

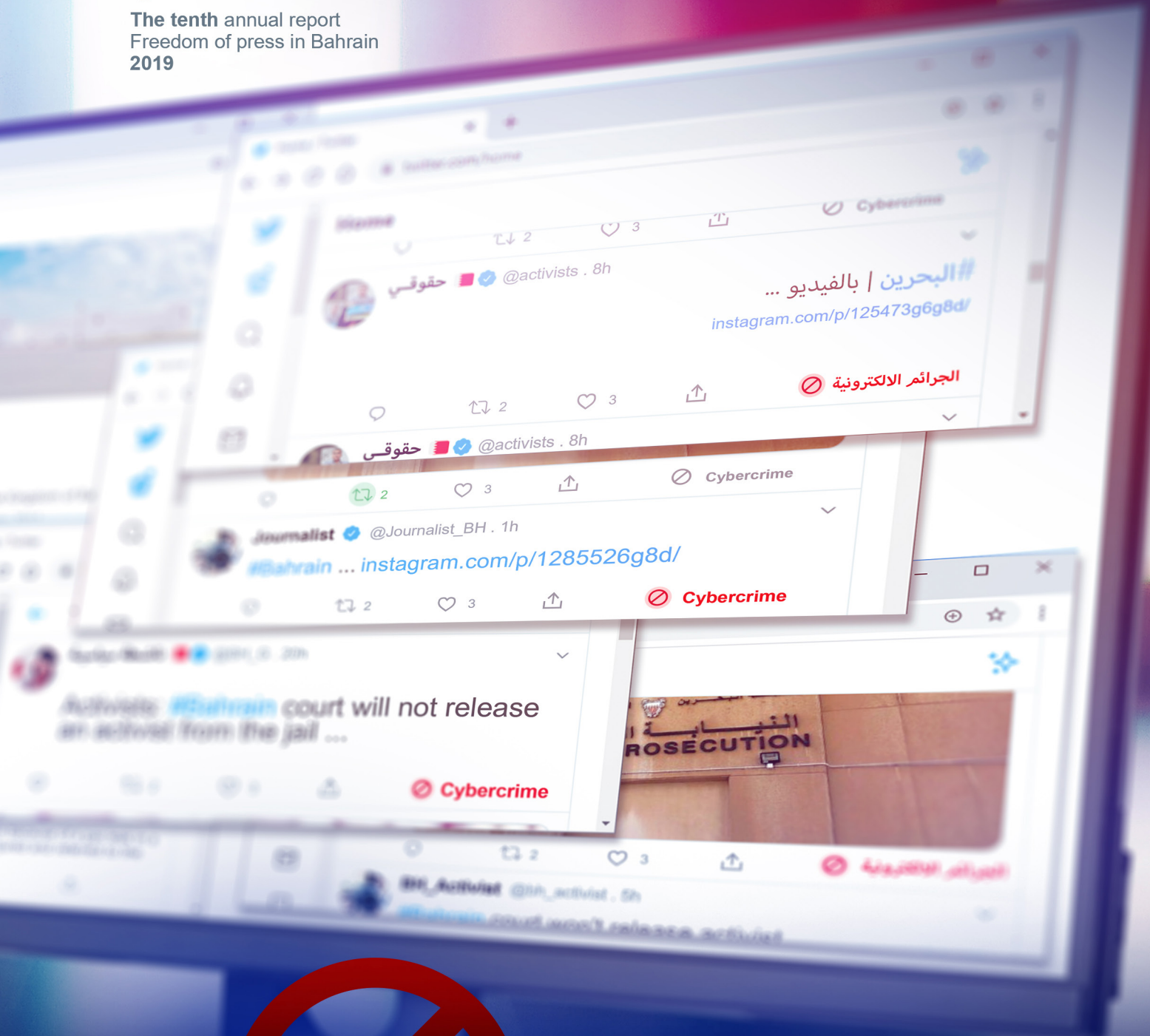


رابطة الصحافة البحرينية
Bahrain Press Association

رابطة الصحافة البحرينية BPA

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The tenth annual report
Freedom of press in Bahrain
2019



Bahrain in 2019 A Cybercrime Syndrome



Bahrain in 2019... A Cybercrime Syndrome

The tenth annual report
Freedom of press in Bahrain 2019

Bahrain Press Association
Organization concerned with defending
freedom of expression in Bahrain
Founded in London
9th July 2011

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E-mail: info@bahrainpa.org
website: www.bahrainpa.org

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The year 2019 marked a milestone at the level of the Bahraini authorities targeting of media freedoms, freedom of expression, and the right to engage in journalistic work. It is one of the worst years when compared to all previous years, specifically since the beginning of the political and security crisis in early 2011.

The very name of the tenth annual report of the Bahrain Press Association, Bahrain 2019: a Cybercrime Syndrome, indicates the security authorities' overtly frantic vision of any healthy practice of freedom of expression as a crime. Expressing opinions about the state and its policies is a cybercrime that, always and forever, aims to spread false news, split the national unity line, provoke sedition, threaten civil peace and social fabric, and to destabilize security in Bahrain.

These charges have been replicated in all cases of arrest, investigation, and judicial trials that affected Bahrainis over the past year. Through this policy, the state seeks to tighten its grip on the cyberspace after had taken absolute control of the local press on the one hand, and banning all forms of political association on the other.

Repercussions of this policy were not only limited to those considered by the state to be activists or political and human rights advocates but also included journalists and activists affiliated with pro-state groups.

Towards the end of 2019, the violations that Bahrain witnessed since February 2011 amounted to a total of 1,595. Violations included killing and arrests, torture and ill-treatment, trials, defamation, obstruction of work, and promoting discriminatory-both political and sectarian-policies, and inciting hatred and violence In some cases.

The Bahrain Press Association has, over the past year, documented 68 cases that constitute violations of the press and public freedoms such as the right of expression. In an unprecedented instance, it is criminalized to 'follow' or 'retweet' posts of Twitter accounts that the authorities consider "provocative and seditious." As such, Bahrain has become the only country in the world to take such action.

Bahrainis' exercise of their natural right to expression has become an electronic crime

On 27 October 2019, the Cabinet started discussing a bill draft regulating the press and media, to be submitted to the parliament after its approval. About 25% of the articles of the new law stipulate penalties that journalists, and the agencies they work for, may face. About 20 articles were dedicated to regulating trials and penalties, which range from hefty fines to the imprisonment of journalists.

After reviewing this draft bill, the Bahrain Press Association considered it the foundation of total elimination of freedom of expression and press freedoms. The Association believes that the passage of this bill is a full-fledged crime, especially that many of the articles impose a flagrant restriction on the freedom of the press. It also places the media under the fire of the government, and leaves journalists unprotected, vulnerable to severe penalties under both the penalty code and the Anti-terrorism Law.

Adding more repression through its security apparatus, the state amended the Anti-terrorism Law to expand its scope of targeting dissidents. The

**68 violations
of freedom of
expression
and press
freedoms
during the
year 2019**

definition now includes “anyone who, by any means, promotes, glorifies, justifies, favors, or encourages actions that constitute terrorist activities.” The Bahraini judiciary interpretation is even broader. Paradoxically, the Council of Representatives, whose role is safeguarding freedoms, has been competing with the penal authorities in turning against Tweeters and journalists and issuing statements demanding their accountability.

Thus, the public sphere was completely locked down and handed over to the Ministry of Interior’s Cybercrime Unit. The Unit is devoted to reading tweeters and journalists’ whispers, interpreting their utterances, and summoning

them for interrogation or arresting them for trials.

It was a brutal year during which Bahrain turned into a perilous police state. The construction of the wall of fear was completed, and the media sphere was left muted, leaving only one dominant voice--the voice of the state.

The expanding discontent was clearly evident in the dissident voices among social sectors affiliated with the state itself. Indeed, muzzling and stifled freedoms reached unbearable levels. Pro-government writers and Tweeters have criticized the suffering freedom in the country.

Among the violations documented this past year were 21 trials against journalists and Tweeters, of whom only one has been acquitted. 16 interrogation cases, 9 arrests, and 22 threats and obstruction of work incidents were documented. Moreover, Bahrain Press Association has also documented 51 cases of interrogation and detention of religious singers during Ashura processions.



Threats and obstruction of work

The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (7 March 2019) did not allow a colloquium at the headquarters of the National Assembly Association. The Ministry considered the colloquium, titled 'March 1965 uprising in the national memory' against the law as the guest speaker (Ibrahim Kamal al-Din) was a former leader in the dissolved National democratic action society (WAAD).

The Foreign Affairs, Defense and National Security Committee of the Bahraini Council of Representatives (11 April 2019) criticized Ibrahim El-Sheikh, a writer in Akhbar Al Khaleej newspaper. for what it claimed "insulting the Bahraini army participating in the Yemen war". (13 April 2019) Thirty-five Bahraini MPs signed a statement calling on state officials, especially those in charge of judicial institutions, "to assume their role in holding accountable those who violate the law, threaten civil peace and spread lies and fabricated news on social media."

The Civil Service Bureau (1 May 2019) announced the organization of meetings with the Media Affairs Committee to impose disciplinary regulations on public sector employees concerning their use of social media. The Bahraini Ministry of the Interior issued a statement (19 May 2019) accusing both human rights activist Yousuf al-Mohafaza and cyber-activist Hassan Abdulnabi of running the 'Na'ib Ta'ib' (repentant MP) account on 'Twitter.' The account is known for publishing leaks about wing conflicts inside the Bahraini ruling family.

