

14th Annual Report on
Freedoms Journalism and
media in Bahrain 2023

Bahrain 2023

Stalked History and Deadlocked Horizon



رابطة الصحافة البحرينية
Bahrain press Association

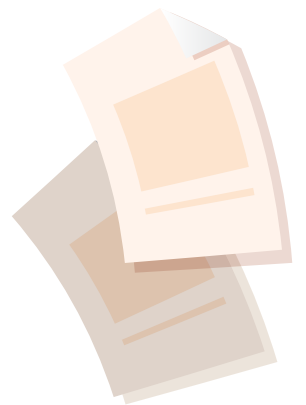
An association that defends the
freedom of the press and the
media in Bahrain, founded on
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**14th Annual Report on Freedoms Journalism
2023 and media in Bahrain**

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I. Introduction

Bahrain 2023: Stalked History and Deadlocked Horizon



The Bahrain Press Association (BPA) documented 53 violations against journalists, media professionals and civil society activists in Bahrain during 2023. This brings the total number of documented cases since the outbreak of the February 2011 protests until December 2023 to about 1864 violations of media freedoms and the .right of opinion and expression

This year's annual report is titled: "Bahrain 2023: Stalked History and Deadlocked Horizon" is an attempt to depict the government's extreme policy towards writings and publications related to Bahrain's history, which includes confiscating books, banning their circulation, and targeting researchers and academics working in this field. This comes in conjunction with a horizon of reform that remains blocked by a package of laws, procedures, and trials that suppress freedom of the press and freedom of opinion and expression in the public sphere





➤ One of the most important indicators observed by the Bahrain Press Association during this year is the authorities noticeable tightening on issues related to writing the history of Bahrain. This was exemplified by the banning of historian Nasser al-Khairi's book *Qala'ed Al-Nahrain fi Tareekh Al-Bahrain*

(The Necklaces of the Two Chests in the History of Bahrain) more than two decades after it was first published. Moreover, the

ban coincided with an official statement warning against "using the book as a historical reference."



➤ It was also reported that all books by Dr. Nader Kazim, a former professor at the University of Bahrain, were banned from local bookstores in a harsh reprisal for reasons that are still unknown. In addition, Jassim Hussein Al Abbas, a history blogger and the owner of the "Years of Al-Jareesh" account and website, was arrested after he participated in a seminar in which he addressed historical topics that contradict the government's narrative of Bahrain's history.

This year's violations were categorized into 30 cases of interrogation and detention, 12 judicial proceedings, 11 cases of abuse and other violations.

The most prominent charges brought against the defendants during interrogation sessions or convicted in court were: "Broadcasting materials that contradict the requirements of civil peace, publishing indecent expressions about an official institution, disseminating false news in wartime, insulting a person who is revered by the people of a [religious] sect, and questioning the religious and national founding principles of society."





Among the indicators was the Bahrain Press Association's observation of the re-use of the charge of "disseminating false news in wartime," after Bahrain announced its participation in a US-led naval alliance to protect the Red Sea shipping lane. This charge was brought against prominent dissident Ibrahim Sharif following critical tweets in this regard for which he was detained for a week pending investigation.

- Another observed indicator was the rising number of cases referred to the investigation or public prosecution by ministries and state bodies. For instance, the Ministry of Commerce referred the owners of six social media accounts to the Ministry of Interior on charges of "practicing marketing activities on social media without a license." Similarly, the Ministry of Education took judicial and administrative actions against four individuals and educational institutions.
- These indicators reveal the nature of the difficult conditions for practicing media activity in Bahrain, as a strict and repressive security approach continues to rule in this important area. Even with the change in government leadership and the infusion of new, young faces, this has yet to have any positive impact. International reports strongly reflect the negative state of media freedoms in the country, with Bahrain ranking last among the Gulf countries for the second consecutive year in the annual Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index 2023.

