesty International about the eight leaders and religious figures arrested by the authorities in Bahrain on 22nd January 1996 who have now spent more than one year in incarceration without trial and who are being held and believed tortured under the notorious State Security Law passed in 1974. The House notes mounting international concern about the role played

by the British mercenary Ian Henderson in the torture and murder of demonstrators and detainees and calls upon Her Majesty's government urgently to intercede with the Government of Bahrain".

At the end of January, thousands of people took part in pro-democracy marches while the security forces were busy tearing down photos of jailed pro-democracy leaders and martyrs.

Bahrain and Qatar made a luke warm attempt to resolve their differences with the signing of an agreement in mid-January in Jeddah to improve ties frayed by escalations over a decades-long dispute. But Sheikh Hamad Ibn Jassem Ibn Jabr Al-Thani pointed out that the the 1990 agreement signed by Bahrain and Qatar on referring their territorial conflict to the International Court of Justice would not be affected.

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