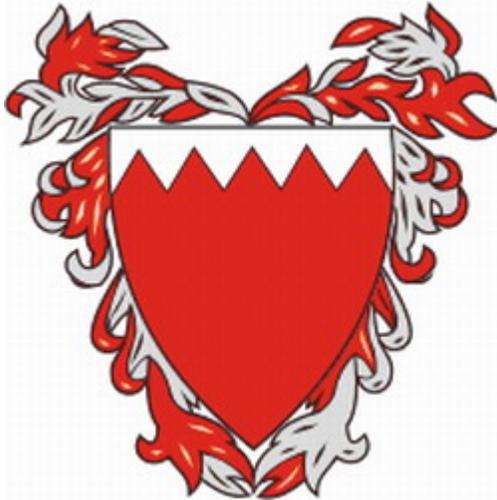


Parliamentary and municipal elections in Bahrain 2006: Islamic Sunnis are leading the second elections in Bahrain

13 December 2006



The first round

The results of the Bahraini parliamentary and municipal elections were a frustration to more than 25 former Bahraini deputies who re-nominated themselves. Only six of them won. The elections were frustrating also to the women. Out of 16 women candidates, only one woman won by acclaim while the other women lost. None of these women were qualified for the rerun. Meanwhile, the Islamic national Accord [Wifaq] Society won 15 seats out of a total of 26 seats. This was confirmed by the final results of the first round elections.

The total number of candidates who ran for parliamentary elections reached 207 candidates who nominated themselves in 39 electoral constituencies while 13 candidates announced their withdrawal from the electoral battle. The candidates competed for 40 House of Representatives seats. Meanwhile, 171 candidates competed in the municipal elections for 40 seats in five municipal councils in Bahrain's five governorates.

Surprises as violent as a thunderbolt were reported during the elections. Most former parliamentary figures lost the election. The most important of these were the first deputy speaker of the House of Representatives Abdul Hadi Marhoon, who won 300 votes only compared to his competitor who obtained 4,000 votes. The results of the elections also showed the loss of the chairmen of the financial and foreign committees. No second Bahraini woman won. The only woman winner was Latifah al-Qu'ud who won by acclaim. Moreover, Sulaiman Abbawi, the first Christian to run for municipal elections, lost.

The opposition Islamic National Accord [Wifaq] Society won more than 16 seats out of 17 seats in the next parliament. Candidate Mahdi Abu Dheib, who ran in a mixed constituency challenging Ibrahim al-Hadi, candidate of the Muslim brotherhood al-Minbar society. Both candidates will run for the re-rerun next week. If Abu-Dheib wins the re-run, the Wifaq will be the party whose all candidates would have won the elections.

Competing in the re-run were also four candidates of the opposition Democratic national Action Society [leftists, nationalists and independents]. They were allied with the Wifaq Society. The candidates were Abd-al-Rahman al-Nu'aymi, Ibrahim Sharif, Munirah Fakhru, and Sami Siyadi. However, the Muslim Sunnis recorded a retreat. They only won five seats while seven of their candidates were transferred to the second cycle. The Islamists had 13 seats in the expired House of Representatives.

Feverish competition was reported in the governorate of the capital city of Manama between the political societies and the independents. Businessman Adil al-Assumi who re-nominated himself after failing to reach parliament in 2002 won in the first constituency against the Islamic al-Minbar candidate and former member of the House of Representatives Sa'di Abdallah.

The Wifaq Society won the second constituency, which is the more difficult and largest in the number of candidates. Candidate Khalil al-Marzooq defeated his competitors. As for the third constituency, it also went to the Wifaq Society despite the tough competition with the Democratic national Action Society [Wa'd] with Jasim El Mu'min winning.

The big shock was in the fourth constituency of the capital city of Manama as the First Deputy of the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abdul Hadi Marhoon, candidate of the National Unity bloc, only won 355 votes compared with 4,584 votes for his main competitor, the winning Wifaq candidate, Abdul Jaleel Hassan. As for the fifth constituency, Wifaq's Muhammad Miz'il won it too. In the sixth constituency, al-Minbar candidate, Abd-al-Rahman Abu-Majeed won more votes than the secretary general of Wa'd Society Ibrahim Sharif. However, he could not muster the needed 50 per cent to qualify him for winning, and the competition will be tough between the two in the rerun. The central seventh constituency will witness a competition between independent Abdul Hakim El Shammari and Wifaq's Abdul Aziz Ibel.

