

13th Annual Report on Freedoms
Journalism and media in Bahrain 2021



Bahrain 2022

The Dead Island

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and media in Bahrain
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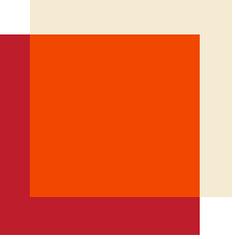


Bahrain Press Association

**An association that defends
the freedom of the press
and the media in Bahrain,
founded on July 9, 2011.**

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A. Introduction

Compared to 49 violations in 2021, the "Bahrain Press Association" was able to document and verify about 41 violations against journalists, media professionals and cyber activists during the year 2022. Thus, the number of documented acts of infringement of freedom of expression since the February 2011 uprisings until December 2022 rises to about 1811 violations.

The title of this annual report, "Bahrain 2022: The Dead Island," attempts to describe what the government stifling policies of freedom of expression had led to. Year after year, Bahrain is becoming a dead island where voice cannot live, nor do its inhabitants dare to express their positions and opinions freely and reassuredly. Bahrainis live in a closed circle of laws and provisions that can turn any opinion into a crime punishable by law.

In the details of the violations recorded during 2022, the Bahrain Press Association documented 17 cases of interrogation and arrest, 9 judicial procedures, and other 15 various violations.

The ongoing monitoring carried out by the Association since 2011 shows that four recurring charges topped most of what was brought against those who were summoned or whose cases were transferred to trials, namely: insulting a statutory body, spreading false news, insulting religious symbols, and defamation and slander. Lawsuits pertaining to the Internet, social media and mobile chat applications accounted for about %95 of the documented cases.

The concerned authority in all these cases is usually the "General

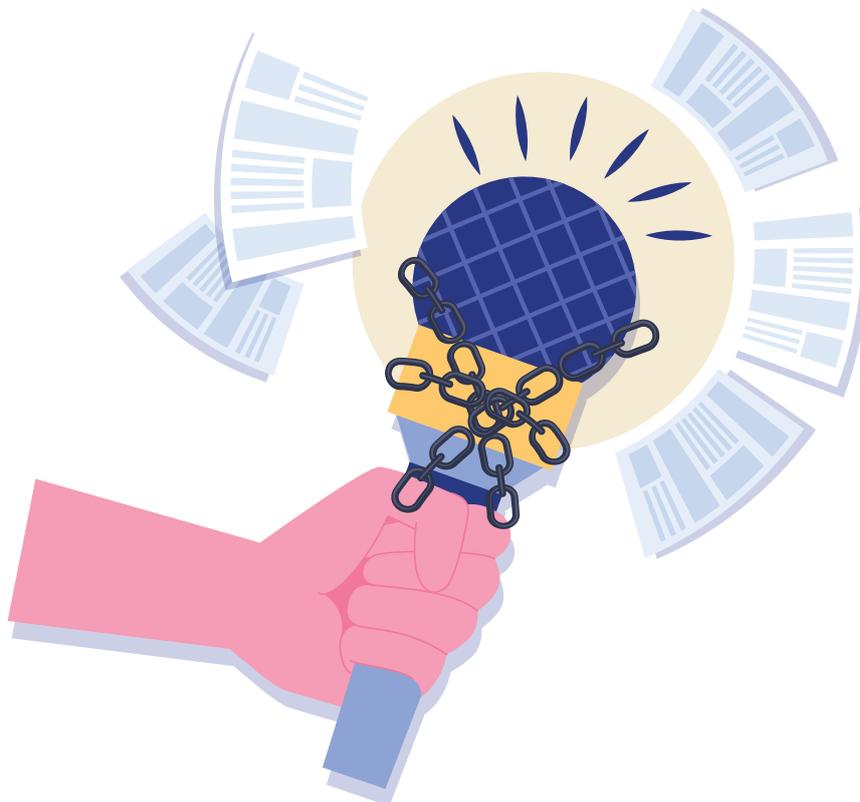
Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security" of the Bahraini Ministry of Interior. The Directorate engages in direct censorship, investigation, summons, preliminary investigation and referral to the Public Prosecution. However, this year, the role of the "National Communication Center" also clearly emerged, which represented not only another challenge, but rather a new opponent to the press and freedom of expression, especially the print media. Although the National Centre was established in 2016 for the purpose of unifying the government media discourse, its role has been growing steadily. It now controls—as reported by a prominent female journalist close to the government—the drafting of interviews and even the news headlines. As a result, the different newspapers present similar content, as if they are one outlet carries different names.

One of the prominent indicators this year is the increased lawsuits filed by the Ministry of Education against its critics, which amounted to at least 4 cases, two of which led to court orders against the defendants. This is an unusual development that can hardly be found in other ministries except for the Ministry of Interior. Most of the summons and trials held against citizens on charges of "insulting a statutory body" belonged exclusively to the Ministry of Education. In all those cases, the lawsuits were filed by the Ministry itself. Paradoxically, the Ministry that should be the model for other ministries in instilling the values of freedom of opinion and expression is suppressing the freedoms stipulated in the constitution. Bahrain's normalization agreement with Israel received widespread popular rejection through social media.

Nonetheless, this denunciation was not shown in any way in the local media during 2022.