On 21 May 2019, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement accusing the head of the Bahrain Press Association, Adel Marzooq, of promoting division and spreading false news. It also threatened to take legal action against him. The statement referenced 'Tweets' that posed questions about the Prime Minister's position and scenarios of disqualifying him. On 22 May 2019, the King ratified an amendment to the Anti-terrorism Law, expanding the scope of targeting and persecution of social media activists.

The Bahraini Ministry of the Interior (22 May 2019) threatened citizens and residents for merely "following" Twitter accounts the Ministry considers "inflammatory and seditious," and more severely "retweeting any of their posts." On 30 May 2019, the Ministry circulated SMSs to all registered Bahraini numbers threatening anyone who follows what it called "pro-terrorist accounts" to face legal proceedings. The Ministry of the Interior

The state has manipulated supreme meanings such as peaceful coexistence among the components of the society as justifications for pursuing media professionals and activists.

(1 June 2019) issued a statement renewing its threats to citizens that “retweeting what the inflammatory and seditious accounts post or showing support or applause by commenting on their seditious content expose the individual to legal accountability.”

The threats by Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa on his account on ‘Instagram’ (2 July 2019) led to the removal of the head of the sports section in the newspaper ‘Al-Ayyam’ Aqeel al-Sayyid and the suspension of sports journalist Abdullah Al-Babtain from work. That came after the newspaper published a poll that revealed the sports sector’s dissatisfaction with the performance of the Minister of Youth and Sports Affairs Ayman Tawfeeq Al-Moayyed. Maha Al-Khalifa, a member of the Bahraini Royal House, posted on her social media account (6 July 2019) describing those who participated in Al-Jazeera’s documentary ‘Bahrain: Playing with Fire’ as “traitors.”

On 22 July, “supreme orders” banned the weekly column of the writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh in ‘Akhbar Al-Khaleej’ newspaper. It has been stopped until the time of this report. Photographer Musa Abdali (26 July) was beaten and tortured by the Bahraini embassy staff in London. They also put a wet shirt in his mouth and tied his hands behind

back after his sit-in on the roof of the embassy to protest the authorities’ intention to carry out two death sentences against dissidents.

The Information Affairs Authority (August 2019) suspended the website of the ‘Voice of Manama’ news platform, whose editor-in-chief is the Bahraini journalist Hani Al-Fardan without providing any explanation. The Bahrain International Airport security authorities (15 November) denied access to the American journalist Matthew Cassel and deported him on a plane to another destination. The Department of Political Associations Affairs of the Ministry of Justice (22 December 2019) canceled a seminar in the headquarters of the National Assembly Association. The Department claimed that the topic ‘The Future of the Gulf Cooperation Council’ “touches on the internal affairs of other countries.” In addition, the speaker, renowned journalist Ali Saleh, “was a member of a dissolved political association.”

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 **Cybercrime**



Trials and Legal Proceedings

**Documenting
1595
violations of
freedom of
expression
between
February
2011 and
December
2019**

The third-instance (minor) criminal court (7 January) sentenced an unnamed suspect to three months with immediate effect for “offensively tweeting against the Ministry of Interior on his social media account.” On 16 January 2019, a Bahraini court sentenced the former MP of Al Wifaq bloc Ali al-Ashiri to one month in prison and a fine of 500 dinars for his Tweet declaring that he and his family will boycott the elections.

(3 February 2019) a Bahraini court fined the former broadcaster of Bahrain TV, Mohammed Al-Bishri (Al-Shurouqi), two thousand dinars as a civil compensation for insulting former MP Mohammed Khaled on social media. A local court (21 February 2019) sentenced an unnamed ‘Tweeter’ to one year over charges of “insulting Saudi figures on social media, and inciting hatred of the regime.”

The first-instance court (13 Marc 2019) sentenced the opposition leader Ibrahim Sharif to six months in prison for a Tweet that was deemed a derogatory insult to former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. However, the court suspended the penalty for three years, starting the date of the verdict and fined him 500 dinars. A local court (3 July) fined journalist Ja`far al-Jamri 100 dinars after being convicted of “slandering a member of the civil society.” A local court (17 July 2019) sentenced Bahraini citizen Jassim Muhammad Hassan from the Al-Malikiyah area to 6 months in prison for “distributing pamphlets calling for civil disobedience on the 14th of February anniversary.”

(10 August 2019) The King issued an amnesty for Tweeter Najah Youssef on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. She was spending a 3-year prison sentence since 2017 for writing on Facebook “No to Formula One races on the occupied land of Bahrain.”

The Supreme Criminal Appeals Court (17 September 2019) denied the release of prominent human rights advocate Nabil Rajab based on the penal code and alternative measures. The Lower Criminal Court (14 November) sentenced the psychiatrist Dr. Sharifa Swar to one year in prison, a fine of 200 dinars, and a bail of 500 dinars to stop the execution of the sentence until the appeal. She was charged with “misusing social media”. A local court (11 December) sentenced Bahraini photographer

Musa Abdali, who lives in London, to 5 years in prison and a fine of 2,000 dinars for “forming a terrorist cell and publishing pictures of sabotage and riots.” A local court (11 December 2019) sentenced photographer Hassan Qambar to life imprisonment for “joining a terrorist cell, photographing riots and vandalism and sending photos abroad.”

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 Cybercrime



On 23 January 2019, the Cyber-crimes Unit summoned Jaafar al-Jamri for interrogation about a sarcastic Tweet about a member of the ‘This is Bahrain’ association who said that an airplane took him from Turkey to Tel Aviv unknowingly. The Unit re-interrogated him on 2 February 2019 about other Tweets concerning the government performance.

On 18 April 2019, the Public Prosecutor summoned journalist Jaafar al-Jamri, cyber activist Abeer al-Jalal, political activist Ibrahim al-Manna’ie and lawyer Abdullah Hashim, for interrogation about Tweets on their social media accounts. On 1 June, the Cyber Crimes Unit summoned prominent writer and journalist Aqeel Sawar for interrogation about his Tweet that criticised the Ministry of Interior’s statement that outlawed ‘following’ and ‘retweeting’ accounts of what it considered “seditious”. On 27 October, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned the cyber activist Abdullah Al-Sahli for interrogation about publishing a video clip in which he criticized the head of the Civil Service Bureau, Ahmed Al-Zayed, for “not implementing the Bahrainization plan.”

On 12 November, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned cyber activist Mohammed Hassan Al-Aradi for interrogation concerning statements he made at a symposium held at the progressive Al-Manbar Society about the unfair distribution of scholarships. On 15 December, Security authorities summoned human rights advocate Ebtisam Al-Sayegh by phone from the Hooraa police station. However, she failed to comply with the summons as “security summons by phone are illegal and cannot be trusted.” The General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security (25 December) summoned the journalist Aqeel Swar for interrogation about a complaint filed by the Ministry of Education against him after he posted a Tweet criticizing the Ministry’s delay in assessing his son’s academic certificate for three years.

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 Cybercrime



Arrests and Detentions

The state is drafting a new bill that will allow suing journalists and link penalties to the Anti-terrorism Law

The Bahraini Public Prosecution (14 April 2019) detained the writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh for interrogation upon publishing his article titled 'Media Misinformation and our military catastrophes.' The Public Prosecutor (16 April 2019) also arrested former MP Mohammed Khaled for his Tweet in support of the writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh and accused him of "publishing false news."

The Public Prosecutor (15 May 2019) arrested lawyer Abdullah Hashim on charges of "exploiting his personal account in publishing false and unfounded news that would harm the public order." Security forces affiliated to the Ministry of Interior arrested (31 July 2019) member of the Unitary National Assemblage Ali Jassem on charges of "insulting God on the social media platform Instagram".

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من السجن ...

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التبليغ
ROSECUTION

▼ #Bahrain | 3 months for “insulting the Minister of Interior”...

On 7 January, the third-instance (minor) criminal court sentenced an unnamed defendant to 3 months with immediate effect for “offensively Tweeting against the Ministry of Interior using his social media account.” The defendant’s identity was not disclosed, but the court said that it «was reassured about the evidence against the accused as the elements of the crime of insulting a state authority were present. He posted on his personal Twitter account Tweets that included derogatory remarks about the Ministry of Interior.»

The Tweet was a response to a statement by the Cyber Crimes Unit, published in a local newspaper. It stated that «there are social media accounts run from Iran and threatened candidates in the elections.» The defendant’s Tweet was deemed offensive by the Ministry of Interior.



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 Cybercrime

▼ #Bahrain | A one-month imprisonment for the former MP

Ali al-Ashiri... On 16 January, a Bahraini court sentenced the former MP of Al Wifaq bloc Ali al-Ashiri to one month in prison and a fine of 500 dinars for his Tweet announcing the family’s decision to boycott the elections. The court stipulated a bail of 100 dinars to suspend the imprisonment. “Some people are still asking if I will vote in the elections! As if they are not living or following the aggravated political situation in Bahrain. I am a Bahraini citizen deprived of my political and civil rights; therefore, my family and I will boycott the parliamentary and municipal elections. No to the political isolation law.”