The second and final round

The official results of the rerun round of the parliamentary and municipal elections in Bahrain was characterized with the Sunni Muslims being ahead of their competitors of the candidates of the Democratic National Action Society, which consists of leftists, nationalists and independents and the Islamic National Accord [Wifaq] Society, which was the main winner in the first round.

Wa'd's three candidates Abdul Rahman El Nu'aymi, Ibrahim Sharif, and Sami Siyadi failed to win against their competitors Issa Abdul Fattah and Abdul Rahman Abu-Majeed, the two independent candidates who were supported by El Asalah [Salafi Islamist], the Islamic Minbar, which represents the Muslim Brotherhood [MB] Group, and al-Minbar member Nasir al-Fadaleh.

Another candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood [MB] Group, Sami Qumbar, won in the fifth constituency of Al-Mahraq Governorate against his independent competitor Salah Al-Jalahimah while Ibrahim al-Hadi, an MB candidate of the third constituency of the

central governorate managed to win against the Wifaq candidate Mahdi Abu Deeb.

With this winning, the al-Manbar seats in the next parliament would reach seven. Meanwhile, with the winning of its candidate in the second constituency of al-Mahraq Governorate Ibrahim Abu-Sandal, Al-Asalah would have won five seats, bringing the total number of the MB seats and the Salafis to 12 seats, and with the winning of the independent Salafi candidate Jasem al-sa'idi, the total number of winners becomes 13.

Eifaq, the largest opposition Shiite society managed to win another seat in this round with the winning of independent candidate Makki Hilal Makki in one of the constituencies of the Northern Governorate, thereby raising the number of the seats it won in the two rounds to 17.

Moreover, Abdul Aziz Ibel, who is close to Wa'd and who is supported by Wifaq managed to achieve another penetration in one of the constituencies of the capital governorate of Manama when he won against his Independent candidate, businessman Abdul Hakim al-Shammari.

With this outcome, the Shiite and Sunni Islamists will prevail in the Bahraini House of representatives as their total seats would reach 32 out of 40 seats.

It is noteworthy that voting centers were closed down at 2000 hours of the evening amid a high demand of 69 per cent for voting in the parliamentary elections and 51 per cent for municipal elections.

Al-Jazirah net has reported that sharp arguments were exchanged between the police and supporters of the opposition in some electoral constituencies in view what the opposition supporters called the selectivity in doing business with the candidates. However, Islamists denied this and asserted that the electoral process proceeded smoothly.

Some 22 candidates from 11 parliamentary constituencies and 32 candidates from 16 municipal constituencies in the five governorates of Bahrain competed in this round.

This is the second parliamentary elections in Bahrain. After King Hamad Ibn Isa Al Khalifah activated the parliamentary system after the death of his father in 1999.

On Saturday morning, 2 December 2006, the second round of parliamentary and municipal elections was launched. A total of 22 parliamentary candidates competed for the re-run competing for 11 seats out of a total of 40 seats after 29 candidates won in the first round. Moreover, 32 municipal candidates competed in the re-run for 16 municipal seats out of 40 after 24 candidates won in the first round.

These elections were characterized with the participation of the opposition societies which boycotted the 2002 elections because of the division of parliament into an appointed assembly with extensive powers and an elected assembly that had no power to enact any legislation. This was boycotted only by the Shiite Haqq Society,

which is a dissident from al-Wifaq while Islamic Action withdrew from it.

Some people believed that the general election centers were “centers for rigging.” Others viewed as an “innovation.” A third party cast doubt on it and affirmed that there were tampering in the votes by the “bats of Darkness,” as they put it. Nonetheless, despite the views given, these centers remained a fait accompli raising an extensive controversy despite the unanimity of all the political societies and a number of independent candidates in calling for their cancellation.

Meanwhile, some people viewed these centers as a way of dealing with congestion and helping the voters with their votes as well as a direct participation in pushing for further participation. Nonetheless, the opposition continued in its demands. Before, the elections, the Labor Minister received a petition submitted by 100 candidates demanding the cancellation of these 10 centers out of their desire to “consolidate the spirit of transparency in the elections and to put an end to the widespread suspicions that elections might be rigged through these centers.”

