

## Chapter VIII — Allegations of Violence by Non-Governmental Actors

### Part A – Attacks on Expatriates

#### 1. Factual Background

1505. The expatriate population in Bahrain is alleged to have been the target of violent attacks during the events of February/March 2011. Most complaints received by the Commission pertained to physical injuries, property damage, economic loss, deprivation of the freedom of movement, denial of medical treatment and attacks at places of worship.

1506. Rapid economic growth, particularly in the oil and construction industries, has led to a high demand for workers in Bahrain. This demand has largely been filled by a rapid increase in the number of expatriate and guest workers, especially those originating from South and Southeast Asia. According to the 2010 official census, the total population of Bahrain was 1,234,571 of whom 666,172 (54%) were non-Bahraini.<sup>738</sup> The census also reported that 562,040 of the non-Bahrainis are of Asian nationality. This represents significant growth from the time of the last official census in 2001, which reported that the population of Bahrain was 650,604, of whom 244,937 (37.6%) were non-Bahrainis.<sup>739</sup> A report submitted by the GoB disclosed that in the period 2001-2002, 81% of foreigners naturalised were of Iranian origin, while in the period 2001-2011, 40% of foreigners naturalised were of Iranian origin.

1507. According to the Ministry of Labor (MoL) the unemployment rate in Bahrain is 3.8%. The Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) reported that in the final quarter of 2010 there were 452,348 workers, of whom 374,707 (83%) were non-Bahraini.<sup>740</sup> The largest groups of expatriate and guest workers are from India (197,084), Bangladesh (75,169), Pakistan (35,218) and the Philippines (24,235).<sup>741</sup>

1508. According to reports by the GoB, incitement against expatriates in Bahrain intensified in the aftermath of the contested 2006 parliamentary elections. The GoB alleges that Al Wefaq is responsible for fuelling anti-foreigner sentiment and cites a number of articles as inflammatory. For

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<sup>738</sup> GoB 2010 Census, [http://www.census2010.gov.bh/results\\_en.php](http://www.census2010.gov.bh/results_en.php) accessed 16 November 2011.

<sup>739</sup> GoB 2010 Census, [http://www.census2010.gov.bh/results\\_en.php](http://www.census2010.gov.bh/results_en.php) accessed 16 November 2011.

<sup>740</sup> LMRA, *Number of Workers by Sex and Bahrain, Non-Bahraini Citizenship, Sector: 2008-2010*, [http://blmi.lmra.bh/2010/12/data/ems/Table\\_05.pdf](http://blmi.lmra.bh/2010/12/data/ems/Table_05.pdf) accessed 20 October 2011.

<sup>741</sup> LMRA, *Top Nationalities of Non-Bahraini workers: 2011 January*, [http://blmi.lmra.bh/2011/03/data/ems/Table\\_07a.pdf](http://blmi.lmra.bh/2011/03/data/ems/Table_07a.pdf) accessed 20 October 2011. See also LMRA, *Table of Dependents of Foreign Workers*, [http://blmi.lmra.bh/2011/03/mi\\_dashboard.xml](http://blmi.lmra.bh/2011/03/mi_dashboard.xml) accessed 20 October 2011.

example, the GoB refers to an article published in 2009 which states that “the majority of naturalized people are barbarians, ignorant, naive, and they are from the *mutaradia* and *natiha* [alluding to Islamic terminology of forbidden animal meat] – and they are of Sunni or Salafi origin”. The GoB also points out the opposition activists often refer to foreign security forces as “foreign mercenaries” and as those behind the crackdown on the protestors. The GoB ties these sentiments to the attacks on expatriate workers.

1509. Al Wefaq criticised the GoB’s policy of hiring expatriate and guest workers whilst the unemployment rate of Bahrainis remained high, particularly among the Shia population. It also criticised the GoB for giving preference to naturalised Bahrainis over non-naturalised Bahrainis, more particularly the Shia population, when it came to employment. They also called into question the patriotism and commitment to Bahrain of foreign nationals and disparaged their linguistic abilities and knowledge of Bahraini customs and traditions. Statements touched on a variety of subjects including: increasing literacy rates among the naturalised; preferential housing for the naturalised in predominantly Shia areas; the new policy adopted by the Electricity & Water Authority to recruit non-Bahrainis; recruitment of naturalised Bahrainis into the security apparatus; and the rising insecurity and crime rates in Hamad town. Beginning in mid-January 2011, Al Wefaq led a campaign calling for a halt to the naturalisation of non-Bahrainis and accused the GoB of running a “political naturalisation project”, which the group asserted would destroy the nation.<sup>742</sup>

1510. The Bahraini population, especially the Shia majority, has over the years expressed the opinion that the GoB has been seeking to undermine their social and political rights. This issue has been on the agenda of election campaigns for a number of years now. It has also been taken up by the various Shia groups in political campaigns and election rallies.

