

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrain's regime defeated in Ashoora showdown with natives

The Ashura season this year has been different from any other seasons in living memory. While the pandemic has been a factor in determining how to mark it, the khalifi regime had planned to ban any form of public congregation. In the weeks preceding the event which covered the last ten days of August, the regime tried to ban the event altogether citing the pandemic. The heads of the matams (congregation halls) were threatened with severe revenge if they opened their places for people to mark the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. They were also warning against the use of loudspeakers at any time. It was a testing moment for the natives who had marked the event more than 1000 years before the khalifi clan occupied the country. Today they are forced to live under laws imposed by these occupiers who have no connection with the land, its history, culture, religion, political alliances and inhabitants. But they have their own methods of challenging the khalifi tribal laws. Civil resistance has been an effective means of blunting their tools of repression and subjugation. Bahrainis have always been peaceful, resilient and determined.

Native Bahrainis have not heeded the khalifi calls to forget their political and religious rights. Instead they have succeeded in organizing one of the most successful observances of the Hussaini season. They have always identified with Imam Hussain who was martyred for making his last stand in Karbala against the Umayyad hereditary dictatorship. The khalifi regime has followed that model despite the fact that it had failed. The murder of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Mohammad, had exacerbated the downfall of the tribal tyranny. Within six decades the Umayyads were obliterated by the Abbassids. In those decades the followers of Mohammad and his household continued their uprisings motivated by the merciless slaughter of the Imam and 72 of his relatives and followers. History has obliterated those who challenged the divine message. It also exposed the extent of their cruelty, lack of human sensitivity or respect of the Islamic morality in dealing with public affairs or safeguarding the lives of people. Hussain had been a source of motivation to many freedom-lovers who rose up to avenge the brutal killing of the Karbala heroes.

Over the centuries, native Bahrainis have marked the Karbala epic in their own ways. This year they exhibited one of most organized public events in the world, with tens of thousands flocking to the streets every day and night, chanting and raising slogans to salute the martyrs of Karbala. They observed the full requirements of safe practices to combat Covid-19. Social distancing, masks and hygiene were extensively used throughout the ten day period. The regime continued to harass the organisers of these events, repeatedly summoning the heads of the matams, preachers, orators and marchers. Yet they could not stop the human chains that extended in Bahrain streets from the capital, Manama to the most remote villages. People openly expressed defiance of the khalifi dictatorship who, in their minds and hearts, are the present manifestation of the Umayyad brutality and lack of human compassion. Native Bahrainis were repeatedly harassed. Their flags and banners were confiscated by ISIS-style attackers, congregation halls besieged and their preachers warned and threatened. But, to them, their acts are religious rights and duties that they cannot abandon at any cost. They were ready to revolt against the khalifi dictatorship in defence of their most precious religious symbols. Imam Hussain has always been viewed with respect and emulation. When the majority of the Muslims remained silent Hussain challenged Yazid, the worst of the tyrants, and declared his mission of reform.

The people of Bahrain have also been angered by the earlier khalifa policies that led to the loss of sovereignty to the powers that had restored it to power in 2011. The decision by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to establish relations with Israel has shocked the Arab people and caused extreme anger in the Arab streets. It is now anticipated that the khalifis will be next to abandon the Palestinian cause and establish links with the Israelis. The problem does not stop here. One of the most worrying sides to this process is the security services that will be provided by the Israelis to the khalifis. Members of Bahraini opposition are worried that they may be targeted by the Israeli Mossad in their countries of refuge. The khalifi regime and the people of Bahrain have vowed not to co-habit together. The enmity between them has become so

deep that total divorce has become inevitable. For decades the security apparatus in the country was run by the British whose departure from the region in 1971 happened in name only. Six years ago Bahrain's dictator paid for a marine base for the UK forces in parallel with the dispatch of prison experts from UK to Bahrain to help the khalifi torturers who had been overwhelmed by the popular uprising in 2011.