Despite this intensive activity, the official spokesman of Bahraini elections, Ahdiyah Ahmad, denied any trend by the higher Election Committee to cancel these centers, justifying this on the ground that the “ten centers are an election necessity that makes it easier for the voters to vote irrespective of the pace that they might be in.”

Meanwhile, parliamentary candidate Munirah Fakhru noted that “these centers were created in 2002 in order to push for bigger participation at a time when the largest political society called for boycott. Consequently, there is no justification for creating these centers, to start with.”

Writer Qasim Hussein has asserted the same position. He said that centers were a “new innovation in the world of old and new democracies on equal footing.” He added: “there is no need to repeat the justifications for these centers in the 2002 elections to provide places for lifting the embarrassment from those willing to participate in areas controlled by people who believe in the boycott of these centers.”

Who is benefiting from the Public Centers?

Statistics have revealed that the greater beneficiary of the public centers were the Islamic Al-Minbar Society and Al-Asalah. The votes given by the candidate of the Islamic Al-Minbar Society, Salah Ali, through these centers totaled 1,191. In other words he won 41 per cent of the votes he was given at the secondary center, totaling 2,867 votes which qualified him to become a parliament deputy without having to enter a new round with candidate Munirah Fakhru who was only given 11 Per cent of the votes which she secured in the branch center in her constituency.

The same thing happened with the candidate at Rabi'ah al-Mahraq, issa Abu-al-Fatah, who won 1,546 votes out of the votes of the public centers in the second round, constituting a rate of 66 per cent of the votes of the secondary centers which totaled 2,336 only.

The matter is not very much different when it comes to the Al-Asalah Society. Al-Asalah also won a lesser share than the share of the lion which went to the Islamic Al-Minbar Society, thereby making it possible to cast doubt and to make accusations to both as a bloc loyal to the government. This prompted the government to divert to the two societies the votes which the candidate of the central Ninth constituency, Salman Ibn Saqr the name of "birds of darkness."

Ibn Saqr accused parties he did name that they have formed a mobile electoral bloc of 8,000 votes to be in the service of the Al-Asalah and Al-Minbar societies. The predictions of Ibn Saqr came true as far as the figure is concerned, because the total number of votes which the candidates of the two societies and candidate Al-Dhahrani reached 8,091 votes in the first round.

The newspaper al-'Ahd wrote in its issue number 157 of 29 November 2006 an article supportive of the view of Ibn Saqr. The title was astounding: "democracy defeats the democrats; Al-Asalah flies with no wings and had it not been for public centers, the MB would have perished."

The writer, who wrote under the name of election controller, said that had it not been for the public centers, Salah Ali, Abd-al-Halim Murad, Issa Abul Fattah, would not have won and Anwar Abdallah would not have lost.

He pointed out that the candidate of the Islamic Al-Minbar did not win except after the arrival of the ambulances of the public centers. Inside the ambulance, 705 votes were inserted and these were enough to secure the winning of the candidate of the Islamic al-Minbar.

The European Union praises the results of the parliamentary elections

The European Union has welcomed the results of the parliamentary elections in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the first round of which was held on 25 November. The Finnish president of the European Union said in a statement it issued according to the Kuwaiti News Agency that: "the popular participation in these elections compared with the elections held in 2002 confirms that the Bahraini people realized the importance of the election process in developing a democratic state."

The European Union expressed its confidence that these elections have reinforced the democratic process in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The control process

Observers believe that there were some negative aspects in the Bahraini elections. The most prominent of these aspects is the approval of the authorities to give official permits to Arab and international institutions to control the elections. However, the European Union managed to control the elections while a number of other organizations could not secure permits as a result of official terms or conditions which forestalled this. We have summed up in the third issue of these bulletin practical aspects for the control of elections in Bahrain.

Higher election committee rejects international control

The Bahraini newspaper Al-Wasat quoted informed sources as saying that the Higher Committee for Supervising the parliamentary and Municipal Elections is inclined not to reply to the applications of the international organizations which they submitted about a month ago to control the election process, asserting that failure to reply was tantamount to a trend to reject the international control and to be content with the civil society organizations.

