

= March of loyalty to martyrs =

The March of loyalty to martyrs (Arabic : ????? ?????????) was a protest on 22 February 2011 in Manama , Bahrain . Tens of thousands participated in the protest , one of the largest in the Bahraini uprising . Named after the seven victims killed by police and army forces during previous protests , the march filled the space between Bahrain mall and Pearl Roundabout . Protesters carried Bahrain 's flag and demanded the fall of the government , implementation of a constitutional monarchy and other reforms , with some of them also demanding the end of the regime .

The march was named the largest in the country 's history by organizers ; sources estimated that over 100 @, @ 000 protesters (8 percent of Bahrain 's population) participated , although other sources gave higher and lower estimations . A number of ambulance drivers , police and army officers joined the protest . Security forces were not present and unlike previous protests , it ended peacefully .

= = Background = =

Protests inspired by the successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia erupted in Bahrain on 14 February . Security forces responded by firing tear gas , rubber bullets , sound bombs and birdshot into the crowd of protesters . More than thirty protesters were injured and one died from birdshot injuries in his back . Another protester was killed the same way the next day , on 15 February , when over 10 @, @ 000 protesters occupied Pearl Roundabout .

On 17 February , police launched a pre @-@ dawn raid on sleeping protesters . Four protesters were killed and more than 300 were injured . Health workers and a journalist were allegedly attacked by security forces . The army was deployed after Pearl Roundabout was cleared of protesters and checkpoints were set up . Protesters moved to Salmaniya Hospital 's car parks where thousands protested against the government .

The following day , army forces stationed in the Pearl Roundabout fired live ammunition on hundreds of protesters who tried to re @-@ occupy the site . At least 120 protesters were hurt and one was fatally wounded , bringing the number of deaths to seven . The Crown Prince offered dialogue with opposition parties . On 19 February , tens of thousands of protesters re @-@ occupied Pearl Roundabout after the army was ordered to withdraw .

On 21 February , the king canceled the Formula 1 race originally scheduled for 13 March . The Associated Press named the decision " another victory " for protesters who had called for its cancellation . " We felt it was important for the country to focus on immediate issues of national interest and leave the hosting of Bahrain 's Formula One race to a later date " , the king stated .

In the evening , tens of thousands of government supporters , borrowing the anti @-@ government protesters ' slogan " no Sunni , no Shia , only Bahraini " , gathered in Al Fateh Mosque in Juffair . One participant interviewed by The New York Times said , " The democracy they have been asking for is already here , but the Shias , they have their ayatollahs , and whatever they say , they will run and do it . If they tell them to burn a house , they will . I think they have a clear intention to disrupt this country " .

The next day , appearing on Bahrain 's official news agency , the king ordered the release of 50 political prisoners , including 25 Shia activists arrested during the 2010 crackdown and accused of forming a " terrorist network " whose goal was to overthrow the government . Ali Abdulemam , a prominent blogger and founder of Bahrain Online opposition forum , was among those who were released . Blogger and human rights activist Abduljalil al @-@ Singace , who called the move " a good step " and a " positive gesture " , was also released . However , according to human rights activist Nabeel Rajab , about 400 more activists remained in prison on " politically inspired charges " .

= = Loyalty to Martyrs = =

In the afternoon of 22 February tens of thousands of children , men and women occupied and

marched on the main streets of Manama . The march was called " The march of loyalty to martyrs " in reference to those killed in previous protests . It stretched for several miles , filling the eastern side of Sheik Khalifa bin Salman Highway from Bahrain Mall to Pearl Roundabout located in Manama 's business district .

The protesters , while carrying the white @-@ and @-@ red flag of Bahrain and posters of the seven victims , chanted : " Ash @-@ shab yurid isqat an @-@ nizam " (" the people want to bring down the regime ") , " Egypt , Tunisia , are we any different ? " and " No Shia , No Sunni , only Bahraini " . Most demanded the fall of the Bahrain government . " Some want the family out but most only the prime minister " , said a protester interviewed by BBC . The march was led by ambulance drivers who reported being attacked by security forces while trying to help treat protesters from the Pearl Roundabout injured on 17 February , which came to be called Bloody Thursday .

Protest organizers , which consisted of a loose coalition of seven political parties including Al Wefaq and Wa 'ad , named the march the largest in Bahrain 's history . Associated Press , The Huffington Post , The New York Times and Voice of America estimated that there were over 100 @,@ 000 participants . The New York Times described the number as " astonishing " , because Bahrain 's total population is a little over 500 @,@ 000 . The BBC described the course of march as a " sea of red and white flags " . Other estimates varied between 30 @,@ 000 and 200 @,@ 000 participants . In their documentary film Bahrain : Shouting in the Dark , Al Jazeera English stated , " Bahrain held its largest march in history ; the world media recorded nearly a quarter of all citizens in the streets " . The BICI report mentioned that " by many accounts more than 100 @,@ 000 people were marching " and that the number of protesters at Pearl Roundabout peaked at over 150 @,@ 000 . IFEX estimated the number to be as high as 200 @,@ 000 ; however , CNN Arabic said the number was just about 30 @,@ 000 .

Security forces did not intervene to disperse the march , however a state @-@ owned helicopter hovered overhead . A small number of police and army officers participated in the protest . Denouncing army troops who opened fire on protesters , an officer said , " What we did to the people was not heroic . We ask the people to forgive us , we ask the people for forgiveness " . Another officer added , " The weapons that have been used against the people are weapons of shame , these weapons should be used to protect the people , and not be used against them . That ? s why we 've decided to be with the people " .

The widow of one of the seven " martyrs " read a statement after the march that listed the opposition 's demands ; the most important demands were the resignation of the forty @-@ year @-@ long government headed by the king 's uncle and the implementation of a constitutional monarchy . Other demands included the immediate commencement of an " impartial " investigation into the deaths , the neutralization of the state media and the release of the remaining " political " prisoners . Analysts stated that the large size of the protest pressured the government to concede to the protesters ' demands . Al Jazeera English said that " unless they offered deep reforms , the Khalifas will likely fall " .

= = Aftermath = =

Peaceful protests , including one pro @-@ government rally , continued throughout February and the first half of March , and drew tens of thousands of participants . On 8 March , unsatisfied by the government response , a coalition of three hard @-@ line Shia groups called for the abdication of the monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic through peaceful means . Al Wefaq continued to demand an elected government and a constitutional monarchy .

In the following days protests intensified , moving to the Royal Court in Riffa , a royal palace in Safiriyya and finally blocking roads leading to the financial district in Manama . Security forces clashed with protesters using tear gas and rubber bullets , but police were overwhelmed by protesters . The government then requested help from neighbor countries , which sent about 1 @,@ 500 security forces to assist the government . A state of emergency was declared and the government launched a crackdown campaign to put down protests by force . The Pearl Roundabout , now cleared of protesters , was torn down by government and protesters found themselves pushed

back into their villages . The government arrested over 1 @, @ 000 protesters including leading opposition and rights activists (known as the Bahrain Thirteen) as well as sportsmen , academics , businessmen , doctors , engineers , journalists and teachers .

Despite the brutal crack @-@ down , smaller @-@ scale protests and clashes continued , mostly outside Manama 's business districts . By April 2012 , more than 80 people had died during the uprising . As of December 2012 , protests are ongoing .

= = External videos = =

The march of Loyalty to Martyrs rally ? 1

The march of Loyalty to Martyrs rally ? 2

The march of Loyalty to Martyrs rally ? 3