There was, and still is, great hope for change with appointing a new Prime Minister with broad powers. The government structure that the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, formed twice this year (13 June and 22 November) brought wide acclaim. However, this yet has to be reflected in any way on the reality of the press, media or freedoms in

general. Today, Bahrain ranks among the lowest international indicators of freedom of expression and political freedoms. It came the last of the six Arab Gulf states in the annual press freedom index issued by Reporters Without Borders organization during the year 2022. Freedom House Organization also continued to classify Bahrain as a "repressive, not free country" in its civil and political rights and liberties index.



B. Milestones in 2022

1. Interrogations and Arrests



The Cybercrime Directorate summoned (5 February 2022) the President of Altajdeed Cultural and Social Society, Jalal Al-Qassab, for interrogation regarding the content of lectures he gave on the Association's YouTube account. However, he was released on the same day. In addition, the Public Prosecution interrogated (16 February 2022) journalist

Mohammed al-Ghasra, director of the "Delmon Post" website, on charges of "spreading false news about a meeting for representatives of a number of associations with a foreign agency."

The Public Prosecution summoned (19 May 2022) lawyer Abdullah Hashem for interrogation on charges

of "libel and slander" following a lawsuit filed against him by the former correspondent of the Saudi "Al-Arabiya" TV channel, Muhammad Abdul-Razzaq Muhammad Ismail al-Zoba'i, known as "Muhammad al-Arab", where the case was transferred to the court. Moreover, the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned (29 June 2022) Tweeter Nawal Attia for interrogation regarding opinion Tweets she posted on "Twitter" in which she criticized the performance of members of Parliament.

The Criminal Investigation Department summoned (17 July 2022) the cyber activist Muhammad Hassan Al-Aradi, upon a lawsuit filed against him by a senior official in the Ministry of Education after he Tweeted criticizing the scholarship distribution system. The security authorities arrested (27-21 July 2022) the well-known academic, Dr. Nader Kazem, a faculty member at

the University of Bahrain, for a week. He was interrogated for hours about his opinions in his books. The security authorities arrested (11 August 2022) two people, including a minor, on charges of "insulting religious symbols."

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned (15 August 2022) Tweeter Nawal Attia, after a complaint was filed against her by the Parliamentary candidate, Salman Saif Al-Shamiri. The Directorate also summoned (6 September 2022) lawyer Abdullah Hashem for calling on the unemployed to protest against the government.

Additionally, it summoned (10 November 2022) the cyber activist Mohammed Hassan Al-Aradi, for interrogation about WhatsApp messages he circulated about one of the parliamentary candidates in District 7 in Muharraq. Similarly,

the Directorate summoned (14 December 2022) blogger Nawal Attia regarding a complaint filed against her by a female Tweeter who accused her of "incitement and defamation." The Directorate also summoned (14 December 2022) the cyber activist Youssef Al-Am, where he was interrogated regarding a complaint filed against him by a female Tweeter who accused him of "incitement and defamation."

2. Judicial Proceedings

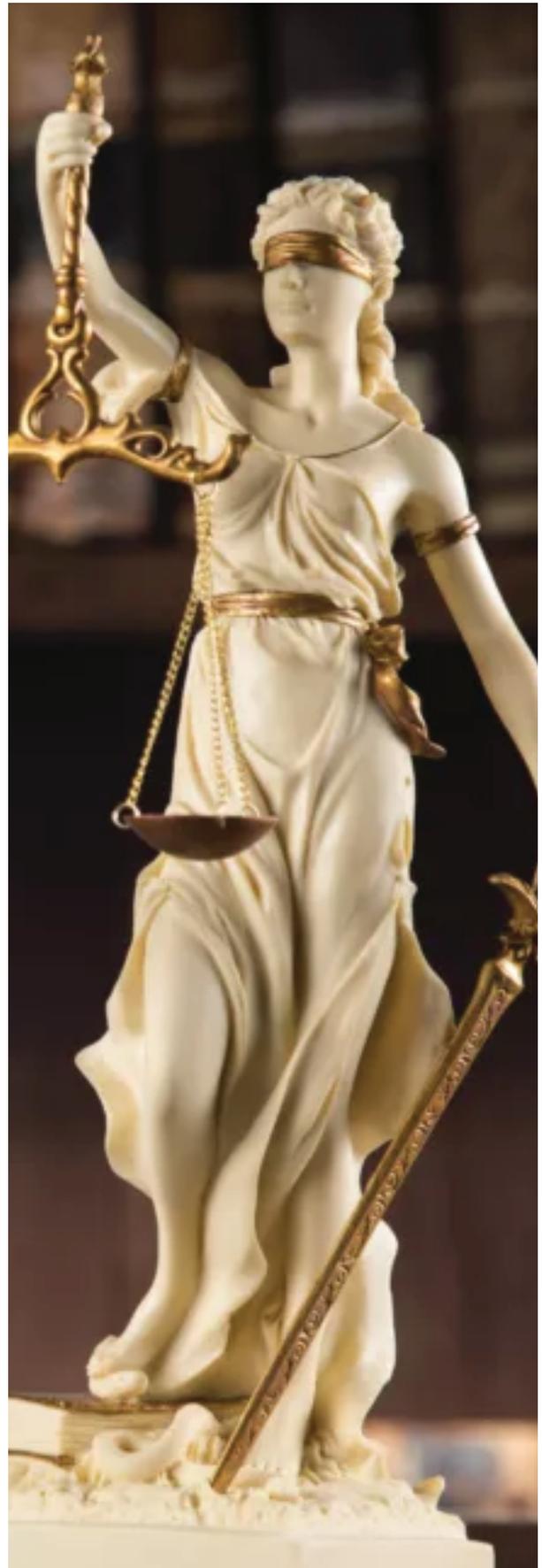
The Cybercrime Directorate announced (1 January 2022) taking legal proceedings-which it did not specify-against psychiatrist Dr. Sharifa Siwar on charges of "insulting and defaming public figures". The execution judge approved (25 January 2021) the conditional release of the photographer Ahmed Humaidan under the Alternative Penal Code 11 months before the end of his -10

year sentence. The alternative punishment has yet to be announced.