Bahrain is thus moving in uncertain direction and its future remains bleak. As the oil revenues dwindle further the regime will be furloughed by Saudi Arabia and UAE who are now the driving seat of the internal and external policies. Bahrainis have, for decades struggled to establish a just and independent social order, free from tribal domination. It continues to do so. With the overcrowded prisons becoming focal in the international debate on Bahrain and the Bahraini diaspora spreading to many countries, the internationalization of the internal conflict cannot be considered good news for a regime devoid of internal or constitutional legitimacy. These are among the factors that continue to drive the khalifis towards more repression and collective punishment. This, in turn has led to deeper resentment that feed into the agenda of the opposition who has given hope of any reconciliation with the khalifi dictators. This complicated situation is not bad news for the people who, for the first time, made up their mind and opted for a total divorce with the khalifi clan. This is a significant development and is enforced by the mouse and cat games that have become the norm in the relations. The Ashura episode has confirmed the total absence of mutual trust, respect or love. For a long time the two sides have been on collision courses that helped to cast their relationship. For native Bahrainis, the khalifis are the modern manifestation of the Umayyad clan that slaughtered the grandson of the prophet and killed many others. This goes deep into the psyche of Bahrainis whose religious commitment and loyalty to the prophet's household are rock-hard. The only way to end this is for the khalifis to leave the political scene.

Bahrainis challenge khalifi sectarianism and persecution of lawyers

As the Ashura commemorations continue, the khalifi regime has escalated its harassment of natives after it had failed to stop them launching their centuries-old commemoration programmes. Almost all heads of the mosques at Hamad town and other places were recalled and warned against participating in those commemorations. They were forced to sign pledges not to engage in their religious duties or face revenge by the regime. Many Ashura banners and flags were attacked and removed by regime's forces.

On 14th August Fitch Ratings has downgraded Bahrain's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to 'B+' from 'BB-'. The Outlook is Stable. The downgrade reflects the combined impact of lower oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic on Bahrain, which is causing marked increases in the budget deficit and government debt, pressure on already low FX reserves and sharp GDP contraction.

There has been an uproar against the khalifi regime when it decided to target lawyers and criminalise their peaceful expression of opinion. Yesterday their kangaroo court adjourned the trial of prominent human rights lawyer, Abdulla Al Shamlawi until 14th September. He had appealed an earlier sentence of eight months jail issued on 30th June for presenting counter argument on a religious matter to that promoted by the khalifi machine. He rejected the idea that fasting on 10th Muharram is a recommended religious act. He also criticized regime's policy of giving priority in housing to foreign workers while natives have to wait more than 15 years to get a house. The regime kangaroo court also adjourned the trial of another lawyer, Abdulla Hashim until 29th September. He faces two years imprisonment for tweets against

corruption and impunity.

On 19th August 26 UK's Bar Human Rights Committee wrote to Bahrain's dictator to raise concerns regarding the prosecution and judicial harassment of a number of lawyers and human rights defenders in the country. This is an encouraging development from the BHRC which had played a positive role in the nineties and challenged the khalifi regime on its human rights dismal record. In its letter the BHRC urged the regime to stop prosecuting the two lawyers and "turn away from what appears to be a policy of criminalizing and harassing lawyers with respect to freedom of expression. In the absence of such reviews, BHRC urges the king to pardon Mr Al Shamlawi to ensure that constitutional rights are upheld and Bahrain respects its international obligations"

Three political prisoners were transferred to solitary confinement for objecting against filming some religious activities by the prisoners. Laith Khalil from Sitra, Ali Ashoor from Karzakkan and Faisal Atiya from Duraz were severely punished for exposing the real aim of the filming. A group of journalists, dressed as policemen had started filming some detainees who were congregating to mark Ashura in one of the cells. The three realized that this would be used as propaganda by the regime and they wanted to deny the khalifis an opportunity to deceive the world.

The khalifi foreign ministry said it was launching a "consultation process" for a "National human rights plan". The filming of some prisoners exercising limited religious rituals while being denied basic religious books, including the holy quran is seen as an exploitation of the political prisoners. The transfer of the three to solitary confinement is testimony to the real face of the khalifi dictatorship. This is yet another cun-

ning move to blunt the calls to stop human rights violations, end culture of impunity and bring torturers to justice. Until now the regime has refused to allow any of the UN experts on human rights to visit the country despite abundance of demands and calls. The regime refuses to stop torture as a means of subduing the natives who are calling for regime change.

The confirmation of the arrival of Spain's former king, Juan Carlos in the United Arab Emirates has enraged human rights activists. On 22nd August Human Rights Watch issued a statement highlighting the bleak human rights situation in that country. It said: "Emirati authorities have been engaged in a sustained assault on freedom of expression and association in the country since 2011, detaining and forcibly disappearing individuals who criticize them. Among those is Ahmed Mansoor, leading human rights advocate in the UAE, who has been confined to an isolation cell since his March 2017 arrest, and deprived of access to fresh air, leaving him in precarious health." It added: "The UAE's repressive system doesn't only affect critics and those the authorities perceive to have harmed the country's carefully-tailored image. Investigations have revealed how the government's use of sophisticated spyware has allowed it to target and surveil foreign journalists and even world leaders." It ended with the assertion that: "The UAE may have thrown its doors open to the Spanish former king, but it still closes them to international human rights organizations and independent monitors, leaving it relatively free to falsely present itself as a tolerant, open, and progressive country."