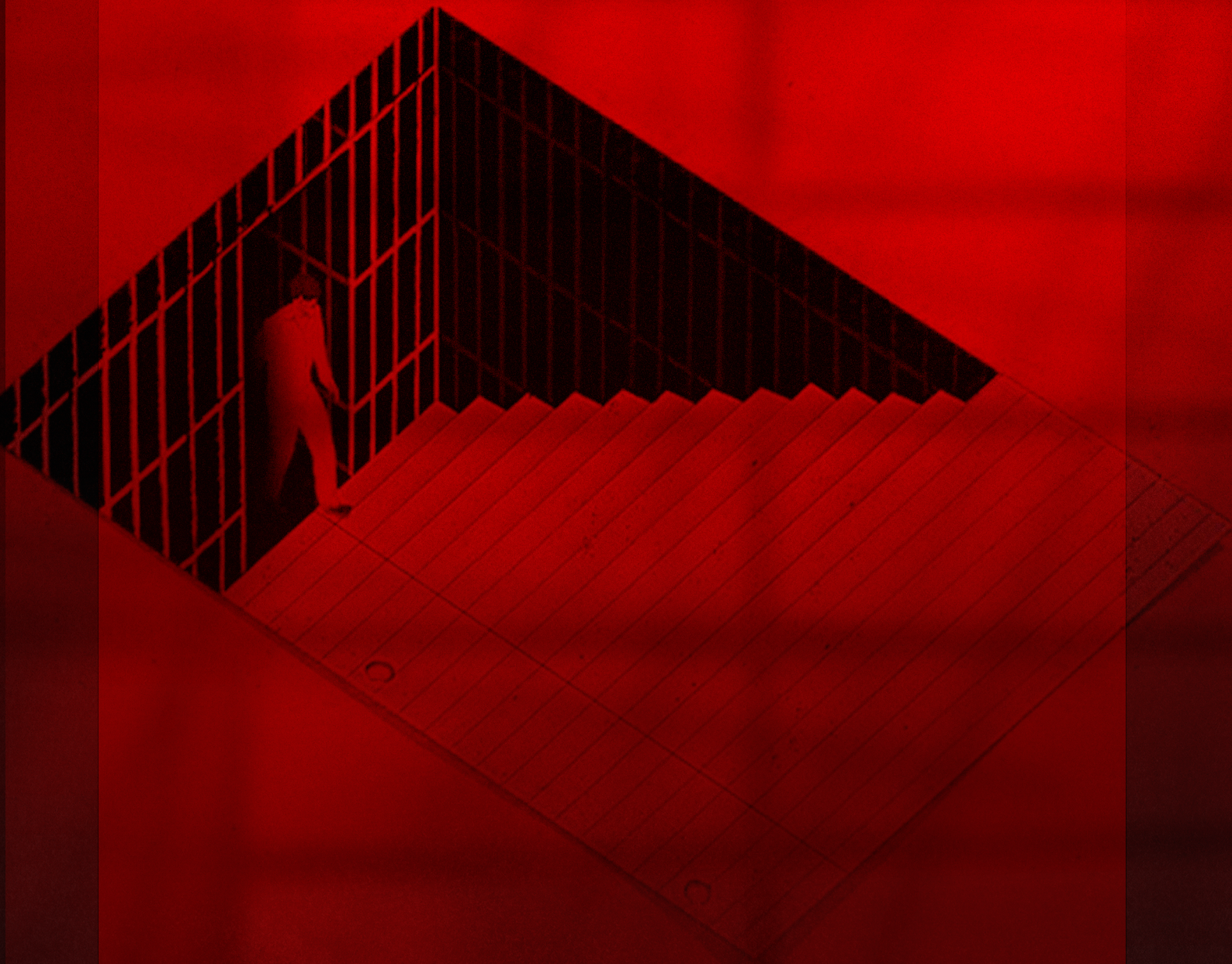




➤ Freedom House ranked Bahrain 72nd globally among "unfree countries" in terms of Internet freedom, noting that "violence and torture against online activists and journalists is common in Bahrain."

- The Bahrain Press Association takes this opportunity to urge the government of Bahrain to abandon the security approach that has dominated its behavior—and still does—towards journalists, bloggers, and opinion leaders since the 2011 crisis. There is an urgent need to adopt a new, more open government policy towards journalists, civil society activists, and any kind of criticism in general.
- The Association also urges the government to stop the frequent, arbitrary interrogations and arrests of tweeters and bloggers. In addition, the Association believes that it is time to open up media and journalistic freedoms in the country and to reconsider the priorities of the work of the Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security Administration, especially with regard to scope of work. It also emphasizes the necessity of the immediate and unconditional release all photographers, media professionals, and activists detained for practicing their work in covering protests or exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression. Lastly, the Association reiterates its demand to end the authority's monopoly on television, radio and print media and to open media outlets to other opposing views





II. Junctures in 2023

Bahrain 2023: Stalked History and Deadlocked Horizon

Interrogations and Arrests



The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate (7 February 2023) summoned the head of the Alba Syndicate, Younis Al Mubarak, following a complaint by after he had requested through his social media account the company to pay overtime compensations to employees.