A Bahraini court sentenced (17 March 2022) the Shiite cleric Sheikh Muhammad al-Mady to one year in prison for speaking inappropriately about the Umayyad ruler Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan. A local court (6 July 2022) issued a ruling fining lawyer Abdullah Hashem an amount of 200 dinars for defaming and insulting the former correspondent of the channel, Al-Arabiya, Muhammad Al-Arab. A minor criminal court sentenced (7 August 2022) a -43year-old Arab woman to 6 months and deportation from the country after she published a video clip that "contained indecent words and gestures."

The Minor Correctional Court of

Justice sentenced (31 August 2022) a -17year-old child to one month on charges of “insulting religious symbols” on “TikTok.” The Court of Appeal upheld (16 October 2022) fining a person whose identity was not revealed an amount of 800 dinars, on charges of “disseminating false news about through a WhatsApp group.” A local court ruled (14 November 2022) a two-month prison sentence and dismissal from school for a high school student for criticizing the Ministry of Education exams. Finally, a criminal court sentenced (20 November 2022) a Bahraini woman to one month in prison, suspended, for posting a video that the court deemed including “insulting the Ministry of Education.”





3. Maltreatment and Other Infringements

Inmates in Jaw Central Prison reported (7 January 2022) the deteriorated health of the photographer, Yasser Ahmed (also known as the American Yasser), who suffered from dizziness and could not move. The prison's administration refused to transfer him to the hospital or have a specialist check him. An investigation by the Irish "Front Line Defenders" organization revealed (17 January 2022) that the phone of human rights defender Ibtisam Al-Saegh was hacked by the Israeli "Pegasus" software at least 8 times during the year 2019. Pro-government local newspapers launched (9 February 2022) an organized campaign of incitement against a group of civil society figures, including Ahmed Al-Khuzai, Osama Al-Baharna, Hussein Al-Rabie and Huda Al-Mahmoud, for meeting with the

new US ambassador Steven Bondy at his home and discussing topics pertaining to political participation and human rights. The Ministry of Labour and Social Development issued (18 February 2022) a warning circular calling on NGOs and civil society associations with social and philanthropic goals “not to involve in politics, observe public order and morals, and demonstrate abidance in all their activities by not compromising the integrity of the state or the formation of government or its social system.”

Several detained political leaders issued (4 March 2022) an urgent appeal to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, requesting their immediate intervention to save the life of the academic Dr. Abdul-Jalil Al-Singace, the owner of the “Al-Fasilah” blog, who went on a

hunger strike 250 days earlier to the time of the statement’s release to protest the confiscation of his research by the prison’s administration. The Services Committee in the House of Representatives referred (16 April 2022) its report on the new press and media law without taking into account the concerns submitted by the press institution about the project.

The Information Affairs Authority banned (28 July 2022) screening the movie “Thor: Love and Thunder” in cinemas against the background of scenes that were deemed to “promote homosexuality”.

Journalist Sawsan Al-Shaer revealed (8 September 2022) information about the National Communication Center's control

over what is published in the press. Such domination extended to even include news headlines and interviews. The security authorities in the United Arab Emirates prevented the two Bahraini journalists, Nazeeha Saeed (23 September 2022) and Wafaa Al-Am (26 September 2022), from entering the country. When Al-Am requested clarification, she was asked to report to the authorities of her country (Bahrain).

A government agency forced (12 October 2022) the Bahrain History and Antiquities Society to cancel a symposium at its headquarters in which academic and researcher Dr. Nader Kazem was going to talk about "How has the food system in Bahrain changed?". In addition, a government agency forced (25 December 2022) the prominent journalist Hani Al-Fardan to

remove news from the media platform that he runs under his name, related to a demonstration that took place in the capital, Manama, against the normalization with Israel.





C. Violations Details



January 2022



Legal proceedings against Dr. Sharifa Siwar for a recorded interview

The Cybercrime Directorate announced (1 January 2022) taking legal proceedings against psychiatrist Dr. Sharifa Siwar, who announced on 31st December 2021, that she had arrived in the British capital, London, to seek asylum. The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate stated that it had "started its legal procedures in response to lawsuits filed by [Bahraini] citizens, following the circulation of a video clip of a woman outside the Kingdom of Bahrain, which included insulting and defaming them and other figures in society."