Moreover, the representative of the Arab network for Election, Issa, El Gha'ib, pointed out that the Yemeni Observatory of Human Rights has submitted an application to the Higher Election Committee for controlling the election. Thus it becomes the fourth international organization to apply after the Arab network for Election, the Arab Initiative for the Control of Elections, and the Democratic Council, which is a US international organization based in Los Angeles.

Sources at the Higher Election Committee announced earlier that it needed a higher decision from the committee which is headed by Justice Minister Muhammad Ali Al-Sutri to allow the international organizations to control the election.

MOREOVER, president of the

Ajaj asserted that the number of the control cards on elections Day will be in conformity with the number of societies so as not to make the election centers crowded with observers, which would cause confusion in the process.

A media team for control

Meanwhile, the Transparency Society and the Human Rights Society of Bahrain announced the formation of a joint committee for the control of the municipal and parliamentary elections. The number of observers of the two societies was well over 400 observers, in addition to the formation of a mobile team for control and a center for receiving complaints from the candidates and voters.

The committee formed a media and supervisory team headquartered at the Bahraini Journalists Association and inaugurated as electronic site which enabled the candidates and voters to communicate through the site and to record their remarks or appeals on the progress of the election process.

Allowing the agents to watch the public centers

The Higher Committee for the safety of Bahraini Elections decided to allow the joint political societies participating in the elections to nominate delegates to act on their behalf for each committee of the ten public centers, provided that one of them only is present at the headquarters of the public committee alternatively.

The Higher Committee issued a statement expressing its extreme concern on reports published by the local press concerning claims that cannot be substantiated on the

public committees. The Committee asserted once again that all the committees of balloting and vote counting were under the control of the judges, who constitute the guarantee for fair elections, and the control of the civil society organizations.

The Higher Committee explained that the public committees were formed for the purpose of allowing a large segment of the registered voters who are staying at their jobs on the day of election to exercise their constitutional right to vote and to choose their candidates. This category of voters includes the airport personnel and workers at companies and enterprises. It also includes the passengers whose time of travel does not conflict with the time of opening and closing the balloting and vote counting. It also includes those whose place of work is located near any public committee and their constituencies are located close to it. It further includes arrivals and departures through the bridge. Therefore, these committees will undoubtedly expand the process of participation in the elections through the participation by those who cannot otherwise participate to start with.

The Information Ministry closes down Internet sites which discussed Al-Bandar issue, and the Haqq Movement publishes a special report about the continuation of the control of the elections

Early last November, the Bahraini Ministry of Information announced that it has closed down and non-Bahraini Bahraini sites on the Internet because they discuss the issue of Salah Al-Bandar, A Bahraini national of Sudanese origin who published a controversial report and who is being tried in absentia.

The press reported that the acting director of the press and publication department at the Information Ministry, Hasan Awn, made a statement saying that these websites have violated the decision of the Criminal Court banning the publication of matters investigated by government authorities in the issue of defendant Salah Al-Bandar.

Awn added that these websites continued to report on the Al-Bandar case before the issuance of the court decision, thereby leaving a negative decision on the progress of investigation and constituting a violation of Articles 40 and 71 of the law on the regulation of printing, press and publication.

The Bahraini official was referring to the report published by Al-Bandar, who was deported by the Bahraini authorities on 14 September and he is currently being tried in absentia. Al-Bandar spoke about a clandestine organization within the government seeking to exclude the Shiites and to tamper with the results of the elections.

The ban on publication in the Al-Bandar case was ordered by a decision of the Criminal Court on 5 October 2006.

On his part, human rights activist Nabil Rajab said about 17 websites were closed down. Most of them were Bahraini and some of them were Arab. Rajab said that the dissolved website of the Bahraini Center for Human Rights was the first to be closed down while other websites were successively closed down as well.

Rajab pointed out that the closure of the websites was a blatant violation of the freedom of expression. He said: "I regret that the step was taken only a short time before the parliamentary and municipal elections. It will reflect a bad image of our country and harm its reformist project."

Rajab added: "I wish that lifting the ban would be done as soon as possible. On our part, we will continue to publish everything that is related to the Al-Bandar report because the question is very important for the future of our country."