The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate (8 March 2023) detained four people for seven days pending investigation. Lawyer Ibrahim Al-Mannai, Qassim Al-Hujairi, Ali Hassan and Ibrahim Khalil were detained on charges of "misusing social media by posting material that contradicts the requisites of civil peace."



The Cyber Crimes Prosecution (15 March 2023) ordered the detention of a defendant for 7 days pending investigation and referred him to the Third Circuit Minor Criminal Court on charges of making "indecent remarks against lawyers that are not appropriate to the honor of the



profession." The security authorities arrested (13 April 2023) the Islamic singer, Abdul Amir al-Belaadi, for 7 days pending investigation and then renewed it for an additional 15 days for reciting a poem in solidarity with Palestine.



Security forces arrested (13 April 2023) the leaders of the Al-Tajdeed Cultural and Social Society, Reda Rajab and Jalal Al-Qassab, from their homes at dawn to implement a preliminary verdict issued against them on the charge of "contempt of Islamic faith" that they had paid the prescribed fine to appeal it. However, they were released after 6 hours, as

it turned out that the "information system" of the Public Prosecution was not updated.



The security authorities summoned (30 July 2023) Sheikh Mahmoud al-Ali for interrogation after a speech he gave on the night of the tenth of Muharram in the capital, Manama. The Ministry of Industry and Trade announced (14 August 2023) that six Instagram accounts were referred to the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security on the pretext that they "engaged in commercial activities through social media platforms

without a license."

The Prosecution of Ministries and Public Authorities (15 August 2023) ordered the referral of a female defendant to criminal prosecution for committing the crime of conducting commercial activity without a license.





The Ministry of Interior (7 September 2023) arrested Issa Al-Maawda (56 years old) after he posted a video clip on social media that the Ministry said "insulted a public servant (a policeman) while performing his duty and directed inappropriate words and phrases to an official institution."



On 14th of September 2023, the Cybercrime Prosecution ordered the detention of social influencer Sheikha Al-Majid on charges of "insulting a person revered by the people of a religion" after she posted videos of her trip to commemorate the Arbaeen (the Fortieth) pilgrimage in Iraq. The Cybercrime Prosecution (16 September 2023)

interrogated a lawyer—whose name was not disclosed—after he "published the minutes of a trial session in a criminal case on his public social media account."



The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate (19 October 2023) arrested an Asian national and referred him to the Public Prosecution on charges of posting tweets containing "insults of a religious nature" and "contradicting the requisites of civil peace and social stability."





On 10th of November 2023, the security authorities arrested Jassim Hussein Al Abbas, the owner of the "Al-Jareesh Years" account and website, on charges of "questioning the religious and national founding principles of the Bahraini society."



The Ministry of Education (21 November 2023) ordered the administrative investigation of a private school, after the competent supervisory authorities detected what they called in a statement "teaching inappropriate educational content."



On 21st of December 2023, the Bahraini Public Prosecution ordered the detention of the former secretary-general of the National Democratic Action Society (WAAD), Ibrahim Sharif, for seven days pending investigation on charges of "disseminating false news in time of war."



Legal Proceedings

- » The Court of Cassation (30 March 2023) sentenced a citizen—whose identity was not disclosed—to one month in prison for "insulting a government official" on Instagram.
- » The Fourth Minor Criminal Court (30 March 2023) convicted three members of the Al-Tajdeed Cultural and Social Society, Reda Rajab, Mohammed Rajab and Jalal Al-Qassab, and sentenced them to one year on charges of "assaulting a religion and denigrating its rituals." The Court of Appeal confirmed their sentence.
- » The Fourth Minor Criminal Court (4 May 2023) sentenced a defendant to three months' imprisonment with enforcement on the charge of "intentionally disturbing lawyers via social media."
- » The Court of Cassation (30 June 2023) upheld a final ruling to imprison a social media user for two months for "insulting a statutory body, the Ministry of Education, via Instagram."
- » The Third High Criminal Court (18 September 2023) acquitted the owner of Disney Nursery of the charges brought against her by the Ministry of Education, including defamation and contempt.
- » The Court of Cassation (20 November 2023) issued its final ruling upholding the imprisonment of two defendants from the Al-Tajdeed Society (Reda Rajab and Jalal al-Qassab) for one year on charges of "attacking the foundations of the Islamic faith."