A curriculum at the University of Bahrain contains texts of hatred against Shiite beliefs

Human rights activist, Mr. Yousef Al-Muhafda, called on (4 January 2022) to open an independent investigation concerning one of the religious books taught at the University of Bahrain

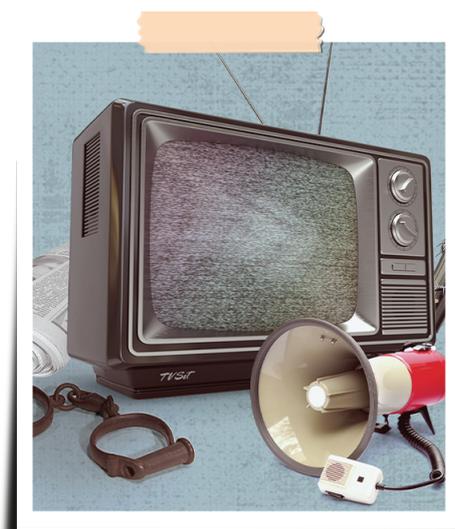
Al-Muhafda claimed that the book contains texts that insult the beliefs of the Twelfth Shiite Imam and incite hatred against Shiites, describing them as "rejectionists."



Photographer Yasser Ahmed is denied health care in prison

A number of political prisoners in Jaw Central Prison confirmed (7 January 2022) that the photographer, prisoner of opinion, Yasser Ahmed, nicknamed "Yasser the American," who is serving a life sentence, suffers from such bad health that he is unable to move properly.

Human rights activist Ibtisam al-Saegh quoted prisoners as saying that Yasser the American "has been going through a terrible condition for several months, and the prison administration has ignored his health condition and refused to transfer him to a hospital or a specialist." The prisoners confirmed that he suffers from "dizziness, inability to move or walk normally, and several other health problems."



A parliamentary campaign to legislate laws restricting the work of content makers on the Internet

Al-Watan newspaper, the mouthpiece of the Bahraini Royal Court, launched (8 January 2022) a campaign to prepare public opinion to receive the legislation of a law that includes restrictions on the work of content makers on YouTube and bloggers on social media. The head of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs

Committee, Mohamed El-Sisi, claimed that "the Bahraini public needs legislation that controls the use of social media and regulates new professions, such as YouTubers and bloggers, in order to ensure that there are no abuses that negatively affect society."



Human rights defender Ibtisam times 8 Al-Saegh's phone was hacked "by" Pegasus

An investigation conducted by the Irish organization Front Line Defenders revealed (17 January 2022) that human rights defender Ibtisam Al-Saegh's devices had been hacked by the "Pegasus", a spyware developed by the Israeli "NSO" group. Furthermore, the investigation

conducted by the organization's digital protection coordinator confirmed that Al-Sayegh's phone was hacked at least 8 times in 2019. The report concluded that "women targeted by surveillance live in a state of fear and anxiety, which leads to their isolation from society, and this imposes restrictions on their social life, jobs, and activity." Ibtisam Al-Sayegh, one of the hack victims, expressed her thoughts saying: "Personal freedoms have ended for me, and they no longer exist. I am unsafe at home, on the street, or anywhere."



Conditional release of photographer Ahmed Humaidan under the "Alternative Penal Code"

The security authorities released (25 January 2021) photographer Ahmed Humaidan as a procedure of the Alternative Penal Code. Humaidan was arrested in the City Center mall in December 2012 and charged with assaulting a police station. The court sentenced him to 10

years in prison. Humaidan is one of several photographers and journalists who were punished by the judiciary for their activities in documenting protests or violations committed by the Bahraini authorities. His release had come 11 months before he completed his sentence and in exchange for another punishment determined by the Ministry of Interior.



The head of the Cultural Renewal Association, Jalal Al-Qassab, summoned

The Cybercrime Directorate summoned (5 February 2022) the head of the Social and Cultural Renewal Association, Jalal Al-Qassab, for interrogation regarding the content of a video he posted on the association's social media account. The summons comes following a complaint filed by lawyer Ali Yahya, who stated earlier that he had filed a complaint against the Association for publishing clips and lectures on the association's account on YouTube about the miracles of the prophets in the Holy Quran. Al-Qassab was released after being interrogated about the content of these lectures.

Media and government campaign against civil society activists for meeting with the US ambassador



Local newspapers launched (9 February 2022) an incitement campaign directed against a group of civil society figures for meeting the new US Ambassador Stephen Bondy at his home and discussing issues related to political participation, human rights and the political isolation law. Those activists were Ahmed Al-Khuzai, Osama Al-Baharna, Hussain Al-Rubaie and Huda Al-Mahmoud. Later on

16th February, the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the US Ambassador, Stephen Bondy, where Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al-Zayani informed him about, "the Kingdom's reservations about the meeting that took place, with connotations that are inconsistent with international laws and norms in this regard," according to the Bahrain News Agency (BNA).



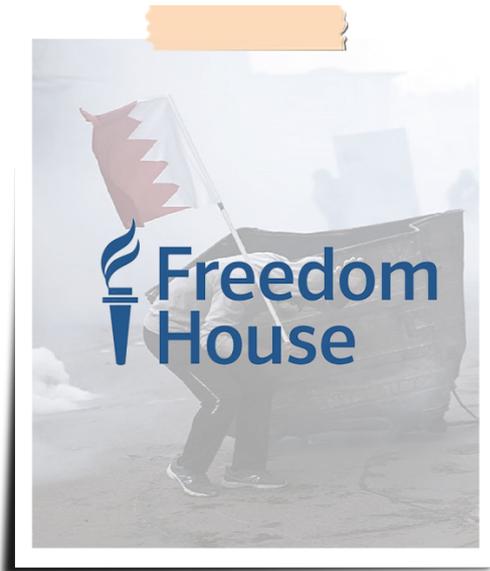
Journalist Mohammed al-Ghasra summoned

The Public Prosecution said (16 February 2022) that it had interrogated journalist Muhammad Al-Ghasra, who runs the Delmon Post website, before ordering his release. The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate said that it had summoned the person in charge of the "Delmon Post" news website and referred him to the Public Prosecution

after he published false news about a meeting of representatives of several associations with a foreign party. The Public Prosecution Office said it "initiated an investigation with the owner of a website that published false information about some people. The interrogation took place in the presence of the President of the Bahrain Journalists Association," and the Public Prosecution ordered his release. The "Delmon Post" website had published a report that included information about the meeting of the US Ambassador to Bahrain, Stephen Bondy, with representatives of civil society organizations.