Haqq publishes a special report on the continuation of the control. On its part, the Bahraini Haqq Movement published on 26 October a statement of which the Arab Network for the Control of Elections obtained a copy indicating that the Bahraini authorities banned access to the website of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, known as WWW.bahrainrights.org through the only electronic server in Bahrain, namely, Btelco, or the Bahraini Telecommunications Corporation. The Haqq Movement then made the necessary tests to affirm the ban was enforced. It issued a special report on the official control and the ban which involved many electronic sites that were included in the list.

The report was sent to numerous international organizations to explain the real picture behind this ban on the Bahrain Center and its timing, in addition to focusing the light on the question of the electronic ban. In the bottom of the report, there was a list of the locally prohibited electronic sites.

<http://www.haaq.org/ar-BH/2/ViewNews/4/140/Default.aspx>

The report said that "this was not the first time in which the Bahraini authorities exercise control and ban on the political, cultural and religious sites and pages and the other sites which discuss issues of a sensitive nature to the authorities, such as the criticism of the regime of the Al Khalifah household, the corruption of the government officials and relevant issues."

The report pointed out that most villages, local communities, institutions and organizations in Bahrain have pages devoted for communication with the masses or with the members and they are used as centers for the dissemination of new and the archiving and documentation of events free from official control.

Discussing the reason why target the Bahraini Center for Human Rights at the present time, the report pointed out as series of reports, attitudes and activities which it interacted with, such as corruption, economic rights in Bahrain and their relationship with poverty, level of income, unemployment, the discrimination that exists in the government on an unwritten basis and political naturalization. It should be recalled that Bahraini authorities have been active granting citizenship to dozens of thousands of citizens of the various nationalities, but from a specific sect of Islam so as to change the religious demography and to tamper with the results of the upcoming elections which allow the naturalized persons to participate in the political process.

The Center has also played the role of propagator for the freedom of expression and

the defense of political detainees and the rights of Bahraini activists.

As for the timing, the report pointed out the role of the center and its activity in exposing the conspiracy which was revealed by Dr Salah Al-Bandar, namely, a plan for the management and financing by a prominent personality of the ruling Al Khalifah family to instigate sectarian hatred and to incite Sunni citizens against Shiite citizens.

The report pointed out that several Bahraini factions denounced the scheme which stipulated offering financial support to pseudo NGO's to promote these ideas and to combat the activities of the real NGO's in Bahrain.

The Center made extensive efforts to cast light on the danger posed by the conspiracy against social peace and the creation of an environment of terrorism similar to the one in Iraq by instigating against the Shiites, involving everyone in a bloody war, preoccupying people from demanding basic rights, the combat of corruption, and participation in the making of the political decision.

The movement expressed its concern for the continuation of the Bahraini authorities of persisting on the oppression of all forms of expression and the exchange of views by enacting legislation that restrict this right, the use of force to prohibit public seminars, and to assault every gathering intending to hold seminars or peaceful demonstrations.

The Movement pointed out that these acts by the Bahraini authorities are no compatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Article 19 of the Declaration, or with the articles of the International Covenant on the Civil and political rights to which Bahrain acceded in September 2006.

Moreover, these stands by the Bahraini authorities are unacceptable by a member of the UN Human Rights Council, all the more so because it was expected to serve as a model for the respect and protection of human rights, particularly the freedom of expression.

At the end of its report, the movement submitted three demands for the purpose of rectifying the situation:
The Bahraini authorities should stop their continuous violations of human rights, such as the freedom of expression. This should include lifting the ban imposed on sites referred to in the report, provided that this should include all forms of expression, such as the press, media and publications.

The United Nations Human Rights Council should take the necessary measures to review the human rights record of Bahrain, all the more so because Bahrain is one of its members. Despite the recurrent appeals and correspondence by international and local organizations, Bahrain is still challenging the international community in its violation of rights and insisting on not changing its attitude and oppressive laws or the use of force to enforce such a policy.