Abuse and Other Violations

- » The Ministry of Education (23 January 2023) ordered the immediate closure of Disney Nursery and the revocation of its license in retroactive retaliation for the production of a video addressing public issues that it had published about two years ago with the participation of kindergarten children. The Ministry of Education (7 February 2023) ordered the exclusion of what it described as "content that does not comply with the approved standards and regulations." The content was presented by a private school in a knowledge fair.
- » The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate of the Ministry of Interior (8 March 2023) warned that reposting/sharing what it described as "abusive" content via social media accounts, referring to the accounts of opposition figures - exposes those who share it to legal accountability.
- » On 8th of March 2023, Bahraini border authorities prevented two Human Rights Watch delegates, Michael Page, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the organization, and researcher Nico Gavrania, from entering the country to attend meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union despite the organization's observer status by canceling the visas it had previously granted them.



- » The Ministry of Interior (12 March 2023) refused to renew the license granted to Disney Nursery, while its director said she had submitted all the documents requested of her. The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (5 June 2023) threatened those in charge of the Imam Sadiq Mosque in Diraz with "zero tolerance" for what it called "legal violations and transgressions during Friday sermons."

- » The Bahraini authorities abruptly banned (25 July 2023) the Bahraini historian Nasser Al-Khairi's book Qala'ed Al-Nahrain fi Tareekh Al-Bahrain (The Necklaces of the Two Chests in the History of Bahrain) from sale and circulation, under the justification that "this book should not be considered as a [reliable] historical reference."



“
The Bahraini Ministry of Information (August 2023) banned all books by researcher and critic Dr. Nader Kazim from trading on local sales platforms.



”

Freedom House (August 2023) ranked Bahrain 72nd in the world in terms of Internet freedom, noting that "violence and torture against cyber activists and journalists is common in Bahrain."

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Activist tweeter Saleh Al-Am (2nd of December 2023) announced that he had received a threat from a municipal council member in his district to prevent him from criticizing matters related to his municipal performance.



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III. Details of Violations

Bahrain 2023: Stalked History and Deadlocked Horizon

January 2023



The Ministry of Education (23 January 2023) ordered the immediate closure of Disney Nursery and the revocation of its license. In its statement, the Ministry said that "in light of violations found by the ministry's Early Education Licensing and Monitoring Department, the Ministry has taken measures to immediately close the Disney Nursery and revoke its license based on its conclusion of the incapacity of the owner of the nursery to take responsibility and trust for the care and care of children." It stated that it "contacted the parents of all children enrolled in the kindergarten (Disney) to arrange for their enrollment in other institutions, and that it has given the owner of the kindergarten a period to implement the decision." The targeting of the kindergarten by the authorities began after it produced a short video in December 2021 in which children between the ages of 3 and 5 years participated. The video that was published on the anniversary of the Bahrain's National Day was considered a violation of security as it touches on public problems they suffer from. The 9-year-old kindergarten had 30 female employees and about 165 children at the time of its closure.



February 2023

Ministry of Education requests removal of 'objectionable' content from a school fair

The Ministry of Education reported (7 February 2023) that it "observed content presented by a private school in a knowledge fair that does not comply with the approved standards and regulations." It explained in a statement that it "took the necessary measures by communicating with the school and verifying that it took the violating content off the display shelves." It also emphasized that the school "should examine all displayed content and verify its compliance."

London court refuses to grant Bahrain immunity in spying on dissidents' case

The High Court in London (8 February 2023) ruled that Bahrain cannot use state immunity as a reason to obstruct a lawsuit filed by two dissidents in Britain who said the Bahraini government hacked their laptops using a spyware.

Opponents Saeed Shihabi and Musa Mohamed say that Bahrain managed to install FinSpy surveillance software on their devices, allowing agents to take control of their laptops, access their files and monitor their communications. They said the program also allows users to turn on microphones and cameras on electronic devices to conduct live surveillance and location tracking.

Shihabi and Mohammed, who live in Britain, pointed out that Bahrain infected their laptops with electronic spying software in 2011, which allowed the

Kingdom to monitor their work with political prisoners in Bahrain and demanded judicial compensation for psychological damage.