1511. During the events of February/March 2011, the demands of protesters included access to jobs and an increase in salaries. A further grievance was the naturalisation of foreigners. During various demonstrations, anti-expatriate and guest worker chants and slogans were heard. Demonstrators held banners targeting naturalised Bahrainis, threatening them and asking them to leave the country. Some of these banners read: “Bahrain is free, free. Oh naturalised get out”; “Bahrain is free free, Oh naturalised, Oh mercenary, Oh killer, your departure time has come”; and “Shia plus Sunnis minus naturalised equals a loving country”.

1512. According to a report submitted to the Commission by the Ministry of Interior (MoI), during the events of February/March 2011, four expatriates were killed and a further 88 expatriates were injured.<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> Al Wefaq, <http://alwefaq.net/index.php?show=news&action=article&id=4761> accessed 26 October 2011 (*Arabic Text*). See also Al Wefaq, <http://alwefaq.net/index.php?show=news&action=article&id=5289> accessed 26 October 2011 (*Arabic Text*).

<sup>743</sup> Report received from the MoI listing the names, dates, and circumstances of injury and death of all the reported deaths and injuries during February and March 2011. Insert cross-

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Nationality	Injured	Dead
Indian <sup>744</sup>	11	1
Bangladeshi <sup>745</sup>	18	2
Pakistani	58	1
Filipino <sup>746</sup>	1	-

1513. On 9 March 2011, in a protest that began at the Ras Romman mosque, thousands of mostly Shia Bahrainis marched on the immigration office in Manama and voiced their opposition towards the granting of citizenship to Sunnis from other countries to serve in the country's military. However, in order to emphasise that the protest was against the GoB's naturalisation policy, and not against Bahrain's Sunni population, participants also shouted slogans calling for Sunni-Shia unity.<sup>747</sup>

1514. A report submitted to the Commission by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 2011 stated that during the events of February/March 2011, foreign labourers residing in Bahrain were subject to acts of violence. The GoB alleged that gangs set up road blocks and check points, where they stopped motorists and pulled them out of their cars, beating foreigners. The GoB also alleged that stores operated by foreign nationals were told by these groups to close or face retribution. This report also included letters from four different Asian embassies regarding death, injuries, material loss and casualties of their respective citizens. The Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that during the February/March 2011 crises a "group of radicals" brutally attacked expatriate workers, while law and order in Bahrain deteriorated within days. It added that, in fear for their life, around 2,000 Pakistanis living in sensitive areas left their houses and requested the Embassy to provide them with temporary shelters. Some of these displaced persons stayed at the Pakistani Club while others stayed at Pakistani schools.

1515. Most attacks against expatriates occurred on 13 and 14 March 2011. The Commission received reports that foreigners were attacked on the streets

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reference to section of the report dealing with killings – See Chapter VI, Section A on Deaths Arising out of the Events.

<sup>744</sup> The Indian Ministry of External Affairs stated that, starting 14 March 2011, major civil disorder hit the Kingdom of Bahrain, roads were blocked by rioters and a state of emergency was declared causing many casualties to the Indian community in Bahrain with one Indian killed and a further seven injured.

<sup>745</sup> The Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs alleged that the opposition protests of February and March 2011 produced an insecure atmosphere that affected Bangladeshi expatriates on different levels. It reported that the Bangladeshi community was vulnerable at their work and their residences, which imprisoned some inside their homes, restricted their movement, leading to loss of jobs for significant number of them. The attacks caused the deaths of three Bangladeshis with a further seven injured.

<sup>746</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines provided the Commission with information about the death of one Philippine national during the unrest. The Commission was unable to interview relatives or witnesses.

<sup>747</sup> *Thousands stage rally in Bahrain*, Al Jazeera (9 March 2011), <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113917595654981.html> accessed 4 October 2011.

of Manama. A report prepared by the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs details an incident on 13 March in which an angry mob locked approximately 40 Pakistanis in Alkuthoot Restaurant and tried to set it on fire. However, the report states, “with the help of community leaders and a Shia Imam, the protestors freed the locked-up Pakistanis”.