Bahrain Freedom Movement
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Anger after linking with Israel, Bahrain's prisons are Covid-19 hotbed

For the past week the Arab and Muslim world has been in shock following the announcement that the rulers of the United Arab Emirates had decided to normalize relations with Israel, dealing a hard blow to the Palestinians. The agreement, which was brokered by the US, is known as the Abraham Accord, and vows to work towards a "full normalisation of relations". Yet Israel would oppose any U.S. F-35 warplane sales to the United Arab Emirates despite forging relations with the Gulf power, Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday, citing a need to maintain Israeli military superiority in the region. Clandestine relations - including intelligence sharing and direct and indirect flights - between Israel and the UAE have been going on for decades. According to Adam Entous, a reporter for The New Yorker, the think-tank and government-backed Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research was established in 1994 for academic research but later "became a conduit for contacts with Israel". A survey con-

ducted by a pro-Israel think tank in June found that the vast majority of Emiratis are against normalisation. Also: 73% say political and economic reform is more important than foreign policy, and a majority seem to disagree with the gov't's hardline stance on Qatar.

Politicians and journalists say that the khalifi regime of Bahrain will be the next to violate the Arab consensus and normalize relations with Israel. One of the main motives of the khalifis is to get security assistance from Mossad against native Bahraini activists. Some members within the Bahraini opposition have expressed fear and worry of the fallouts of the Israeli-khalifi intelligence and security cooperation. Bahraini activists, including more than 20 NGOs have signed statements against forging relations with Israel. Religious scholars have vowed to oppose such a move and urged the people to adopt peaceful means to challenge the khalifi dictatorship's policy of betraying the Palestinian cause and ceding sovereignty to Israel as it did with

the Saudis and Israelis.

Spanish, Saudi and Bahraini people have expressed anger against UAE rulers for giving sanctuary to the former Spanish king. Juan Carlos has fled justice after he had amassed enormous wealth "gifted" to him by Saudi and khalifi dictators. The 82-year-old monarch has been in the United Arab Emirates since 3rd August. In 2014 Carlos abdicated in favour of his son Felipe after a tax fraud case involving members of the royal family, as well as an ill-judged elephant hunting trip at a time when Spaniards were struggling with a deep recession. Controversy mounted, culminating with a move by Spain's Supreme Court in June to open a preliminary investigation into his involvement in a high-speed rail contract in Saudi Arabia. Switzerland's La Tribune de Geneve newspaper reported Juan Carlos had received \$100 million from the late Saudi king. Switzerland has also opened an investigation. He also received £1.7 million from Bahrain's dictator. None of these money-laundering

UK urged to stop defending khalifis, US arms to Saudis condemned

As the people of Bahrain prepare to mark the Independence Day on 14th August, calls have been made for the UK government to change its shameful policy of supporting the khalifi hereditary dictatorship. Since the UK's withdrawal from the region in 1971, this regime has been persecuting the native population mercilessly. Instead of conditioning its withdrawal on adopting a democratic transformation, the UK has been propping up the regime that has been proven to administer "systematic" torture. UK's public money is used to "train" these torturers as well as other institutions. Huddersfield University also runs an MSc security course for torturers. Several torture victims have testified that they had been tortured at the location where the university runs its courses and training.

As the crisis of the political prisoners in Bahrain intensifies due to khalifi inhumane policies, the fate of at least six detainees is unknown following their removal from their cells last week. The six were accused of inciting others to start hunger strike to protest their ill-treatment, lack of medical care and denial of proper family contacts. Among the grievances of the political detainees is the use of the right to family contacts as a weapon. It has been a month now since Khalil Al Halwachi last called his family. Other mothers have complained of not hearing from their loved ones behind bars. As of Sunday 9 August 2020, inmates at Building 14 of Bahrain's notorious Jau Prison started hunger strike to protest prison conditions and denial of religious freedoms. There are 287 prisoners at Building 13, meaning that the building is 30% over capacity.

Each cell currently houses an average of 12 prisoners, with many forced to sleep on the floor. In addition, prisoners in Building 12,13 & 14 are forced to spend approximately 22.5 hours inside their overcrowded cells and are allowed out for a maximum of 1.5 hours in the day. Political prisoners at Dry Dock prison are demanding to know their health conditions after Covid-19 tests were carried out on them at the beginning of the month. They were secluded at Bloc 1 where new prisoners are often held. They want to know the results of these tests as the pandemic continues to spread among political prisoners.