On 7th of February 2023, the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate summoned Younis Al Mubarak, president of the Aluminium Bahrain (Alba) Syndicate, following a complaint by Alba's management for demanding through his social media account that the company pay overtime salaries to employees. Al Mubarak had demanded that the company pay its employees overtime compensations that have been suspended since 2018 in light of its increased profits. He also demanded that it should stop its policy of forcing employees to work without financial compensation. Previously in September 2022, authorities summoned the head of the union for demanding that the company pay overtime, which it considered "distortion of its reputation."



members of the Al-Tajdeed Society referred to trial on charges 3 “of "undermining the Islamic faith

On 17th of February 2023, the Public Prosecution referred three members of the Al-Tajdeed (Renewal) Cultural and Social Society on charges of "undermining the Islamic faith." The defendants are the Society's president Reda Rajab, Society's researcher Jalal al-Qassab, and Society's member Mohammed Rajab.

The head of the Cybercrime Prosecution stated that the prosecution has "completed its investigations into the statements and recordings that were circulated on social media that included violating the foundations of Islamic faith and its fundamentals and insulting the prophets, and submitted those responsible for them to criminal prosecution. The Public Prosecution had received two reports from the Ministry of Social Development and the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate of the Ministry of Interior regarding the three defendants. The prosecution alleged that they "published a number of statements and broadcast a series of episodes discussing Quranic miracles, stories of the prophets and the biography of the Prophet by raising ideas and assertions that would prejudice the foundations of Islamic faith and its fundamentals as concluded by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs." The prosecution indicated that "the investigations proved them guilty and that what was published and broadcast in the episodes dealt with reviewing the verses of the Holy Quran and the stories and miracles of the prophets with interpretations that contradict the clarity of their indication and the authority of their rulings on the ability of God Almighty, and slandering them with a degree of deliberate skepticism in a manner that would undermine the foundations of the Islamic faith and its fundamentals that are unanimously agreed upon by all Muslims of all sects, as well as dealing with ideas and opinions about the biography of the Prophet that create doubts and questions about the message of the



Prophet and the miracle of the Holy Quran, and shaken certainty about it as one of the foundations and premises of the Islamic religion and its pillars." Accordingly, the Public Prosecution concluded to refer the defendants to criminal trial.

Woman sentenced to two months in prison for posting indecent photos

The Third Minor Criminal Court (22 February 2023) issued a two-month imprisonment sentence with enforcement and confiscation of the used mobile phone against a woman who posted images deemed indecent on her personal social media account.

The details of the incident, according to the Chief Cybercrime Prosecutor, go back to "receiving a report from the competent security department that a woman was observed using her social media account, which is followed by thousands of followers, to publish indecent images with indecent comments that are obscene and contrary to moral values." The Public Prosecution issued an order "to arrest and bring the accused, interrogate her and scrutinize her cell phone used in committing the crime, in addition to issuing an order to delete the photos and clips in question from the accused's publicly available accounts, in accordance with the provisions of the procedural information technology law."

March 2023

Passport officer sentenced to one year for leaking photos of several people

The Supreme Criminal Court of Appeal upheld (5 March 2023) a first-degree ruling to imprison an employee of the Nationality Department at the General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence for one year after convicting him of divulging secrets and "exploiting his job by leaking photos to a number of people who bully and mock them on social media."

The details of the incident—as the investigating officer testified—are



that "a room was monitored on Clubhouse application, whose users publish pictures of people and bully and ridicule them. And by intensifying serious investigations, it was reached that the accused exploited his job at the General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence and extracted those photos from the system of his workplace and sent them to the members of those rooms on the aforementioned application."

"citizens arrested for "misuse of social media 4

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate announced (8 March 2023) the arrest of four people on charges of "misusing social media" by posting material that "contradicts the requisites of civil peace and social stability, which negatively affects the security and safety of society."

The defendants are lawyer Ibrahim al-Manai, Qassim al-Hujairi, Ali Hassan and Ibrahim Khalil. The Ministry of Interior said in a statement that "the necessary legal procedures are being completed in preparation for referring the aforementioned persons to the Public Prosecution." In turn, the Chief of the Cybercrime Prosecution stated that "the Public Prosecution received four reports from the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate about a group of people misusing social media platforms by posting a number of statements and broadcasting recorded materials that would undermine public order and the requirements of protecting national security and peace."

The "Cybercrime" threatens to prosecute those who repost from opposition accounts

March 2023) The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate of the Ministry of Interior has vowed that reposting/re-sharing what is published by "abusive" social media accounts—as it put it—exposes the individuals involved to legal accountability. "Within the framework of monitoring and observation work, it was found that some people misuse social media by



broadcasting materials that contradict the requisites of civil peace and social stability. Such practices negatively affects the security and safety of society," said the director general of the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security.