The Ministry of Labor warns civil society associations against engaging in politics or undermining the safety of the state

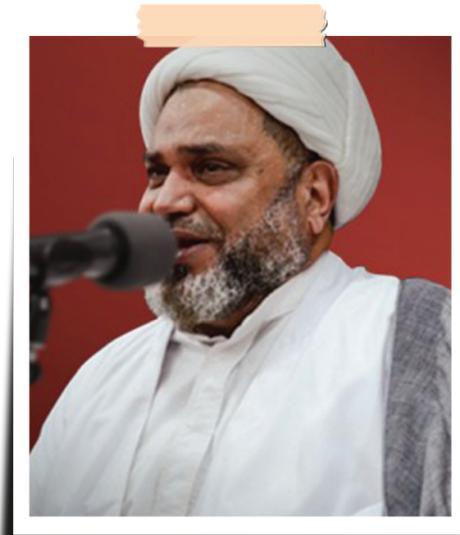
The Ministry of Labor and Social Development issued (18 February 2022) a warning circular in which it called on non-governmental and philanthropic organizations not to engage in politics. The Ministry stated that "for the good and regular workflow of civil organizations, we call on all civil society organizations to abide by the laws and regulations in the Kingdom of Bahrain and to adhere to the applicable legal provisions regarding not engaging in politics and observing public order." The statement particularly emphasized that "associations are not allowed to practice politics, and they must observe public order and morals, and be committed in all its activities not to prejudice the integrity of the state, the government structure, or the social system."



Freedom House: Bahrain is an oppressive, not free state

The American organization "Freedom House" classified (4 March 2022) Bahrain as a "repressive, not free country", according to the civil and political rights and freedoms index. Bahrain scored only 12 points out of 100, according to the organization's report on the state of political rights and civil

liberties in countries of the world for the year 2022. Bahrain scored only 2 points in the index of political rights and 10 points in the index of civil liberties, while it did not score any points in most of the areas.



A Shiite cleric sentenced to one year for criticizing the Umayyad caliph, Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan

A Bahraini court sentenced (17 March 2022) the Shiite cleric Sheikh Muhammad al-Mady to one year in prison for speaking inappropriately about the Umayyad ruler Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan. Sheikh al-Madi

was reviewing early Islamic history, where he tackled the biography of Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan in a critical manner, which the Bahraini authorities considered an offense against a "companion". The authorities are pursuing Shiite clerics for their criticism of historical figures.

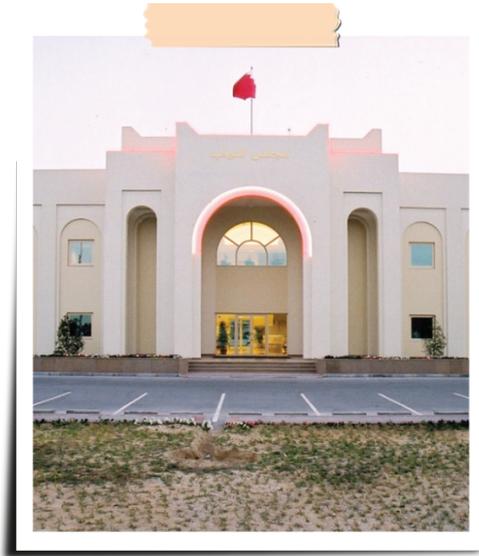
Imprisoned academic and blogger Dr. Al-Singace's health is deteriorating due to his hunger strike



A number of imprisoned political leaders issued (4 March 2022) an urgent appeal to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner for Human Rights requesting their immediate intervention to save the life of the academic Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, a former faculty member at the University of Bahrain and owner of the "Al-Fasila" blog

who has been on hunger strike for 250 days (at the time of issuing the statement) to protest the confiscation of his research. The letter said, "We appeal to you to intervene immediately to save the life of our fellow prisoner of opinion, Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, who has been on strike for nearly 250 days, and the news about his [health] condition is alarming. Your intervention could save his life." The letter was written by: Sheikh Ali Salman, Professor Abd al-Wahhab Hussain, Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja, Sheikh Abd al-Jalil al-Miqdad, Sheikh Muhammad Habib al-Miqdad, Sheikh Abd al-Hadi al-Mukhudhar, Sheikh Saeed al-Nuri, Muhammad Ali Ismail, Sheikh Mirza al-Mahrous. In the same context, the American Committee to Protect Journalists called on US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to bring the press freedom record in Bahrain up for discussion in the strategic dialogue between the United States and Bahrain, especially the issue of blogger Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace.