20 19 1 16 Cybercrime

▼ **#Bahrain | Journalist al-Jamri was interrogated...** On 23 January, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned the former 'Al-Wasat' journalist Jaafar al-Jamri. He was interrogated about a sarcastic Tweet about a member of the "This Is Bahrain" association, the cleric Sheikh Fadil Fateel, after the latter stated that he was not aware of the plane that transported him to Tel Aviv in December 2018. Al-Jamri also started a sarcastic hashtag mocking the justifications made by Fateel, leading him to file a case against Al-Jamri.



20 19 1 23 Cybercrime

▼ **#Bahrain | Hossam Sorour 15-year imprisonment was upheld...** On 31 January, the appeals court upheld the sentence of photographer Hossam Sorour to 15 years in prison. On 21 April 2016, a local court sentenced him to 15 years in prison for "being involved in a bombing near the entrance to his village of Al-Daraz."



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الجرائم الالكترونية

التبليغ
ROSECUTION

▼ #Bahrain | Journalist al-Jamri was interrogated...

On 2 February, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned journalist Jaafar al-Jamri, for the second time, nearly a week after a previous summon. He was interrogated about his Tweets commenting on the government's performance.

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 Cybercrime

▼ #Bahrain | TV presenter Al-Shorouki fined 2000 dinars...

On 3 February, a Bahraini court fined the former presenter of Bahrain TV, Muhammad al-Bishri (Al-Shorouki), 2000 dinars. The court determined the aforementioned amount as a civil compensation for the former MP Mohamed Khaled for what it considered to be an "insult" Al-Shorouki committed on his social media account.

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 Cybercrime

▼ #Bahrain | For "insulting Omar al-Bashir," Ibrahim Sharif trial began...

On 11 February, the Lower Criminal Court held the first session of the trial of dissident Ibrahim Sharif, the former Secretary-General of the dissolved WAAD Association, on charges of "insulting the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir." Ibrahim Sharif Tweeted on 25 December 2018 saying, "Go away, Zul .. 30 years ago, Omar Al-Bashir came on the back of a tank claiming to "rescue" [the country]. During his reign, civil wars worsened, the secession of the south took place. He impoverished and humiliated the noble Sudanese people. It is time for Sudanese's freedom and the departure of the authoritarian president." During interrogation, Sharif denied the charges emphasizing that "the matter does not go beyond the framework of his opinion on the events in Sudan." The court decided to postpone the trial to a hearing on 19 of the same month, which in turn postponed it to another session on March 13.



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 Cybercrime

▼ #Bahrain | One year for a Tweeter for "insulting Saudi figures"...

On 21 February, a local court sentenced a not identified Tweeter to one year in prison. He was convicted of "insulting Saudi figures on social media" and "inciting hatred of the regime."

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ROSECUTION

✓ **#Bahrain | A colloquium on the March 1965 uprising was banned...** On 7 March, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs did not allow a colloquium on the March 1965 uprising at the headquarters of the National Assembly Association. The National Assembly Association issued a statement explaining that “[t]his morning, the National Assembly received a request from the head of the Political Associations’ Affairs Office of the Ministry of Justice to cancel the colloquium: ‘The uprising of March 1965 in the national memory’ that the Association was planning to hold on Monday 11 March. The Ministry of Justice justified its decision that “the mentioned colloquium breaks the law since the speaker [Ibrahim Kamal al-Din] is a former leader in the legally dissolved WAAD society.””

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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | 6 months for Ibrahim Sharif and 500 dinars to suspend the penalty...** On 13 March, the first instance court sentenced opposition leader Ibrahim Sharif to 6 months in prison for a Tweet that was considered insulting the former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. The court ordered that the sentence be suspended for a period of 3 years, starting from the date of the verdict, with a fine of 500 dinars.

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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | Journalist Fadhil al-Mansi was summoned...** On 18 March, Bahrain Public Prosecution summoned journalist Fadel Al-Mansi for interrogation. He was interrogated about a report published in the newspaper on 3 November 2018. The report titled “hookah cafes above the law” was about unlicensed cafes but after publication, a case was filed against him.

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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | Dr. Sharifa Swar was summoned...** On 23 March, the Public Prosecutor summoned Dr. Sharifa Swar, a psychiatrist, for interrogation about a video clip she posted on her Instagram account in which she revealed the spreading use of a drug called ‘Lyrica’ among the students of Hamad Girls Secondary School.

Nawaf Al-Awadhi, Head of the Capital Prosecution, said, “The Public Prosecution has started investigations about the case and will take, in the course of investigations, what the law has authorized it to uncover the circumstances of the case.” On 10 April, Dr. Swar was summoned for interrogation again, where she was charged with “public defamation of the complainants,” “spreading false news” and “misuse of social media.”



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من السجن ...

الجرائم الالكترونية

التبليغ
ROSECUTION

✓ **#Bahrain | A Parliamentary committee instigated against writer Ibrahim El-Sheikh...** On 11 April, the Foreign Affairs, Defense and National Security Committee of the Bahraini Council of Representatives attacked Ibrahim El-Sheikh, a writer in Akhbar Al Khaleej newspaper, for what it claimed an “assault on the Bahraini army participating in the Yemen war.”

“We know well the agenda the writer represents, especially with his vicious connections with the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood backed by Qatar,” the Parliamentary committee added.

It also called “the Public Prosecutor, with its given authority, to take immediate judicial procedures against the writer of the article, since it constitute serious breaches through circulating false news during wartime.” This follows El-Sheikh’s article entitled ‘Media misinformation and our military catastrophes,’ in which he criticized the coverage of the UAE Sky News correspondent, Mohamed Al Arab, for the war in Yemen.



#Bahrain | The prosecution accuses Sharifa Swar of «spreading false news»... On 11 April, the Public Prosecution charged psychiatrist Sharifa Swar with “public defamation of the complainants,” “spreading false news” and “misuse of social media.”

Nawaf Al-Awadhi, Head of the Capital Prosecution, stated that “the Public Prosecution has completed its investigations concerning a reported video clip that was circulated on social media.

The video includes individuals talking about the dismissal of a student from her school because of dealing in a regulated drug. The Prosecution also looked at complaints submitted by those whose names were mentioned in the video for being exposed to defamation.”

He added that “the drug that was said to be circulated (Lyrica) is not classified as a prohibited drug but rather a drug that could only be obtained by prescription, and that drug was not seized with any of the students at any time.”





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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | 35 MPs demand accountability for «fabricated news» publishers...** On 13 April, thirty-five Bahraini MPs signed a petition calling on state officials, especially those in charge of judicial institutions, “to assume their role in holding accountable those who violate the law, compromise civil peace and spread lies and fabricated news, in order to keep the society safe.”

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✓ **#Bahrain | Writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh was arrested ...** On 14 April, the Bahraini Public Prosecution summoned writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh for interrogation about his article, Media Misinformation and our military catastrophes, published in Akhbar Al Khaleej. It ordered his arrest for interrogation. The chief prosecutor Abdullah Al-Thawadi said, “the prosecution reviewed what the accused had posted and circulated on his personal account on social media, proved his skeptical approach to the government’s visions and external relations.

In addition, he published an article containing false news regarding the coalition forces, thus losing confidence in its powers and capabilities. Accordingly, it perceives its victories as nothing but mock allegations and misinformation.”

The writer was released on 18 April after the Prime Minister intervened and Al-Sheikh wrote an article of apology.

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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | Former MP was arrested...** On 16 April, the Public Prosecutor summons former MP Mohammed Khaled for his Tweet in support of the writer Ibrahim Al-Sheikh and ordered its detention over charges of “publishing false news.” His tweet, which he posted on his personal Twitter account, stated: “And what they wanted has been achieved, and Ibrahim Al-Sheikh’s column disappeared from Gulf News. God suffices us, for He is the best disposer of affairs.” He was released on 18 April after the Prime Minister intervened and soon deleted his Twitter account.”





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✓ **#Bahrain** | The prosecution appeals the acquittal of the Bahrain Tribune's editor-in-chief... On 17 April, the Bahraini Public Prosecution appealed the acquittal issued for the editor-in-chief of the Bahrain Tribune newspaper, Mahmoud al-Mahmoud. He accused al-Mahmoud of "spreading false news" and "insulting a British businessman after publication that he had embezzled an amount of money," but he was acquitted in the court. The case was adjourned to a hearing on 29 April, when the appeals court upheld his acquittal.



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✓ **#Bahrain** | Interrogating 4 civil activists about their Tweets... On 18 April, Bahraini Public Prosecution summoned journalist Jaafar al-Jamri, cyber activist Abeer al-Jalal, political activist Ibrahim al-Mannai and lawyer Abdullah Hashem. Activists explained that interrogations that were conducted by the Cyber Crime Directorate focused on Tweets they posted over the past days.



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ROSECUTION

✓ **#Bahrain | The Civil Service Bureau considered regulating public sector employees' use of social media...** On 1 May, the Civil Service Bureau announced holding meetings with the Media Affairs Committee to impose disciplinary regulations for public sector employees concerning their use of social media.