1516. The Commission also received information about a number of incidents in which attacks against expatriates took place in their homes. Late in the evening of 13 March 2001, a group of individuals entered a residential building in Manama that was inhabited mostly by Asian workers. The group began attacking residents, among whom was a Pakistani citizen named Mr Abdul Malik Gholam Rasul, who was beaten to death. Later Mr Farid Maqbul was attacked and sustained severe injuries from which he subsequently died. As the night proceeded, more cases of attacks against Asian expatriates were recorded. A Pakistani construction worker and *Muezzin* (person who performs the Islamic call to prayer) suffered serious brain injuries after he was brutally assaulted and had his tongue severely lacerated. Commission investigators reviewed photographs and the medical report confirming the extent of his injuries and visited him at the hospital where he was in a vegetative state.<sup>748</sup> One individual stated that on 13 March 2011 protestors broke into his house in Manama and demanded that he show his identification. He alleges that they beat him with a baseball bat, fracturing his arm, and that whilst beating him they told him that Bahrain was only for Bahrainis and not for Asians.

1517. One complainant reported that on 14 March 2011 he awoke at around 20:00 to find a group of 30-40 youths breaking into his residence carrying knives and steel rods. According to his statement he and other individuals living at the residence were beaten because they were Pakistanis despite telling their attackers that they were labourers and not affiliated with the Bahraini Police. One of the victims claims that: “They want us to leave Bahrain. Pakistani people have jobs in [the Police Department] that [the Bahrainis] think should be theirs”. According to a number of Pakistanis who were interviewed by the Commission, they believed that attacks were carried out by Shia who hated Pakistanis and mistakenly believed them to be soldiers in the Bahrain security forces.

1518. Another complainant reported that on 14 March 2011 protestors broke into a friend’s home while he was visiting. The protestors asked him if he was a police officer and asked for his identification. The complainant stated that both he and his friends were beaten and kicked before being dragged onto the street where hundreds of protestors were waiting. A video available on the internet showed protestors putting swords to their throats and threatening them. The complainant reported that they were then taken to the GCC Roundabout where the beating continued. Eventually they were taken to SMC where they were again beaten. He reported that a nurse refused to treat him, stating that “[W]e do not want Indians here, slaughter them!”. Along with his friends, the complainant was forced to stand against a wall and

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<sup>748</sup> When Commission investigators visited this individual on 28 October 2011, he was still in a vegetative state.

beaten. The complainant claimed that they were shown plastic bags and told that they were to be used to carry their bodies. During the ordeal they were accused of being police officers, which they continued to deny.

1519. The Commission also reviewed a number of videos which appeared to show violence against South Asians.

- a. In March 2011 Bahrain Television showed video footage of alleged crimes committed against South Asian expatriate workers at the hands of some demonstrators.<sup>749</sup> The video depicts demonstrators seemingly at the beginning of a confrontation, but does not indicate the circumstances or extent of the situation. The video then shows the bodies of two individuals lying on the street. The circumstances related to their deaths are unclear from the video. The video then shows injured South and Southeast Asians receiving medical treatment. Again, the circumstances related to their injuries are unclear from the video.
- b. Another video aired during the same period by the same channel depicted South Asian expatriate workers being pulled out of an ambulance at the hospital.<sup>750</sup> The video depicts an injured person on a gurney, followed by two individuals in handcuffs, being taken out of an ambulance and into the hospital. As the injured are escorted into the hospital, it appears that one individual attempts to kick one of the injured individuals, and other onlookers push forward in order to get closer but are held back by what appear to be security personnel.
- c. The Dubai-based Al Arabiya news channel aired a video of paramedics, who appeared to join the protesters in hitting injured Indian workers who had been hospitalised. According to Al Arabiya, foreign workers were being assaulted by protesters in order to undermine the national economy.
- d. Another video showed a group of protesters including some in a vehicle marked with a Red Crescent running over a Pakistani policeman multiple times.<sup>751</sup>
- e. A video submitted by the government depicted a masked individual approaching a bus and attacking the driver, who appeared to be foreign. However, the identity or political affiliation, if any, of the assailant could not be ascertained.

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<sup>749</sup> YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbpJ7iiBinc&skipcontrinter=1> accessed 4 October 2011.

<sup>750</sup> YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbMmbNOG19s> accessed 4 October 2011. See Chapter V on Events at Salmaniya Medical Complex.

<sup>751</sup> Al Arabiya TV, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/03/18/142009.html> accessed 4 October 2011.