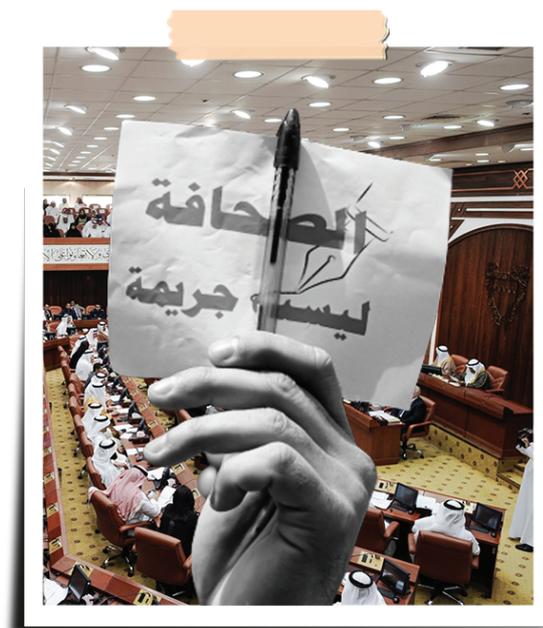
 **April 2022**



“Parliamentary services” endorses the government's press law, ignoring the “press institution”

The Services Committee in the House of Representatives (16 April 2022) referred its report on the new press and media law, without taking into account the concerns

submitted by the press institution about the project. The committee recommended passing the draft law as received from the executive authority, without making any amendments except for minor ones, ignoring all press professionals’ concerns. The law maintains the judiciary authority to try journalists through the penal and terrorism laws, leading to harsh and lengthy prison sentences.



The Bahraini Parliament discussed (19 April 2022) the new press law and postponed it again without passing it

The Council of Representatives unanimously approved the request of the Chairman of the Services Committee to withdraw its report on the draft law regulating the press, printing and publishing, and returning it to the committee for further study for a period of two weeks.

 **May 2023**



Bahrain comes last in "Reporters Without Borders" index of press freedom in the Gulf

Bahrain (3 May 2022) ranked last in the Gulf region, fourth in the Arab world, and 167 globally out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index issued by Reporters Without Borders on the World Press Freedom Day. The report published by the organization,

which is based in the French capital, under the title "The New Era of Polarization," carries many warnings about the expansion of misinformation and the control of dictatorships over the work of the press.



Lawyer Abdullah Hashem summoned following a complaint by journalist Mohammed Al-Arab

The Public Prosecution summoned (19 May 2022) lawyer Abdullah Hashem for interrogation on charges of "libel and slander". On his Twitter account, Hashem said, "I received a summons from the Public Prosecution that a person named Muhammad

Abd al-Razzaq Muhammad Ismail al-Zobaie claims that I insulted and slandered him through the phone, meaning "Twitter." When I responded that I do not know that person, the Public Prosecution told me that I know him by the name "Muhammad Al-Arab" [former correspondent of Al-Arabiya TV]."



The editor-in-chief of "Akhbar Al-Khaleej" complains of restrictions on the press

The editor-in-chief of "Akhbar Al-Khaleej" newspaper, a pro-government newspaper, complained (29 May 2022) about the narrow margin of freedom remaining for the press in Bahrain and the many restrictions it faces. In an article titled "Press and Freedom", the editor-in-chief said: "The bizarre thing is that all this is happening, and the press is being harassed in such ways, at a time when the reform project of His Majesty the King gave full freedom to the press." He further explained, "Most officials evade meeting the press and refuse to provide newspapers with any information related to their responsibilities and field of work .. They do not accept criticism of any sort and at any level nor tolerate it. Rather, they are fed up with it."

June 2023



A -45year-old woman arrested for "filming a clip that violates public morals"

The Ministry of Interior arrested (28 June 2022) a woman on charges of filming an immoral clip. The Ministry stated, "In response to a video clip circulating on social media that includes scenes contrary to public morals, the investigations resulted in the

arrest of a -45year-old woman after verifying her identity and her involvement in committing acts that violate the law." Tweeter Nawal Attia was summoned for criticizing the Council of Representatives



The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned (29 June 2022) Tweeter Nawal Attia for interrogation regarding statements she made on "Twitter"

The tweets criticized the performance of members of the Bahraini Parliament. She was released on the same day.

July 2023



Lawyer Abdullah Hashem fined 200 Dinars on slander charges

A local court (6 July 2022) fined lawyer Abdullah Hashem an amount of 200 dinars for defaming and insulting the former correspondent of Al-Arabiya channel, Muhammad Al-Arab. "Relegation to the dustbin of history needs no justification."

Hashem had tweeted, alluding to Ak-Arab. After the fine was issued, Hashem commented, "Thus, some have achieved a long-awaited gain, to have a criminal precedent on my profile." On 7th July, Hashem filed an appeal against the verdict, and a session was set to consider his appeal on 25th July. When the Court of Appeal convened on the aforementioned date, it upheld the fine issued against him.



A person summoned and tried for "misusing the social media"

The Public Prosecution summoned (7 July 2022) a person, whose identity was not revealed on charges of "misusing social media." According to a statement issued by the Public Prosecution, the Public Prosecution charged him with "publishing photos and video clips that violate public morals and promote the practice of debauchery." It also decided to detain him pending investigation and refer him to a criminal trial

-6month sentence for an Arab woman for "publishing an obscene video"

The Anti-Cyber Crime Directorate arrested (13 July 2022) a -43year-old Arab woman after she had posted a video clip on her social media account. The Directorate stated that the video "contained obscene words and gestures." It also added that "The legal procedures are being completed in preparation for referring the accused to the Public Prosecution." When she was presented to the Public Prosecution Office on 17th July, she was charged with "publicly making a call contrary to public morals" and "misuse of telecommunications means and illegal residence in the country."