New arrests have been carried out by khalifi regime forces. From Nabih Saleh town Fadel Abbas Al Khodairi was snatched from his home. From Sitra-Wadyan Hassan Al Bahhar and Fadel Al Jufairi were detained.

The khalifi crown prince has encouraged foreign workers to come to the country despite the sharp rises in Covid19 pandemic and the increasing numbers of unemployment among natives. Private companies will be able to resume the process of hiring foreign workers this month as the regime escalates its war against natives. The regime's Labour Market Regulatory Authority said it will begin accepting applications for new work permits from August 9. The development comes after a directive was issued by the Government Executive Committee that is chaired by khalifi crown prince Salman bin Hamad.

A lawsuit has been filed with the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. by Saudi national Saad Aljabri, one of Mohammed bin Salman's former top intelligence officers. Aljabri, who had sought exile in Toronto, is seeking unspecified damages from bin

Salman and his associates for orchestrating an "attempted extrajudicial killing" and for violating international law days after the brutal killing of prominent Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in the fall of 2018. He says that MBS had dispatched a group of hitmen, known as the Tiger Squad, to Canada to seek out and kill him. Even though the scheme was thwarted when the group failed to get past suspicious border officers at Pearson International Airport, Aljabri's life remains in "dire peril," the lawsuit says.

In a report released yesterday, the US State Department's Inspector General said that the State Department had followed the law but failed to address civilian deaths in declaring an "emergency" to push through an \$8.1 billion weapons deal to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Lawmakers in Congress had tried to block the deal amid concerns about the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, which has killed thousands of civilians and created a horrific humanitarian crisis. Congress normally has to sign off on such deals, but Pompeo bypassed lawmakers by declaring a national security ". He argued that "Iranian aggression" required the U.S. to help Saudi Arabia, a pivotal ally in the region, defend itself. "This report tells us everything we suspected: the emergency was a sham," said Rep. Eliot Engel, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "It was cooked up to get around congressional review of a bad policy choice. And ever since Mr. Pompeo declared that 'emergency,' he and his top lieutenants have worked to bury the truth."

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transactions have been scrutinized by the corrupt international monetary system.

Meanwhile it has been confirmed that last year Saudi regime broke the records of extra-judicial killings and beheaded 185 people. The health of Dr Mohammad Saleh Al Khaudari who has been in jail for the past two years has deteriorated following his complaint of a slipped disc. He has not been treated but left to suffer more.

Tension is rising in Bahrain as the people prepare to mark the Ashoora season due to start on Friday. The people had planned a Covid-compliant events including traditional processions to express sorrow at what had befallen Imam Hussain, Mohammad's grandson and his relatives and companions. To challenge the scholars and people the khalifi dictators issued a statement banning these religious activities. This is in line with the khalifi policy of systematic religious persecution of the native majority Shia Muslims. Regime's



thugs have attacked and destroyed black flags and banners posted on the roads to mark the occasion.

The mother of Ali Jaffar Ashoor, 18 is extremely concerned for his health after he joined the hunger strike by hundreds of native Bahraini prisoners. They are protesting the continuous abuse by the khalifi jailers, lack of medical care and hygiene at torture cells, interrupted family contacts and overcrowding. Ali's body is riddled with shotgun pellets that have not been removed. The mother called for ending solitary confinement as an additional punishment and stopping abuse of political detainees. Front Line Defenders has expressed deep concern for the welfare of human rights activist, Naji Fateel who also joined in the hunger strike

by native Bahraini prisoners at the notorious Jau prison. Nothing has been heard from him since 9th August. He has been transferred to solitary confinement in revenge for his bravery.

Concern is mounting among the native political prisoners as Covid-19 symptoms spread in several torture cells. Several inmates have now been isolated but no cohesive approach to the pandemic in prisons has been adopted. Hussain Mohammad Najeeb has exhibited such systems but afforded little help or treatment apart from isolation. He has high temperature and a feeling of fatigue. He also suffers sickle-cell disease.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
19th August 2020

I have been tortured and jailed in Bahrain for seven years. Does the UK support that too?

Britain's unwavering support for Bahrain has provided the regime with a convenient veneer of reform behind which they continue to terrorise their population

Ali Alhajee, Jau Prison, Bahrain
The Independent, 15th August 2020

I write today from Bahrain's notorious Jau Prison, where I have spent the last seven years as a political prisoner for organising protests calling for democratic reform. I am one of thousands of Bahrainis rounded up, tortured and handed lengthy sentences in unfair trials as part of a government crackdown on dissent that continues to this day.