The head of the Civil Service Bureau, Ahmed bin Zayed Al-Zayed, stated, "The meeting held on 5 May included deputy assistants of human resources, human resource managers and communication managers in all government institutions, and aimed to clarify the necessary rules for government employees' activities on social media, driven by our national responsibility and to maintain civil peace."

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 **Cybercrime**

✓ **#Bahrain | Journalist Jaafar al-Jamri was interrogated...** On 5 May, the Bahrain Public Prosecution summoned journalist Jaafar Al-Jamri for interrogation. He was interrogated, in the presence of his attorney, about the content of Tweets he wrote on his Twitter account, which implied criticism of matters of public affairs.

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 **Cybercrime**

✓ **#Bahrain | Lawyer Abdullah Hashem arrested for a week on charges of «disseminating false news»...** On 15 May, the Cyber Crimes Unit summoned lawyer Abdullah Hashem, where he was interrogated about Tweets on his Twitter account.

The Public Prosecution stated in a statement that he "abused his personal account in spreading false and unfounded news that would harm the public order. The Public Prosecution office initiated its investigation and looked at the news published on the defendant's personal account, which appeared to be posted over a lengthy period of time. The posts included false information and comments attributed to the accused that would cause confusion and instability in the society, as well as question the performance of the authorities and their ability to maintain security and protect society."

The prosecution said that it "interrogated the accused and confronted him with what he published, and ordered his pretrial detention, after he had been charged with spreading false news, knowing that it could undermine the public order, as well as misuse of social media." He was released before he spent the stipulated pretrial term on 21 May, but the case against him continued.



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 **Cybercrime**

✓ **#Bahrain | The Ministry of Interior accuses al-Mohafaza and Abdulnabi of managing “Na’ib Ta’ib” account...** On 19 May, the Bahraini Ministry of the Interior issued a statement accusing both human rights advocate Yousuf al-Mohafaza and cyber-activist Hassan Abdulnabi of running the “Na’ib Ta’ib” (repentant MP) account on “Twitter.” The account is known for publishing leaks about wing conflicts inside the Bahraini ruling family.

The statement accused them both of “standing behind fake accounts on social media, circulating false news and seeking to destabilize the country.” They denied and refuted the accusations in posts they published on their social media accounts. The Ministry of Interior said that, “there is a network of websites that offend Bahrain’s social security, most of which are managed by external parties in Iran, Qatar, Iraq and European countries, in addition to fugitive individuals against whom judicial convictions were issued.” “The aforementioned accounts have, for some time, been implementing a systematic plan to discredit Bahrain and its people, and spread the spirit of discord and division among the components of society,” the Ministry added.



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Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | The Ministry of Interior criminalizes following the account of the head of the Bahrain Press Association...**

On 21 May, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement accusing the head of the Bahrain Press Association, Adel Marzooq, of promoting division and spreading false news, and threatened to take legal action against him. The statement was based on ‘Tweets’ that posed questions about the Prime Minister’s position and scenarios of disqualifying him.

The Ministry said that “Adel Marzooq’s account is managed from abroad and aims to spread the spirit of discord among the components of Bahraini society. Legal actions are being taken against him and anyone promotes his dubious messages.” In his response to the Ministry, Marzooq said, “Gentlemen in the Ministry of Interior: My account is verified and I have been living in Britain for 8 years after receiving political asylum, as you know. Commenting on disagreements among state officials is a purely journalistic work; it is neither incitement nor insult.”



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Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | A law extending criminalization of government critics is ratified...** On 22 May, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa approved the amendment of the “Anti-terrorism Law,” expanding the scope of prosecuting government critics.

The amendment stipulated that “he shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years, and with a fine of no less than two thousand dinars (5.2 thousand dollars) and not exceeding five thousand dinars (13 thousand dollars) whoever, by any means, promotes, glorifies, praises, justifies, or encourages acts constituting a punitive terrorist activity, whether inside or outside the Kingdom.”

20 19 5 22 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | The Interior criminalizes ‘following’ and ‘retweeting’...** On 22 May, the Ministry of Interior Tweeted a bilingual (Arabic and English) message to both citizens and residents threatening punishment for merely “following” Twitter accounts the Ministry considers “inflammatory and seditious,” let alone retweeting what these accounts post. It threatened that ‘following’ or ‘retweeting’ is sufficient to subject a person to “legal accountability” and that “the immediate shutting down [of these accounts] is a national duty.”

The Cyber Crime Directorate stated: “Following seditious and inflammatory accounts and retweeting them leaves you subject to legal accountability.”



20 19 5 22 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | The Ministry of Interior circulates text messages threatening citizens...** On 30 May, the Ministry of Interior disseminated SMSs to citizens’ phones warning that following seditious accounts that criticizes the government on social media subjects to legal accountability. The messages sparked a wave of panic, as many citizens began to ‘unfollow’ many accounts critical of the government on social media. That was evident in marked drop in the number of followers of these accounts. The Cyber Crime Directorate stated: “Following seditious and inflammatory accounts and retweeting them leaves you subject to legal accountability.”

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نشطاء: محكمة #البحرين في طريقها من السجن ...

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ROSECUTION

▼ **#Bahrain | Journalist Aqeel Swar was summoned...** On 1 June, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned prominent writer and journalist Aqeel Swar for interrogation. He was interrogated by the Director General of the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security, brigadier general Bassam Al Miraj, regarding Swar's Tweet in response to a statement by the Ministry of the Interior, in which citizens and residents were threatened to be punished if they 'follow' accounts that are considered "inflammatory and seditious". In his Tweet, Swar said: "This is the worst thing ever since Bahrain knew the meaning of freedom of expression. Have fear of God. We will not remain silent about naturalization and corruption, nor will we be silent about electronic flies with their vulgar rehtoric. We will remain silent about eavesdropping. Include these words in your lawsuit when you shut down my account. We seek help from His Majesty."

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 **Cybercrime**

▼ **#Bahrain | The Interior renews its threats to citizens...** On 1 June, the Ministry of Interior issued a statement renewing its threats to citizens that "sharing/retweeting what inflammatory and seditious accounts post or showing support for owners of these accounts by commenting on their seditious content expose the individual to legal accountability."

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 **Cybercrime**

▼ **#Bahrain | Bahraini Minister of Commerce said that he hates Al-Ayyam...** On 10 June, the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Zayed R. Al Zayani, refused to make any press statement to Al-Ayyam newspaper during a press conference in which he was speaking to the media. The Minister openly said, "I don't like Al-Ayyam and don't want to answer its questions." The newspaper published the minister's statement saying that "what he did was undemocratic."accountability."

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 **Cybercrime**

▼ **#Bahrain | The first court hearing for the journalist, Jaafar Al-Jamri, was held...** On 10 June, the first hearing of poet and journalist Jaafar Al-Jamri's trial was held on charges of "insulting a member of civil society". He stated that the Public Prosecution summoned him on 5 May upon a complaint filed against him by Sheikh Fadhil Fateel. He also added that the Public Prosecution charged him with "slander and libel" for using the hashtag **#ما_وعيت_إلا_وأنا_في_القدس**.

Al-Jamri indicated that his Tweets on the hashtag were responses to his followers Twitter. He did not mention Sheikh Fateel, pointing out that the latter claimed that he received threats of assault and murder after the spread of the hashtag. Al-Jamri added that the pillars of the lawsuit against him are fragile, noting that Sheikh Fateel had nursed rancour against him after the massive criticism of the visit of the "This Is Bahrain" delegation to Jerusalem.

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من السجن ...

الجرائم الالكترونية

التبليغ
ROSECUTION

✓ #Bahrain | Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad threatens 'Al-Ayyam' newspaper...

On 2 July, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the King's representative for charity and youth affairs, the National Security Advisor and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, published a threat to Al-Ayyam newspaper on his account on Instagram after it had published a poll that revealed the sports sector's dissatisfaction with the performance of the Minister of Youth and Sports Affairs Ayman Tawfeeq Al-Moayyed, who is one of his close associates. "Freedom of expression is guaranteed, but lying is not allowed," Prince Nasser posted. This was understood as a threat to the newspaper after it had published a poll on 1 July under the title 'Dramatic satisfaction decline with the performance of the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs in the national clubs sector.' The poll conveyed the opinion of clubs on the performance of the Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs at the level of national clubs sector during the first half of 2019 based on 10 indicators. Almost all of the answers were not in favour of the Ministry.

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 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Journalist Jaafar Al-Jamri fined 100 dinars...

On 3 July, a local court fined journalist Ja'far al-Jamri 100 dinars after being convicted of "slandering a member of the civil society." Al-Jamri has appealed the verdict, and the case was transferred to the appeals court for consideration on 29 September.