Activist Mohammed Al-Aradi summoned following a Tweet criticizing scholarships

The Criminal Investigation Department summoned (17 July 2022) the social activist Muhammad Hassan Al-Aradi, upon a lawsuit filed against him by a senior official in the Ministry of Education after he had Tweeted criticizing the scholarship distribution system.

Thor movie was banned for "promoting homosexuality"

The Information Affairs Authority banned (28 July 2022) the screening of the movie "Thor: Love and Thunder" in cinemas against the background of scenes that were deemed to "promote homosexuality". An official source at the Ministry of Information Affairs said, "It was decided to stop one of the films shown in cinemas," in reference to "Thor." He considered that the Ministry is keen on "preserving and maintaining good societal values."



Arrest and dismissal Dr. Nader Kazem from work for the opinions expressed in his books

The security authorities arrested (27-21 July 2022) the renowned academic Dr. Nader Kazem, a faculty member at the University of Bahrain, for a week. He was interrogated for hours about his opinions in his books. It was also reported that he was transferred to a hospital during his detention time due to pre-existing health problems. Dr. Kazem was simultaneously dismissed from his job at the University of Bahrain as a professor of cultural studies in the Faculty of Arts. In its letter to Kazem (a copy of which was posted on social media), the university claimed that his dismissal was due to "the lack of need for him in the academic department as a result of the limited teaching needs." The Public Prosecution ignored even commenting on the issue that became a hot topic of discussion among Bahrainis, nor did it issue any statement regarding his case and the nature of the charges he was arrested for. Among the developments associated with his case, a Tweeter named Maryam Al-Jowder instigated his execution. Al-Jowder, who introduces herself via Twitter as a finance and business development consultant and a member of the Bahrain Chamber of

Commerce and Industry, advocated his execution, saying, "If I were the government, I would execute him in the Manama market square, so that they would learn that no land tolerated hypocrites and traitors as much as Bahrain did."

August 2022

Accounts accused of "stirring public opinion" by publishing a video from inside the prison

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate pursued (6 August 2022) social media accounts that published a leaked video from inside Jaw Central Prison showing that the police prevented political prisoners from practicing their religious rituals on Ashura. It accused those accounts of "provoking and inciting public opinion." In its statement, the Directorate added that "monitoring and tracking procedures led to video clips circulated via some social media accounts and included transgressions and legal violations, with the aim of provoking and inciting public opinion."



Two people arrested and one of them sentenced to a month for "insulting religious symbols"

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate arrested (11 August 2022) two people, including a -17year-old child, on charges of "insulting religious symbols." As a result, they were referred to the Public Prosecution. The Public Prosecution said in a statement that it had "received a report from the Anti-Cybercrime

Directorate of monitoring an account on TikTok, in which two people, including a -17year-old child, appear to have insulted religious symbols." It also said that they "confessed to what was attributed to them and ordered the transfer of the adult accused to the court and the other to the minor correctional justice court." On 31st August, the Court of Minor Correctional Justice issued a sentence to imprison the child for a period of one month with enforcement in light of the findings of the social expert's report.

Nawal Attia summoned for criticizing a parliamentary candidate

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned (15 August 2022) the famous cyber activist and Tweeter Nawal Attia. She was interrogated about her Tweet condemning the statement of one of the candidates for the parliamentary elections.

September 2022



Lawyer Abdullah Hashem summoned after calling on the unemployed to protest

The Cybercrime Directorate summoned (6 September 2022) lawyer Abdullah Hashem for calling on the unemployed to protest against the government. "I have just received

a summons from the Cybercrime Directorate for writing about the unemployment widespread among Bahraini university graduates," Hashem Tweeted. He also pointed out that his call was misunderstood, resulting in his summons. After finishing the interrogation, Hashem stated that "it was a just a decent discussion about the content and intended meaning of the post." He also received another summons for interrogation about the content of the same tweet on 12th September.



Sawsan Al-Shaer reveals that the National Communication Center controls even newspaper headlines

The opinion columnist for "A Final Word" in "Al-Watan" newspaper owned by the royal court published (8 September 2022) an article about the National Communication Center. She complained about the Center's

absolute control over what is being published in the press, which now includes even news headlines and interviews. Al-Shaer said, "The relationship between the press and the executive authority has recently become a complicated one that lacks much comfort." "Today, pluralism has disappeared that if you check any Bahraini newspaper today, you will find the Bahrian news on the front page merely one template replicated in all newspapers, that is usually sent to them as a press release to publish as it is." She further explained that, "even the headlines are chosen on behalf of the newspapers ... What is published is the opinion of the executive authority formulated and sent through the National Communication Center; the newspaper has only to transmit it verbatim." Al-Shaer went on to say that "the interviews must pass through the censorship of the Communication Center to be either approved or revised and edited."



Tweeter Nawal Attia summoned upon a complaint by a candidate

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned (28 September 2022) the cyber activist and Tweeter Nawal Attia. During her interrogation, she was told that the matter was related to a complaint filed against her by a candidate for the parliamentary elections.