1520. The Commission received statements from 19 complainants indicating that foreign nationals were discriminated against and mistreated by medical staff and protestors while visiting SMC during February and March 2011. One witness, who was a SMC employee, stated that during the time protestors took control of SMC he witnessed foreign patients being beaten by protestors. He also stated that foreign nationals were compelled to confess, in a video broadcast on television, that they were spies working for the government. The witness also claimed that Shia nurses refused to treat injured foreigners. Another witness working at SMC claimed Asians were attacked by protestors in the presence of doctors and nurses.

1521. The Commission further received reports of 16 attacks against expatriates in the work place. Eight of these related to attacks on private businesses owned by expatriates. Complaints related to the destruction of property, physical and verbal abuse, as well as economic loss. The owner of a Bangladeshi restaurant described an attack on his restaurant by approximately 50 masked protestors, who forced themselves into the premises, vandalised it and severely beat an employee with metal objects. He reported that the injured employee was refused treatment at SMC and was so traumatised that he left Bahrain for Bangladesh.

1522. The Commission received statements from four expatriates describing attacks at various mosques. One individual stated that on 31 March 2011 unknown individuals attacked the Salman Hussein Bin Matar mosque, where he worked, physically assaulting him and vandalising the mosque. Another complainant described to Commission investigators that a group of protestors attacked the mosque where he worked, cutting down palm trees to block the street and vandalising the mosque. This individual stated that he stayed inside the mosque for 14 days because he was too scared to leave. Another individual described how he was attacked close to the mosque where he worked by protestors carrying sticks and suffered serious injuries. He later changed his job out of fear of being attacked again. Several attacks on places of worship used by expatriate and guest workers, especially Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, were reported by Al Karama, a non-governmental organisation. These included: Al Zouwada Mosque in Ras Romman on 14 March 2011; al Gharbi Souk al Lahema Mosque in Manama on 16 March 2011; Mubarak al Hessawi Mosque in Manama on 16 March 2011; Sheikh Ali ben Khalifa al Khalifa Mosque in Manama on 17 March 2011; and, Al Moughirah ben Shoueba Mosque in Sitra on 18 March 2011.

1523. The Commission also received statements from four individuals claiming that they had been verbally and physically abused at school and university due to being naturalised citizens. One student reported that on 4 March she was physically assaulted outside her school by a group of students chanting “naturalised citizen, get out of school”. The student’s sister similarly claimed that when she was leaving school she was attacked by approximately 12 students chanting “naturalized citizen, leave the school”.

1524. On 26 March 2011, the Foreign Minister of Bahrain indicated that he met with members of the Asian communities and inspected the conditions of

foreign nationals residing in Bahrain.<sup>752</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reaffirmed the right of foreigners to security, stability and work in Bahrain and the Ministry has indicated that it will take measures to financially compensate the victims of such attacks.<sup>753</sup>

## **2. Findings and Conclusions**

1525. The Commission found sufficient evidence to establish that some expatriates, in particular South Asian workers, were the targets of attacks during the events of February/March 2011. The Commission finds that four expatriates were killed by mob attacks during the events and many were injured.

1526. Pakistanis, in particular, were the target of attacks owing to their membership of some of them in the BDF and police force. Various neighbourhoods where expatriates live in Bahrain were the subject of sporadic attacks. The attacks on expatriates created an environment of fear, resulting in many of them leaving their homes and living in shelters. Other foreign nationals relayed to the Commission that they feared leaving their homes, attending services at their places of worship, or going to work. This caused many foreign nationals economic loss because they were fearful of returning to work and opening their businesses. The attacks on South Asian expatriates also resulted in hundreds of Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Indians fleeing the country.

1527. There is a high degree of mistrust of immigrants by the Shia community, partly because they are perceived to be a threat to the job market for Bahrainis, and partly because of their membership in the security forces. The employment of naturalised individuals in the country's Armed Forces, National Guard and various law enforcement agencies has, provoked racial and sectarian strife and sometimes xenophobic sentiments towards foreigners. This has been exacerbated by the involvement of those forces in what has been thought to be repressive tactics during the period of unrest

## **3. Recommendations**

1528. To develop educational programs at the primary, secondary and university levels to promote religious, political and other forms of tolerance, as well as promote human rights and the rule of law.

### **Part B – Attacks on the Sunni Community**

#### **1. Factual Background**

1529. The first direct confrontation between the Sunni and Shia communities took place on 3 March in Hamad Town. By the end of the

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<sup>752</sup> Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=65&language=en-US> accessed 4 October 2011.

<sup>753</sup> See Chapter XI on Measures and Remedies Undertaken by the Government.