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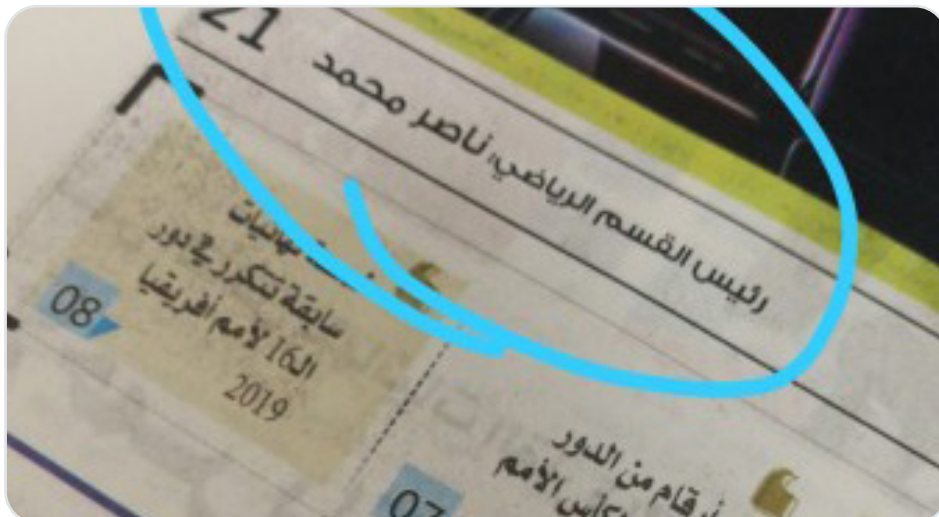
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 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | wo journalists of Al-Ayyam newspapers were removed 48 hours after the Prince's threatening post....

On 4 July, the local newspaper, Al-Ayyam, removed the head of the sports section, Aqeel al-Sayyid, from his position and dismissed sports journalist Abdullah al-Babtain within 48 hours of the threat posted by the King's son, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. Al-Babtain was the editor of the poll about the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which infuriated Prince Nasser.

The newspaper's management asked Al-Babtain to stay at home and not attend his regular workday until they decide about him. As for the head of the sports section, Aqeel al-Sayyid, he was replaced by journalist Nasser Muhammad, whose name was clearly marked on the newspaper's sports supplement as the head of the sports section.



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 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Sheikha Maha Al-Khalifa threatens Bahrainis who appeared in Al-Jazeera's documentary...

On 6 July, Maha Al-Khalifa, a member of the Bahraini Royal House, posted on her social media account, threatening those who participated in Al-Jazeera's documentary 'Bahrain: Playing with Fire.' It was an episode of the Palestinian journalist Tamer Almisshal's program 'What's hidden is greater' on the Qatari TV channel Al-Jazeera. She described the Bahraini guests who participated in the episode (which had not been broadcast yet but only the promo) and described them as "traitors." This comes as part of a pre-emptive campaign on national television and government media, and statements by officials that lasted for nearly two weeks, in which Al-Jazeera was attacked after announcing its intention to broadcast the documentary. The documentary, which was later broadcast, featured an exclusive testimony of a Bahraini officer who led the military squad that stormed Dawar Al-Lulu (Pearl Roundabout) in 2011. It also showed two secret testimonies of Salafi militants who admitted that the Bahraini government asked them and their fellows to assassinate dissidents.

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Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | 6 months for a citizen for «distributing leaflets»...

On 17 July, A local court sentenced Bahraini citizen Jassim Muhammad Hassan from the Malikiyah area to 6 months in prison for distributing leaflets. Authorities said that the suspect distributed leaflets calling for civil disobedience on the anniversary of the start of the Bahrain protests (14 February), when he was arrested the same day and brought to trial.

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Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Photographer Musa Abdali was beaten at the Bahrain embassy in London...

On 26 July, Photographer Musa Abdali was beaten by the staff of the Bahraini embassy in London after he staged a sit-in on the roof of the embassy in protest of the authorities' intention to carry out death sentences against opponents. Abd Ali climbed up the roof of the embassy in the British capital, demanding the revocation of death penalty against the activists Ali Al-Arab and Ahmed Al-Mulla. Media agencies broadcast the sit-in via his mobile phone live video.

Abdali said that he was beaten and tortured by the embassy staff who put a wet shirt in his mouth and tied his hands behind back. The assault did not stop until the British police stormed the embassy building to rescue him. He filed a criminal complaint with the British police saying that he had been subjected to an assassination attempt by the embassy staff.

His lawyer stated that "the police have started investigating these accusations, which they described as serious." The Bahraini embassy issued a statement claiming that Abdali "threatened to jump off the roof of the embassy before the embassy staff intervened to curb what he had done to ensure his safety until the police arrived."



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✓ **#Bahrain | The 'Information' suspends 'Voice of Manama' website...** In August, the Information Affairs Authority suspended the website of the "Voice of Manama" news platform, whose editor-in-chief is the Bahraini journalist Hani Al-Fardan, without providing any explanation. It is noteworthy that the 'Voice of Manama' is an official electronic newspaper licensed by the Ministry of Information (currently the Information Affairs Authority). The newspaper was founded in 2006 in cooperation with "Oman Net" radio and with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) as part of a project to establish nine community radio stations in the Arabian Gulf and Yemen.



✓ **#Bahrain | Political association member arrested for «insulting the Divine Entity»...** On 31 July, security forces affiliated with the Ministry of Interior arrested Ali Jassem, a member of the Unitary National Assemblage. The General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security stated that "A person was arrested on charges of insulting the Divine Entity on one of the social media platforms 'Instagram' and the necessary legal measures were taken [against him]."

On 4 August, the head of the Northern Governorate Prosecution, Abdel-Rahman Al-Maawda, said in another statement that "the prosecution ordered his pretrial detention after he was charged with public infringing on religion, libel and slander, and misusing means of communication, and thus decided to transfer him in custody to trial."



✓ **#Bahrain | Actress Najla Abdul Redha arrested for posting a dance video...** On 5 August, Bahraini authorities arrested actress Najla Abdul Redha (31 years old) after she posted video clips that were deemed "contrary to public morality," according to a statement by the Public Prosecution. The videos she posted on her Instagram are dance clips, which include seductive movements.



✓ **#Bahrain | A royal amnesty for Tweeter Najah Youssef...** On 10 August, security authorities released Tweeter Najah Yusef by a royal decree the king issued pardoning a number of prisoners on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. Najah Yusef, a mother of four children, was sentenced to 3 years in prison in 2017 after she had written on her Facebook account "No to Formula One races on the occupied lands of Bahrain .. [these races] are nothing more than a means for the Al-Khalifa family to whitewash their criminality and their record of grave human rights violations."

Her family received a phone call from Isa Town prison that the detainee was on her way home.





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ROSECUTION

✓ **#Bahrain** | **6 months for a lawyer on charges of “insulting the Divine Entity”...** On 10 September, a local court sentenced lawyer Ali al-Sayegh to 6 months in prison for “insulting the Divine Self on social media.” The defendant appealed and the appeals court later ruled to replace the prison sentence with community service as an alternative punishment.

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 **Cybercrime**

✓ **#Bahrain** | **Al-Ayyam to dismissed 3 journalists to “cut costs”...** In September 2019, Al-Ayyam newspaper, owned by Nabeel Al-Hamar the media advisor to the King of Bahrain, informed three of its staff without prior notice that their contracts were terminated. Journalists are: Muhammad Al-Giousy, Ayman Shakal and Ibrahim Badr, who worked at different sections. The newspaper told them that their dismissal was “to cut costs.” It is the measure that the newspaper started since the beginning of 2019 by dismissing foreign and part-time employees.



Cybercrime

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 **Cybercrime**

✓ **#Bahrain** | **Nabil Rajab’s release denied under the Alternative Penal Code...** On 17 September, the Supreme Criminal Appeals Court refused to release prominent human rights defender Nabil Rajab pursuant to Law No. (18) of 2017 regarding penalties and alternative measures approved by the King on 17 July 2019.

His lawyer, Mohamed Al-Jishi, affirmed that “the court refused to release his client” under this law, which allows the judge to order another penalty in place of the original penalty. These penalties include community service, house arrest, banning specific places, pledging not to contact certain parties, undergoing electronic surveillance, attending rehabilitation and training programs, or repairing damages caused by crime.





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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | One year for a Tweeter for “insulting the Divine Self”...** On 18 September, the Third Minor Criminal Court sentenced Tweeter Ali Jassem, a member of the political bureau of the of the Unitary National Assemblage, to one year in prison for “insulting the divine self” on ‘Instagram’ and slandering another person on the same platform.

In the grounds of judgment, the court said that “freedom of expression and criticism is constitutionally guaranteed and that everyone has the right to express his/her opinion publicly. This freedom halts if it transgresses on the rights and freedoms of others and touches their honor, consideration, religion or beliefs .. which necessitates punishment.”



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 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | Dr. Sharifa Swar brought to trial...** On 23 September, Psychologist Sharifa Swar was sent to the Lower Criminal Court on charges of “misuse of social media” after publishing a video that revealed a network of influential people distributing drug called ‘Lyrica’ among the students of Hamad Girls Preparatory School.

The prosecution charged Swar with “publicly defaming the complainants .. spreading false news .. And misusing means of communication.” Dr. Swar’s attorney, Mohamed Al-Othman, requested an adjournment and a copy of the case documents. The hearing was adjourned to 1st October, but Al-Othman said that “The court has set a very close session that does not allow time to copy and study the documents and submit requests.” A series of adjournments took place, 10 October then 21 October and later to 14 November.

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 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | 51 summonses during the religious season of

Ashura... In Septembr, security authorities carried out a massive assault against preachers and religious singers during the religious Ashura season, which is celebrated by the Shiite community. Over the season, dozens were summoned for interrogation regarding the content of their sermons or poems. Many of them were charged with “insulting the Umayyad caliph Yazid ibn Mu’awiya.” The interrogations aimed at informing preachers and religious singers that they are under close observation and that they should refrain from involvement in any political or religious issues that could be projected on the political reality.