The abuse I was subjected to has left me with a slew of injuries which continue to plague my daily life. During hours of brutal beatings, my nose was broken so badly it required two operations to fix and I was left with partial deafness and permanent damage to my testicles and jaw. Yet while my experience may sound shocking, torture has long been a tool of political control in Bahrain and hundreds of my fellow prisoners have similar stories.

News recently reached the prison that the British government has introduced "Magnitsky-style" sanctions against international human rights abusers, raising hopes among some prisoners that those responsible for our torture and imprisonment might held to account. However, for those familiar with Britain's long friendship with Bahrain, these hopes seem misplaced.

The British government often boasts about opposing torture, but it has in fact played a historic role in its institutionalisation in Bahrain and continues to turn a blind eye to abuses in its former protectorate to this day. In the 1920s, the UK was responsible for establishing Bahrain's first police force and contemporary sources reveal that many torture techniques I was personally subjected to, including targeted beatings and sleep deprivation, were introduced during this period. Since Bahrain's independence in 1971, the UK government has remained close with Bahrain's ruling family and has been reluctant to criticise their dismal human rights record. Bahraini state newspapers, which are all that's available to prisoners

since the regime shut down the country's only independent newspaper in 2017, frequently brag about the UK's support for Bahrain, particularly their efforts to reform our notoriously abusive police and judiciary. However, despite receiving thousands of pounds from the British taxpayer, these institutions remain as corrupt as ever.

Torture remains central to Bahrain's justice system and study visits to the UK by Bahraini judges have done nothing to lessen the reliance of Bahrain's courts on coerced confessions. Substantial evidence suggests that five of the six men executed in Bahrain since 2017 were tortured into providing false confessions; I shared a cellblock with one of these men, a gentle 27-year old schoolteacher named Abbas Al-Samea, and I will never forget my horror when I learned he and two others had been shot dead by a state firing squad.

Bahrain's injustice system remains as ruthless today. Just last month, torture victims Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa had their final appeal against their death sentences rejected, in a trial damned by numerous British MPs, leading NGOs and top human rights lawyers as fundamentally flawed. They join 10 other Bahraini political prisoners who have exhausted legal remedies and face imminent execution.

The UK's attempts to address the rampant impunity enjoyed by Bahraini security forces have been similarly unsuccessful. Much vaunted local oversight bodies, trained at the expense of the British taxpayer and mandated to investigate human rights violations, have attracted widespread international criticism for their proximity to the government. I experienced this collusion first-hand; when I was assaulted by prison guards in 2015 in full view of CCTV cameras, these institutions actively covered-up the attack, even after I provided the names of the officers responsible.

Such complicity continues to this day. Earlier this summer, my fellow prisoner Mahmood Aljazeera, a journalist imprisoned for writing articles critical of the government, was placed in solitary confinement for challenging false statements made on Bahraini television by the head of one of

these same UK-funded bodies.

Bahraini prison staff, too, have benefited from British training, enjoying guided tours of prisons in Britain and Northern Ireland to learn best practice. Yet prisoners continue to languish in squalid, overcrowded conditions, with social distancing rendered impossible and prisoners still not provided masks or hand sanitiser months after the pandemic began.

These conditions have led to an ongoing scabies outbreak, which has infected most prisoners in my building, including myself. Scabies is a highly contagious skin disease which thrives in unsanitary environments and is exacerbated by Bahrain's baking summers, where temperatures regularly exceed 40°C. As the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy and 20 other rights groups recently stated, should Covid-19 reach Jau Prison the effects would be devastating, particularly for aging political leaders with underlying health conditions.

Such disregard for inmates' health is nothing new and medical negligence has long been one of Bahrain's most insidious means of abusing political prisoners. Over the past two years, I have been forced to conduct two 75-day hunger strikes just to secure medical treatment. After having 13 teeth removed almost a year ago, I am still awaiting follow-up surgery and struggle to even consume solid food. Now coronavirus is being used as an excuse to further deny us medical care, with all external appointments cancelled until further notice.

Britain's unwavering support for Bahrain has provided the regime with a convenient veneer of reform behind which they continue to terrorise their population. Even the handcuffs we are forced to wear when moving around the prison are a reminder of this pernicious relationship, bearing the letters TCH ENGLAND, a Birmingham-based security company.

For all Bahraini political prisoners, it is painful to watch the UK government consistently side with our abusers while we suffer behind bars. If the government is serious about reform in Bahrain, they should begin by calling for all political prisoners to be released.