To see the report in English, please refer to:

<http://www.haaq.org/en-US/42/ViewNews/37/139/Default.aspx>

Correspondents without Limits:

On its part, Correspondents without Limits Organization strongly condemned the measures of the Bahraini government toward the closure of a number of websites as a consequence of the Al-Bandar Report. In this connection, the organization announced that “although the human rights situation has relatively improved ever since King Hamad Ibn Isa Al Khalifah held power, progress in the field of the freedom of expression remained unlimited. The government is still controlling the Internet through the Batelco company so as to make its electoral interests prevail and to silence the voices of the opposition.”

It should be recalled that the Ministry of Social Development threatened in March 2006 the Bahrain Center for Human Rights to inflict penalties on its officials unless they suspend their activities.

The

It should be noted that Batelco has hacked seven websites of information and discussions as follows:

<http://www.montadayat.org>

<http://www.ahrarlbahrain.com>

<http://www.bhaintimes.org>

<http://www.alsaheefa.net>

<http://www.tubnli.net>

<http://www.rezgar.com>

In the most recent report on ranks published by “Correspondents without limits,” the State of Bahrain occupied the 111th rank out of a total of 168 States.

The Bahraini women and the difficult formula in the 2006 elections:

It is a known fact that Arab women are facing numerous difficulties and challenges to access parliament and municipal seats. However, observers believe that the Gulf women are facing a more difficult situation particularly after the difficulties and confrontations which Bahraini women faced in addition to the disappointment of women because of their failure to win even a few seats.

A total of 18 women nominated themselves in the parliamentary elections in 2006. For the second consecutive time, Bahraini women did not win even one single parliamentary or municipal seat, instead of one seat won by acclaim about one month

before voting began. The winning woman was Latifah Al-Qu'ud.

A report by the United Arab Emirates newspaper Al-Bayan said that the fact that no Bahraini woman could access the House of Representatives is an evidence that the efforts of political empowerment which took four years and the efforts to train her to run for parliamentary and municipal elections have failed to change the persuasions and views of the voters to vote for women.

Bahrain women tried to break the wall of despair by competing with men in the period of election publicity which ended, 24 hours before the start of balloting last Saturday in accordance with the laws and regulations governing the electoral publicity. This will make women review their calculations and organize themselves once again on the hope of repeating the attempt in the 2010 parliamentary and municipal elections.

Women candidates blame the clerics and the male mentality:

After the results of the first round of elections were declared, Bahraini women candidates placed the blame on the role of the clergy and the dominant "male mentality" in addition to some excesses that were committed during the balloting after all of them failed in the parliamentary elections.

In a statement to the French News Agency, Bahrain University Sociology Professor Baqir Al-Najjar said that the failure of all women candidates in the elections "had nothing to do with society's attitude as much as it relates to the nature of competition which most hopeful women candidates were engaged into."

Al-Najjar added that "Fakhrou and other women competed with Muslim Brotherhood male candidates, who although they did not object to women's entry into parliament, they fought them in the elections because they were women."

Al-Najjar admitted that the women who ran for elections in the Shiite areas where the Wifaq Society is monopolizing power "have lost because of the influence of the clerics."

The Bahraini opposition has frequently objected to the formation of public voting centers and accused the government of trying to influence the results of the polling through these centers.

The 10 public centers which were formed in Bahrain for the purpose of these elections allow the voters to cast their ballots irrespective of the electoral constituency to which they belong.

People casting doubt were referred to the Prosecution:

In a rapid development of the Bahraini electoral scene and in a step which political analysts described as aiming to stop rumors which hurt the interests and prestige of Bahrain, the official spokeswoman of the parliamentary and municipal elections for 2006, 'Ahdiah Ahmad Al-Sayyid, said that the higher committee of the elections

decided to refer every person who disseminates rumors that cast doubt on the fairness and correctness of the elections without an evidence or proof whether he is candidate or otherwise,, to the public prosecution.

She called on all the candidates, especially those who manipulate the feelings of the voters in order to win their votes to stop using twisted methods to promote themselves among their voters at the expense of those who are in charge of the electoral process.

'Ahdiah Ahmad said that the law incriminates all those who disseminate rumors against the fairness of the elections without providing an evidence in accordance with Article 30 of the of the law which stipulates that "without any prejudice to any penalty stipulated in the Penal Code or any other code, anyone who committees any of the following acts shall be penalized with imprisonment for a period not to exceed six months and a fine of not over 500 Bahraini dinars or by one of these two penalties: dissemination of false statements about the election or about the attitude of one of the candidates or about his morality with the aim of influencing the results of the elections.