The number of summonses reached 51, including 36 clerics and preachers, 5 religious singers, and 7 administrative summonses, in addition to 3 other individuals.

The following are the names of those who were summoned, noting that a number of them were summoned more than once, as chronologically shown below:

Sheikh Abdul Mohsen Mulla Attia AlJamri - Bani Jamra (4 September), Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Ajimi - Karana (4 September), Sheikh Munir Al-Maatouq - Al Naiem (4 September), Mullah Qasim Zinedine - Al Daraz (4 September), reciter Ali Hammad - Al Burhama (4 September), Sheikh Issa Eid - Karzakan (5 September), Sheikh Sadiq Rabie - Sanabis (5 September), Sheikh Jawad Al-Mirza (5 September), Sheikh Hamed Ashour (5 September), reciter Ahmad Al Awainaty (5 September), Sheikh Munir Al-Maatouq - Al Naiem (5 September), reciter Hady Al-Bilady - al-Bilad al-Qadeem (5 September), Sheikh Fadel Al-Zaki - Abu Saiba (5 September), Sheikh Jaafar Al-Sayegh - Muharraaq (5 September), Sheikh Zahir Al-Khal - Al-Daraz (6 September), Sayyed Jaber al-Shahrakani - Shahrakan (6 September), Sheikh Issa al-Mu'min - Saar (6 September), Sheikh Mohammad Ali al-Mahfuz - Bani Jamra (6 September), reciter Abdallah Al-Buri (Abu Sajjad) - Buri (6 September), Jamil Al-Asfour (obsequies/ma'tam leader) - Al-Shakhurah (6 September), reciter Abdallah Al-Buri (Abu Sajjad) - Buri (7 September), Sheikh Hassan Al-A'ali - A'ali (7 September), Mullah Mahdi Al-Manami - Al-Nuwaidrat (7 September), Sheikh Aziz Al-Khadran - Hamad City (7 September), Sheikh Hani Al-Bannaa - Daih (7 September), Sheikh Aqeel al-Ghanimi - Daraz (8 September), Sheikh Abdullah Al Amir Malillah - Naiem (8 September), Sheikh Aziz Al-Khadran - Hamad City (8 September), Sayyed Ahmad Al Wadaii - Barbar (8 September), Sheikh Hassan Al-Shakhuri - Shakhura (8 September), Sheikh Ali Ashur - Karzakan (8 September), Sheikh Issa al-Mu'min - Dair (8 September), Mullah Qasim Zinedine - Daraz (8 September), Sheikh Hassan Al-A'ali - A'ali (8 September), Ustaz Ali Mahanna (8 September), Sayyed Saied Hussein - Sitra (8 September), Abdel-Majid Abdullah (Hajji Smud) - Dumistan (8 September), Sheikh Jasim Al-Dumistan (9 September), Sayyed Maytham al-Muhafazah - Barbar (9 September), Sheikh Mamdouh Al-A'ali - A'ali (9 September), Mullah Mahdi Al-Manami - Al-Nuwaidrat (9 September), Sayyed Ahmad Al-Wada'ii - Barbar (10 September), Sheikh Issa al-Mu'min - Diar (10 September).



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من السجن ...

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ROSECUTION

✓ #Bahrain | A video brings the Muharraq Fans Association President to interrogation...

On 6 October, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned the President of the Muharraq Club Fans Association and the National Team Saad Mahboub after publishing a post on Instagram about the rival club, Al Riffa, which is known as the ruling family club. "Riffa is at the bottom .. because of its sports performance." The video clip caused him to be removed from the association's presidency.



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 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Activist Abdullah Al-Sahli summoned for criticizing director of the Service Bureau...

On 27 October, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned cyber activist Abdullah Al-Sahli for interrogation about publishing a video clip in which he criticized the head of the Civil Service Bureau, Ahmed Al-Zayed, for "not implementing the Bahrainization plan." He was also summoned on 30 October for interrogation at the Public Prosecution for the same reason. He was released later. His first trial session on the charges began on 24 November .



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✓ #Bahrain | The Ministry of Health threatens Al-Watan newspaper...

On 3 November, the Ministry of Health issued a statement against the Al-Watan newspaper after it had published the day before a news report about the spread of a bacterium in Salmaniya Hospital, one of the main hospitals in the country. In its official statement, the ministry accused the newspaper of “exaggerating and intimidating people,” warning that it “would not allow the red lines of freedom of expression to be crossed.”

On 2 November, the newspaper published a report titled ‘Salmaniya bacterium continues and the souls are blown with the wind.’ The report quoted sources in the government medical complex stating that “a bacterium called ‘Pseudomonas’ spread across ward 307 specializing in treating premature infants, and that the Department of Pediatrics does not quarantine infected children; it only puts them in separate beds divided by curtains.”



✓ #Bahrain | The prosecution pressed charges against photographers Hassan Qambar and Musa Abdali...

In November, the Public Prosecution filed a new case against photographers Hassan Qambar and Musa Abdali (along with 30 other people accused of forming a terrorist cell seeking to destabilize security in the country). The prosecution pressed the charges of “photographing sabotage and riots” against photographer Hassan Qambar who sent the photos to photographer Musa Abdali, who lives abroad in the British capital, London.

20 19 11 3 Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Mohammed Hassan Al-Aradi interrogated for criticizing scholarships distribution policy...

On 12 November, the Cyber Crime Unit summoned cyber activist Mohammed Hassan Al-Aradi for interrogation concerning statements he made at a colloquium held at the progressive Al-Manbar Society about the unfair distribution of scholarships. He was summoned upon a complaint against him filed by the Ministry of Education. Al-Aradi stated that the ministry accused him of “insulting the minister and demanding his resignation” and that he “submitted his responses and left” on the same day.





20 19 11 12 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | One year for Dr. Sharifa Swar...** On 14 November, the Lower Criminal Court sentenced psychologist Dr. Sharifa Swar to one year in prison and fined her 200 dinars, and a bail of 500 dinars to suspend the execution of the judgment until the appeal. The law case was concerning a video clip that was circulated on social media in which few individuals talked about the dismissal of a student from her school for drug dealing.

20 19 11 14 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | US journalist Matthew Cassel denied access to the country...** On 15 November, security authorities at Bahrain International Airport denied access to the American journalist Matthew Cassel and deported him on a plane to another destination. Matthew Cassel is a documentary filmmaker and multimedia journalist based in the Middle East. His work focuses on documenting stories of people facing conflict and persecution in the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe.”



20 19 11 15 Cybercrime

✓ **#Bahrain | Cyber activist Aref Al-Mullah summoned for interrogation...** On November 18, the Cyber Crime Unit of the Ministry of Interior summoned cyber activist Arif Al-Mullah for interrogation. He reported that his interrogation was focused on opinions he had expressed on social media, in which he criticized the inaccurate meters that the Ministry of Electricity installed.

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✓ #Bahrain | Al-Nabaa newspaper closed down... On 27

November, the weekly newspaper, Al-Nabaa, affiliated with the 'Al-Minbar Al-Islami' Society (Muslim Brotherhood), announced that it stopped publishing. The newspaper attributed its stopping to "the restructuring of the Dar Al-Nabaa Press and Information Foundation which publishes the newspaper." Nonetheless, information indicate that it actually stopped because of the authorities' tightening grip on the movement that the newspaper speaks of, especially after on the current expressed by the newspaper, especially after Al-Minbar hosted a colloquium that criticized restrictions imposed on political associations.

Abdel-Moneim El-Meir, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, said that "The decision to restructure the institution demanded to stop the issuance until we are ready for a fresh start that responds to the demands of the digital media market." It is not really known whether the newspaper will resume or will cease publication permanently.



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Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Two foreign women and a Bahraini arrested for photographing themselves in "positions of moral turpitude"

... On 28 November, security authorities arrested two foreign girls and a Bahraini youth on charges of indecent acts.

On its official Twitter account, the Ministry of Interior said, "Commenting on the indecent photos that were circulated on social media, it is to protect public morals, two foreign girls who committed acts of moral turpitude another Bahraini citizen (28 years) who was involved in the incident using his car." Social media circulated nude pictures of the two foreigners taken along a coast in the country.

On 2 December, the Public Prosecution ordered they transfer to trial on charges of "posting pornographic photos and encouraging prostitution on social media." The case was scheduled for a hearing on the 4th of the same month.

Abdel-Moneim El-Meir, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, said that "The decision to restructure the institution demanded to stop the issuance until we are ready for a fresh start that responds to the demands of the digital media market." It is not really known whether the newspaper will resume or will cease publication permanently.

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Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | TV presenter Muhammad Al-Shorouki arrested for «offending Kuwait»...

On 30 November, security authorities arrested the former presenter of Bahrain TV, Muhammad Al-Bishri (Al-Shorouki), after he had posted a video on his YouTube channel that was considered insulting to a "sister country". On its official Twitter account, the Ministry of Interior said, "Taking legal measures against a person after he posted a video clip on some social media websites that includes offense of a sister country," referring to the State of Kuwait.

He appeared before the Public Prosecution on 1 December 2019 and admitted the charges. The aforementioned was released three days after his arrest."