Journalists Wafaa Al-Am and Nazeeha Saeed were prevented from entering the United Arab Emirates

The security authorities in the United Arab Emirates denied entry to the two Bahraini journalists, Wafaa Al-Am and Nazeeha Saeed. Journalist Wafaa Al-Am said on her Twitter account (26 September 2022) that an Emirati official told her that she was "banned by a circular issued by the security forces, and when I asked him about the reason and how to resolve the issue, he said that I should contact the authorities in my country." For her part, journalist Nazeeha Saeed stated that the UAE authorities prevented her too (23 September 2022) from "entering the country I was visiting on a business trip," noting that she was detained for more than two hours without answering her questions and then "beginning deportation procedures without explanation or even inform me of the decision." Saeed continued that, "After I insisted on knowing what was happening and why I was transferred to the departure gates instead of the arrival, I was told without details, 'You will not be allowed to enter for security reasons.'"

October 2022



Nader Kazem’s symposium on “Food Security” banned

A government agency forced (12 October 2022) the Bahrain History and Antiquities Society to cancel a symposium at its headquarters in which academic and researcher Dr. Nader Kazem was supposed to participate. The Society had included in its cultural program for the 69th season a

symposium by Kazem titled “How has the food system in Bahrain changed?” However, the Society was forced to cancel it earlier than the scheduled date after receiving orders from a state agency that was not disclosed.



The appeal upheld a fine of 800 dinars for a person for “publishing false news.”

The Court of Appeal upheld (16 October 2022) fining a person, whose identity was not revealed, an amount of 800 dinars on charges of “disseminating false news.” From the little known about the case, the accused was convicted of “disseminating false news via a WhatsApp group about an official in the Ministry of Education.”

November 2022



Activist Muhammad Hassan Al-Aradi summoned regarding a “video on WhatsApp”

The Cybercrime Directorate summoned (10 November 2022) the cyber activist Mohammed Hassan Al-Aradi, for interrogation about WhatsApp messages he circulated about one of the parliamentary candidates. Upon leaving, Al-Aradi stated, "It turned out that the complaint was filed by one of the candidates in Constituency 7 in Muharraq regarding a short video about that candidate circulated on social media."



Two and a half months for a high school student for criticizing exams in public schools

A local court ruled (14 November 2022) a two-month prison sentence and dismissal from school for a high school student on charges of criticizing the Ministry of Education exams. The student had posted a video on social media criticizing how the Ministry of Education exams are conducted. His trial took place based on his statements in the video, and; therefore, was accused of "insulting a government agency and its affiliates."



A month for a Bahraini woman for "insulting the Ministry of Education"

The Third Minor Criminal Court sentenced (20 November 2022) a Bahraini woman, whose identity was not revealed, to a one-month suspended sentence for publishing a video criticizing the Ministry of Education. The woman was convicted of "insulting a

public entity" and "providing false and misleading information contrary to the truth through a video she posted on social media." It was confirmed that the intended ministry is the Ministry of Education.



December 2022



Nawal Attia summoned for "incitement and defamation"

The Anti-Cyber Crimes Directorate summoned (14 December 2022) the blogger and cyber activist Nawal Attia. She was interrogated about a complaint filed against her concerning opinions she expresses on Twitter. It turned out that the complaint was filed by a Tweeter who accused her of "incitement and defamation." However, Attia was released on the same day.



Youssef Al-Am summoned for "incitement and defamation."

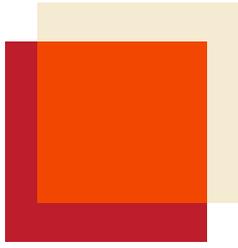
The Cybercrime Directorate summoned (14 December 2022) the cyber activist Youssef Al-Am, where he was interrogated regarding a complaint filed against him by a female Tweeter who accused him of "incitement and defamation." It turned out that the complaint was filed by a female Tweeter who accused him of "incitement and defamation." However, he was released on the same day as well.

Journalist Hani Al-Fardan was forced to remove news about a march in Manama



It was reported (25 December 2022) that prominent journalist Hani Al-Fardan, former opinion columnist for Al-Wasat newspaper, received a call from a prominent government authority prior to its closure, ordering him to delete a piece of news from the media platform that he manages under his personal name. Al-Fardan was forced to delete the news piece, which turned out to be related to a

demonstration in the capital, Manama, against the normalization agreement between Bahrain and Israel.



D. Recommendations

The Bahrain Press Association condemns the targeting of journalists, bloggers, photographers and people of opinion, such persecution which, it believes, has become a systematic and common practice.

The Association calls on the United Nations, Bahrain allies, and all international organizations and bodies concerned with defending the freedom of opinion and expression, and press and media freedoms for immediate intervention and to exert urgent pressure on the Bahraini government to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all photographers, media professionals, and activists detained for practicing their work or exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- Adopt a more serious and open government policy towards the rights of journalists and civil society activists to enable them to exercise their constitutional and legal rights to express opinions and exercise the right to criticism without fear or targeting.
- Stop arbitrary prosecutions, arrests and judicial trials on charges of “inciting hatred of the regime”, “misusing social media” and all what restricts freedom of expression.
- Secure freedoms of media and the press, and reconsider the work priorities of the Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security Administration, especially with regard to censoring cyber activists.
- Put an end to the authority’s monopoly of the television, radio and print media, and enabling the voice of opposition in the media—including reauthorizing the publication of Al-Wasat newspaper.
- Call on 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.

Bahrain 2022: The Dead Island



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