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From: OpsNewsTicker
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Subject: Bahrain Vote Erupts in Violence (NYT)

JERUSALEM — As the government of Bahrain held parliamentary elections Saturday, hundreds of protesters clashed with security forces while trying to make their way to Pearl Square, the site in the capital where the kingdom's pro-democracy movement got started early this year and was heavily suppressed. The protest was a main part of the Shiite majority's response to the election in the Sunni-ruled monarchy, which was boycotted by the mostly Shiite opposition. The aim of the protest was to march to Pearl Square, in Manama, where the government destroyed a 300-foot sculpture topped by a giant pearl in March after forcibly removing the protesters' tent city.

"Security forces closed all access to Pearl Square today," Mohammed al-Maskati, president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, said by telephone. "The square is now like an army base. Thousands of protesters turned out in Sanabis and got attacked badly by the security forces."

He said that dozens of people had been arrested on Friday and that some said they had been beaten badly. Nabeel Rajab, president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, said in a Twitter message sent from outside the country that about 38 women protesters had been ordered detained for 45 days.

Mr. Maskati added that turnout for the election was minimal as a result of the boycott and that the authorities had prevented television crews from shooting inside polling stations to avoid showing the low participation. Government accounts of the voting said the opposite, that participation was high and that the day was further evidence of the country's return to normalcy.

Eighteen members of the main opposition Wefaq party quit their posts in the 40-seat Parliament early this year. Saturday's election was aimed at replacing them and buttressing Bahrain's contention that it has restored order to a country whose economy, heavily dependent on international finance, relies on a reputation for stability. Prince Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, Bahrain's prime minister, issued a statement on Saturday saying the election was proof that "we are on the right path toward a better future."

He added, "The massive popular turnout has revealed citizens' keenness to be partners in building Bahrain, boosting democracy and maintaining national unity and growth."

Bahrain is more than two-thirds Shiite yet is run by a Sunni royal family. The pro-democracy movement has been heavily defined by that divide. Mr. Maskati said he and other human-rights groups would soon provide evidence of their contention that the voter turnout was low.

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