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Bahrain in 2019: A Cybercrime Syndrome

The tenth annual report

The Bahrain Press Association

2019

12 December

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Journalist @Journalist_BH . 1h

Bahrain ... [instagram.com/p/1285526g8d/](https://www.instagram.com/p/1285526g8d/)

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نشطاء: محكمة #البحرين في انتظار مراح لاحقة
من السجن ...

الجرائم الالكترونية

التبليغ
ROSECUTION

✓ #Bahrain | Photographer Musa Abdali sentenced to 5 years...

On 11 December, a local court sentenced Bahraini photographer Musa Abdali (resident of UK) to 5 years in prison and a fine of 2,000 dinars for the charges he was convicted with. The court charged him and 30 other people with “forming a terrorist cell seeking to destabilize the country” and “publishing photos of sabotage and riots.” He appeared before the Public Prosecution on 1 December 2019 and admitted the charges. The aforementioned was released three days after his arrest.”



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Cybercrime

✓ #Bahrain | Life sentence for photographer Hassan Qambar...

On 11 December, a local court sentenced photographer Hassan Qambar to life imprisonment for “joining a terrorist cell .. photographing riots and vandalism .. and sending videos abroad [to Musa Abdali].” Thus, the sentences under which he was detained exceeded the barrier of one hundred years, as he had been previously convicted with other charges pertaining to his activities of photographing protests.



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✓ #Bahrain | Hoora police station summoned human rights advocate Ebtisam Al-Sayegh for interrogation ...

On 15 December, security authorities summoned human rights defender Ebtisam Al-Sayegh, a member of the ‘Peace’ Organization for Democracy and Human Rights, by phone from the Hoora police station, asking her to come for interrogation. But Al-Sayegh said that she would not comply with the order as summonses via phone are were illegal and cannot be trusted.

She Tweeted saying, “I am fine so far. Security summonses over the phone are illegal and I do not trust them as they bring back painful memory that I do not wish to experience again, neither myself nor any person.”

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Cybercrime

▼ **#Bahrain | 'Justice' intervenes to cancel a colloquium at the National Assembly...** On 22 December, the Department of Political Associations Affairs of the Ministry of Justice canceled a colloquium in the headquarters of the National Assembly Association. The speaker, renowned journalist Ali Saleh, was planning to talk about 'the future of the gulf cooperation council (GCC)'. In a phone call with the President of the National Democratic Assembly, the Ministry justified its decision on the grounds that "the colloquium to be held touches on the internal affairs of other countries" and that one of the participants is "a member of a dissolved political association," in reference to Saleh's former membership in the opposition National Democratic Action Association (WAAD).



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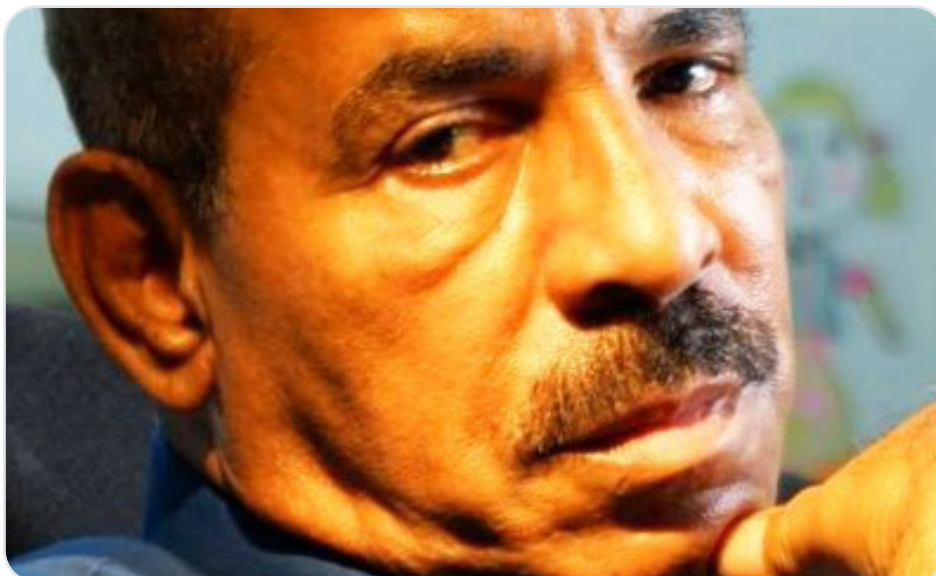
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Cybercrime

▼ **#Bahrain | Journalist Aqeel Swar summoned for interrogation...** On 25 December, the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security summoned journalist Aqil Swar. Swar received a summons to appear for interrogation in the criminal investigations building, without providing him with any information or the reasons for this summons. Upon arrival, the two interrogating officers told him that the claimant is the Minister of Education. They interrogated him about the content of a Tweet in which he criticized the Ministry after it had rejected the assessment of his son's master's degree. After making his statement, Swar signed the proceedings and left.



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20 19 1 4 **Cybercrime**

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ROSECUTION

Bahraini Press Association (BPA)

New Press Law “a Crime” for Bahrain and Journalists; Government Must Cease Action

✓ **#London | Bahraini Press Association – 8th of November 2019...** The Bahraini Press Association confirms that, after reading the new Press and Media bill in Bahrain, the bill establishes to contain freedoms of opinion, expression, and the press; which overrides the levels of press freedoms in Bahrain before the reforms project, and abiding by the country’s constitution.

The Association warns that the bill is a full crime and a total disappointment, especially that many of the bill’s articles contain blatant restrictions on the freedom of the press, where it places the publishing media under the control of the government, and the journalists under laws related to penalties and terrorism together.

The cabinet has debuted its weekly meeting (Sunday the 27th of October 2019) studying the Press and Media bill so it would be sent to the parliament after endorsement.

Around 25% of the new bill’s 85 articles declare the possible penalties journalists and their employers would face if the law is breached. The bill specialized 20 articles to form trials and penalties that start with huge fines and ends with imprisoning journalists. This comes at a critical period where the government has practiced, since 2011, systematic policies towards press freedoms and freedoms of expression and opinion in the country.



Journalist Imprisonment

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Press Freedom

The Association confirms that at the time that the bill stresses on press freedom, yet its articles contain it with several vague expressions that could hold many explanations. There are many clauses that could place a journalist under accountability. Articles 64, 65, 66, 67, and 68 define 19 clauses that are considered prohibited which would lead, if breached, the journalist to strict accountability. These clauses were worded so that they could easily adapt with any accusation against the journalists.

Among these clauses are huge fines for journalists in the case of publishing or spreading what is considered “a blemish in the ruler or a prime minister of an Arab, Islamic, or any other state that the kingdom has diplomatic representation in.”

The Association sees that this clause can be easily modulated at any time against journalists that tackle Arab, regional, or international affairs. And it questions: what’s the definition of blemish in this clause and what are its boundaries?

In reality, authorities didn’t suffice with these articles that limit press freedom, but it indicated in the 2nd article of the bill that “Press freedom (...) is guaranteed in accordance to the conditions and provisions based on this law and its executive list and the decisions issued by the ministry.”

The ministry didn’t accompany the bill with the executive list, and it’s unknown what are the explanations that this list would include, and whether it will contain more restrictions on press freedom.

Article 13 also barred the prevented the publication of any item that is conflicts with the constitution or contravenes with commitments mentioned in the code of honor. The bill, in its first article, defined the code of honor as “the basis of the organizational behavior for journalistic ethics issued by the order of the minister.”

The Right to Gather Information

It doesn’t differ much for the right to obtain information than press freedom, for the 6th article has indicated that the journalist’s right to obtain information is only “permissible in accordance to the laws of its source.”

The article doesn’t oblige the governmental and private sector parties to give journalists information, but it specified that with “providing its information, statistics, and available news that doesn’t pose a legal problem or breaches in the general order in the case of publishing or attainment.”

The Association sees that such wordings are in line with Press rights, yet, at the same time, place legal escapes to violate and restrain them.

Blocking or Shutting Down a Press Institution

The bill provided the closure and blocking newspapers and websites in four places, and it didn’t confine that to judicial rulings solely, but the bill gave right to a specialized party (Ministry of Information) to block websites as well.

Article 62 states that it’s the ministry’s right to issue calls to “shut down a press institution for a duration of 30 days,” and articles 57, 58, and 70 state that courts can block newspapers and websites for a duration that reaches almost a whole year.

The Association saw that it's not the ministry's right anyway to block newspapers and websites, calling for obliteration of the articles that grant the judiciary rights to block newspapers, unless under major criminal offenses.

The Association confirms as well that the Ministry of Information, and for the past years, wasn't a trustworthy side when dealing with newspapers or granting it the right to shut down ones. Especially that the ministry issued illegal decrees, most prominently banning Al-Wasat newspaper from publishing (June 2017) for pure "political" reasons and without a judicial rule.

Internet Monitoring

The Association is surprised from censorship some of the bill's articles has on websites and e-news media outlets, where article 41 states that the bill's rulings apply on "electronic publishing houses, electronic newspapers that don't have published origins, websites and platforms and accounts for news services, websites and platforms for live broadcast and podcasts, websites for print newspapers, Audiovisual content, websites or channels or platforms or e-programs that use organized activities under this law."

The bill also obligates websites to preserve all what's published and provide the preserved piece to the ministry at the latter's request.