Mosque speakers violate the law

On 18 November 2006, The Bahraini Transparency Society issued its fifth report on the Bahraini elections. It said that the society has monitored violations committed by three mosque speakers who directly involved themselves in the election campaigns and called on the people to vote in a specific way.

The report said that the Bahraini Transparency Society has received complaints about the use by the supporters of the candidates of the religious institutions of election publicity to discredit other candidates or to call for non-voting for women candidates.

The Bahraini Transparency Society renewed its call to the Friday Mosque speakers and the Jama'ah to comply with the familiar constraints in this regard.

Bribes

The society said in its statement that it has followed up the "reports disseminated by the local press that some local parliamentary candidates offered bribes either in checks or cash or in-kind or gifts or services. It said that it viewed this as a violation of the law.

The report referred to a complaint by some residents of an electoral constituency had erected an election advertisement saying that the residents support this candidate. The residents voiced their protest at such an advertisement by staging a sit-in in front of a local newspaper.

On its part, Transparency called on all the candidates not to use information in election publicity which might not be true, all the more so because this is a violation of the law and the constraints regulating the electoral progress.

A Bahraini Candidate asserts that there were violations, but the election

committee denied the violations

A candidate of the ruling family in Bahrain has said that there were 8,000 voters without addresses who can vote at any election constituency.

Candidate Salman Ibn Saqr Al Khalifah said that he was sure that these election violations were committed, adding that the Higher Election Committee summoned him for the purpose of calming down the situation.

He explained that three judges and the executive director of the elections met with him and informed him that the question was not true and that it should not be raised.

He said that the committee should have verified the information and closed down the public voting centers because of the inability of any of the candidates to appoint 10 agents to watch these centers.

The election committee hastened to deny these accusations and treated them as a false rumor. It said in a statement that candidate Salman Ibn Saqr has not offered any evidence confirming the truth of his claims.

The public voting centers were a controversial issue between the opposition and the government. The opposition believes that these centers could facilitate the rigging of elections. In fact, the opposition demanded the cancellation of these centers while keeping the private centers of each election constituency.

Public centers are open centers not linked with any electoral constituency. Any voter could vote in these centers, irrespective of his address.

The controversy over the right to vote

The right to vote occupied a significant space in the controversy pertaining to the military. The Secretary General of the Islamic National Wifaq Society , which is the mainstream current in the Shiite sect, Shaykh Ali Salman renewed his demands that the military should not be allowed to vote in the upcoming parliamentary or municipal elections and that all public voting centers should be closed down. He said: "it is unacceptable to take the voting of the military separately from the remaining political process. It is true that they are citizens of this country. But we agree apprehensive that they might give their votes to the government candidates at the expense of the opposition. Meanwhile, the higher committee supervising the parliamentary elections announced that the military are citizens who have all the rights that are guaranteed by the constitution, including the right to vote."

The committee said in a statement: "One cannot protest that the voting of the military would politicize this important national institution or turn it into a place of attraction by the various political forces."

The committee went on to say that the "military are citizens who have all the rights that were guaranteed by the constitution for all the citizens within the law."

The naturalized persons

Meanwhile, the chairman of the executive committee for parliamentary elections, Wa'il Abu-Ulay, said that the voters who have the right to vote at the election centers are the persons whose names were included in the election lists which the Higher Committee supervising the Elections approved in September 2006, asserting that the persons who were granted the Bahraini citizenship after September 2006 would not be entitled to vote in the 2006 elections.

Bahrainis abroad have chosen their candidate

On 21 November 2006, some 1,191 Bahraini citizens residing abroad headed the polling centers designated by the Bahraini embassies and consulates to choose together representatives in the upcoming parliament and municipal council.

The official spokeswoman of the 2006 elections at the Kingdom of Bahrain, Ahdiyah Ahmad, said that the number of voters who registered their names for voting from outside Bahrain totaled 1,159 voters. She pointed out that the voters were distributed in the different countries as follows: Jordan, which was the highest rate, 197; Saudi Arabia: 73; Kuwait: 133; Oman: 25; the United Arab Emirates: 155; Qatar: 90; Egypt: 56; Syria: 29; Tunisia: 4; Algeria: 2; Morocco: 3; Iran: 33; China: 9; Russia: 3; Pakistan: 57; India: 52; Britain: 125; France: 11; Switzerland: 5; Germany: 13; Washington: 52; New York: 19; and Japan: 12.