The Association sees that involving platforms and news accounts and others in this law reveals the governmental intentions to control the general atmosphere, where the government what's to tighten its grip on all what's written and broadcasted online.

Cinema and Visual Media

The law designated clauses specialized in monitoring cinematic work, and article 36 stated to form a committee in the ministry called "The Committee of Monitoring Cinema Movies and Recorded Publications."

The bill granted the committee vast powers to supervise movies, amongst that the right to delete what is described as "scenes that it sees as a breach to the constituents of the state or society or religion or morals and decency". And the bill grants the ministry the right in "issuing to cinema owners or supervisors instructions and that aim to maintain the cinema programs under religious, national, moral, artistic, and decency-related standards."

In this context, the Bahraini Press Association refuses the extents of governmental control that reaches the work of cinema, as it declared its wonder from the government's disregard to placing a law that permits the proclamation of media and private broadcast outlets.

The Association also calls the government to stop the bill and pave the road for a discussion with civil society institutions to draft a law that preserves freedoms and protects journalists, indicating that the bill in its current format only enforces governmental oppression on journalistic work and the dedication to a systematic policy that targets freedom of opinion and expression in the country.



On the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, NGOs call for immediate actions

✓ **#Beirut | Bahraini Press Association – 14th of November 2019...** To mark the 6th International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, on 02 November 2019, which was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its 68th session in 2013, 18 NGOs called for immediate actions at the conclusion of an event in Beirut entitled “No to impunity for the crimes committed against journalists in the Arab region.”

The sponsoring NGOs are the Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Bahrain Press Association (BPA), CIVICUS, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Development Refqan Organisation in Yemen, Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), IFEX, International Media Support (IMS), Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights (IOHR), Maharat Foundation, Media Association for Peace (MAP), Metro Center for Journalists' Rights and Advocacy, Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA), PEN International, Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), Syrian League for Citizenship, and the World organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

The event included a seminar which was moderated by Khalid Ibrahim from GCHR in addition to speakers Adel Marzooq from BPA, Abeer Bader Yassin, an independent journalist from Yemen, and Mustafa Saadoon from the IOHR. Two speakers, Roula Mikhael of Maharat and Vanessa Bassil of MAP, were unable to attend due to the closure of some roads as a result of popular protests in Lebanon.

Marzooq talked about the massive violations that have been committed against journalist in Bahrain by authorities and the fact that after the closure of the only independent newspaper in the country “Al-Wasat” there is no space left for journalists to publish their views freely. He added that the government is using the Cyber Crimes law to target online activism. Marzooq called on the international community to act immediately and provide support for at-risk journalists and put more pressure on repressive governments to respect freedom of the press.

Yassin talked about the situation of journalists in Yemen, describing it as a tragic reality in one of the most dangerous countries to live and work as a journalist, which has resulted in many independent journalists fleeing outside the country. She added that the international community and its organisations did not provide the required protection to journalists in order to dispel the fear of violations against them, so there must be firm and strong mechanisms regarding crimes committed against the media, otherwise it is no wonder that they remain targeted and exposed to the risk, and that the voice of truth remains silent.

Saadoon said that since the beginning of the popular protests in Iraq on 01 October 2019, journalists have experienced difficult situations, there are many threats from authorities or groups loyal to them, and there are dozens of journalists

who left Baghdad for the Kurdistan region of Iraq as well as Beirut, Istanbul and Amman. He added that the international community falls short on supporting Iraqi journalists and enhancing their protection and should reconsider typical mechanisms of supporting civil society organisations as well as journalists.

A photo exhibition was also organised to mark the International Day to End Impunity, in order to shed light on journalists in the Arab region who have been killed or disappeared in the past years, including in Palestine, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

The events aimed to draw attention to the serious risks faced by journalists as they do their peaceful work in these nine countries and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, in addition to raising voices to demand the strengthening of protection and security for journalists, an essential requirement. This includes journalists and professionals working in various media outlets in war and conflict zones as well as those carrying out their work during times of peace.



On the eighth anniversary of the issuance of the “Bassiouni report”

Bahraini organizations call on the government of Bahrain to launch a genuine and comprehensive national reconciliation initiative

✓ **#London | Bahraini Press Association – November 23, 2019...**

Today, November 23, marks the eighth anniversary of the release of the BICI report, known as the Bassiouni Report.

Although many local and international parties, with all their different political and rights-based aspects and interests, were counting on this government / UN report and its recommendations to play an active role in achieving national reconciliation, overcoming the political and security crisis and reducing human rights violations in the country, the authority is still evading the implementation of the report's recommendations eight years after the issuance of the Bassiouni report. We recall here the statements of the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Mahmoud Sharif Bassiouni, on May 10, 2016, that the government has implemented only 10 out of 26 recommendations, and didn't deal well with reforms of priority, such as those related to accountability and prisoners of conscience; this is a reality that has not changed since the year 2016 till today.

The committee, composed of eminent international human rights experts, analyzed and verified various violations in Bahrain during 2011 and concluded its work with recommendations to the government on how to prevent such incidents and address their consequences and repercussions. The committee delivered a final report on November 23, 2011, to King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The

report identified 26 recommendations to the Bahraini Government, which aimed at meaningful reforms to end continued systematic violations.

Furthermore, we at Bahrain Interfaith, the Bahrain Press Association and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, urge the Government of Bahrain to adopt the option of dialogue in order to achieve comprehensive national reconciliation and fix the current crisis, and to commit to the recommendations adopted in the report; in particular Recommendation No. 1725-b, which states the importance of “ the development of a national reconciliation program that addresses the grievances of groups which are, or perceive themselves to be, deprived of equal political, social and economic rights and benefits across all segments of Bahrain’s population.”

Referring to recommendation 1719 – “to adopt legislative measures requiring the Attorney-General to investigate claims of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and to use independent forensic experts. Such procedures should guarantee the safety of those raising such claims. Furthermore, the legislation should provide for remedies for any person claiming retribution for having raised a claim of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”- we again call on the Bahraini authorities to invite Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, to visit Bahrain and to take the necessary measures against both the Authority on the one hand and the victims on the other.

Moreover, we emphasize the need for serious government’s actions regarding the media incitement issues, as the Committee made the following recommendations (recommendation 1724):

1. To consider relaxing censorship and allowing the opposition greater access to television broadcasts, radio broadcasts and print media. The continuing failure to provide opposition groups with an adequate voice in the national media risks further polarizing the political and ethnic divide.
2. To establish professional standards for the media and other forms of publications that contain an ethical code and an enforcement mechanism, designed to uphold ethical and professional standards in order to avoid incitement to hatred, violence and intolerance, without prejudice to internationally protected rights of freedom of expression.
3. To undertake appropriate measures including legislative measures to prevent incitement to violence, hatred, sectarianism and other forms of incitement which lead to the violation of internationally protected human rights, irrespective of whether the source is public or private.

In light of the importance of the Bassiouni report and its recommendations, and in order to reach a solution to the crisis in Bahrain, we at Bahrain Interfaith, Bahrain Press Association, and Bahrain Center for Human Rights emphasize the following:

- Adhering to the 26 recommendations of the report and working on their implementation, including allowing local and international civil society institutions to monitor their progress.
- Working hard to open the prospects of dialogue and make way for a genuine and comprehensive national reconciliation in a way that results in the satisfaction of all parties and segments of society.
- Allowing the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to enter Bahrain and prepare a

detailed report on cases of torture and to compensate the victims. This includes the launching of a national project on transitional justice.

- • Allowing independent media, visual, print and audio, to be present and work in Bahrain, and monitoring all media outlets and preventing the use of hate speech and incitement to violence.
- • Reunifying in Bahrain and allowing all its citizens to return to their homeland without any threat or danger, including returning the citizenship to Bahrainis, whose nationalities have been revoked.
- • Terminating all legal legislation contrary to the two International Covenants and Bahrain's human rights obligations issued after February 2011, particularly with regard to the abolition of the so-called Political Isolation Law, the dropping of political and civil rights to a broad community, the abolition of Bahraini nationality, and laws restricting freedom of opinion, expression, and the press.
- • Releasing all political detainees, especially the elderly, women and children.



Recommendations

Bahrain Press Association condemns the targeting of journalists, bloggers, and photographers, which the Association believes, has become a systematic, common practice. Such constraints have considerably affected Bahrain's international reputation in terms of press freedom.

The Association calls upon the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Nations and all international organizations and bodies concerned with the defense of freedom of opinion and expression, press and media freedom to exert urgent pressure on the Bahraini government to:

- Immediately, and unconditionally, release of all photographers, reporters, journalists, and activists detained for conducting their work in covering protests or exercising their right of expression;
- Stop arbitrary prosecutions and arrests and judicial trials on charges of "insulting the king," "spreading false statements" made against Internet activists and media professionals. Charges such as "protesting" for photographers, "inciting hatred of the regime" for politicians, and all charges pertaining to freedom of expression must be revoked;
- Secure the freedom of media and the press and to shut down the Office of Internet Surveillance in the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication, and to abolish Law No. (47) that regulates the press, publishing, and printing in the country;
- End the state's monopoly of the television, radio and print media and enable the voice of opposition in the media, including reauthorizing the publication of Al-Wasat; and to
- Invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression to schedule an urgent visit to Bahrain.

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