She added that the "number of candidates in the parliamentary elections who appointed agents for them was 31 candidates, while only 18 candidates for the municipal elections appointed agents to monitor the election process."

It should be recalled that each candidates has the right to appoint one agent to monitor the electoral process.

Election phenomena

In the Bahraini electoral scene, there were several phenomena that were different from the election phenomena that usually appear in the remaining Arab capitals and countries.

Show business in the elections:

At the peak of the election campaigns, work of theater started to appear in the arena. There was the play: "the deputies are standing next door," which was written and produced by Sa'd al-Jazzaf. It discusses the competition for nomination for the upcoming parliamentary assembly and the accompanying election phenomena and hearsay which often focus on the salary of the parliament deputy of 3,500 Bahraini dinars or an equivalent of US \$9,500.

One of the scenes in the play shows the meetings between the candidates and the voters. The candidates here tempt the voters with pseudo promises which are often

not delivered. Voters argue with the representatives who are running for the second time and are now re-nominating themselves. The voters are asking: why have you not fulfilled your earlier promises?

The play also shows the bad performance of the deputies in the last parliament, their lack of political and parliamentary experience, particularly when the government bargains with them on private projects and they abandon their role of control and legislation or receive bribes from the government.

At one of the open squares of the capital Manama and with simple resources, a group of Bahraini youth showed a play called "Tahnoon for the homeland and the homeland for Tahnoon." The play was political oriented and calls for voting for the unified list.

The play is a comical one. It shows the race for elections between a liberal independent candidate, naturalized candidate, the candidate of the unified bloc, and an independent Islamic candidate. Competition for accessing the parliamentary seat begins at the electoral constituency and the platforms of the candidates are shown to the voters. This is done in the form of debates and popular seminars which turn into fist fights.

SMS messages oppose the women candidates of Bahrain and call for sectarianism

Although a woman, Latifah Al-Qu'id, won by acclaim, the Bahraini women candidates for parliamentary and municipal elections remained worried vis-à-vis what the Bahraini rank and file called the "bats of darkness" that disseminated the SMS messages that call for the prohibition of voting for women and for being content with voting for men only.

The SMS messages were exchanged on a large scale in the first phases of the election campaigns, particularly after the declaration of the date of the municipal and parliamentary elections. The messages were of an unknown source. Often they focus on sectarian polarization particularly in the constituencies where there are mixed sects.

With this countdown for the date of the elections, the messages were intensified and became more widespread. Official circles continued to ignore such behavioral patterns despite the repeated statements by the officials of the Higher Election Committee. A public opinion poll conducted by the Bahraini newspaper Al-Wasat said that some figures of political and religious societies were involved in this sectarian activity.

Suppression of the freedom of election in the name of religion

Meanwhile, Bahraini candidates and heads of political societies launched a political campaign against the clerics who sought to force the citizens and the voters to vote for the candidates of a specific list only, not for others, and were manipulating their religious position to promote their own candidates although there were qualified men and clergy who nominated themselves in the election as independent candidates.

Those who were complaining against the intervention of the clerics said that the freedom of the public should not be suppressed by imposing a specific list with specific names, particularly that wisdom dictated that a cleric should support the freedom of choice and not to impose the candidates on the public. A good cleric can be a good source for Fatwa. The clerics, the candidates added, should explain the constraints that are laid down by the Shari'ah in the choice of the more qualified and he better without falling into the trap of names and the entry into polarization of the candidates, because these political stands have negative impact that affect relations of people, one among the other, and consequently, their relations with the clerics.

Cassation Court

issued a decision on 22 February dissolving the Center. A penalty of imprisonment of up to six months is expected to be inflicted on the members of the Center in addition to a fine of 500 Bahraini Dinars (or 1,045 Euros).

Higher Court

and member of the Higher Election Committee Khalid Ajaj noted that the “domestic monitoring of the election was good, particularly after the door was opened to all the civil society organizations to watch the election process.”