He explained that "reposting what is published by such seditious accounts or providing support for them through supportive comments exposes the individual to legal accountability," pointing out "the importance of controlling the use of social media and working to raise awareness and immunize and protect society from the danger of misusing these means within the framework of adhering to the law and respecting the authentic customs and traditions that characterize the Bahraini society."

Human Rights Watch staff visas canceled as observers at IPU conference



On 8th of March 2023, border authorities prevented two delegates from Human Rights Watch (HRW), which hold a monitoring status within the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), from entering the country. The Deputy Director of the organization's Middle East and North Africa division, Michael Page, and researcher Nico Gavrania had their visas revoked.

Human Rights Watch said that on 8th of March 2023, Bahraini authorities revoked the entry visas issued on 30th of January 2023, to two staff members of the organization to attend the 146th IPU General Assembly from 11th to 15th of March.





Suspect who “harassed” lawyers on social media jailed

The Cyber Crimes Prosecution (15 March 2023) ordered the detention of a defendant for seven days pending investigation and referred him to the Third Circuit Minor Criminal Court on charges of making "indecent remarks against lawyers that are not appropriate to the honor of the profession." The Chief

Prosecutor stated that "the Public Prosecution received a complaint filed by the Bahrain Lawyers Association that following the posting and circulation of a video clip on social media in which the accused speaks about lawyers in the Kingdom of Bahrain, describing them in indecent terms that do not befit the honor of the profession and undermine their consideration and status before society."

The Cassation sentenced a citizen to prison for "insulting a government official"

The Court of Cassation (30 March 2023) sentenced a citizen—whose identity was not disclosed—to one month in prison for "insulting a government official" on social media. The court based its ruling on a report it received from a public official that a person on Instagram had "insulted him and his fellow employees."





Three members of Al-Tajdeed Society sentenced to prison for "insulting a religion"

The Fourth Minor Criminal Court (30 March 2023) convicted three members of the Al-Tajdeed Cultural and Social Society, Reda Rajab, Mohammed Rajab, and Jalal al-Qassab, and sentenced them to one year and setting a bail of 500 dinars for a "temporary" suspension of execution. The charges for which

they were convicted were "insulting a religion, denigrating its rituals, posting YouTube videos that publicly insult a symbol that is glorified or revered by the people of a religion, and posting tweets on Twitter that insult and offend the Prophet Muhammad."



April 2023

Religious singer Abdul Amir Al-Baladi arrested for reciting a poem in solidarity with Palestine

On 13th of April 2023, security authorities arrested the Islamic singer Abdul Amir Al-Baladi and ordered his detention for seven days pending investigation for his participation in a funeral procession in the capital Manama and his recitation of a poem in solidarity with Palestine. On 20th of the same month, the Public Prosecution extended his detention for an additional 15 days.

Al-Aqeedat tribe's leader Mutashar Rafi Dandal jailed for "disseminating false news and claiming authority"

The Public Prosecution announced (19 April 2023) the detention of Mutashar Rafi Dandal, who identifies himself as the chief of the Al-Aqeedat tribe, on charges of "collecting funds without [an official] permission, disseminating false news, and claiming authority." The head of the Ministries and Public Authorities Prosecution stated that "the Public Prosecution received a report from the Criminal Investigation Department that a video clip circulating on social media showing a person giving a sermon to a council during which he praised his efforts in contributing to collecting money to pay blood money for a person convicted in a Gulf country, and his ability to resolve disputes among individuals and settle them."

The "Public Prosecution" also accused Rafi Dandal of "displaying influence and claiming authority to resolve and settle disputes among people without resorting to the authorities," noting that the accused admitted in a video clip published on social media to collecting money for non-public purposes.

Dandal and his relatives had raised a large sum of money to pay the blood money of a member of the Aqeedat tribe in Saudi Arabia, who was convicted of killing a member of the Dawasir tribe.



May 2023

Bahrain is last among Gulf countries in press freedom

Bahrain (3 May 2023) ranked last among the Gulf countries in the 2023 Press Freedom Index—an annual ranking issued by Reporters without Borders (RWB). Globally, Bahrain dropped four places since 2022 from 167th to 171st among the 180 countries of the world. At the global level, the organization ranked Bahrain among the bottom ten countries, ranking 171st out of 180 countries in the ranking issued on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

3 months for a citizen for harassing lawyers on social media

The Fourth Minor Criminal Court (4 May 2023) sentenced a defendant to three months' imprisonment with enforcement on the charge of "intentionally disturbing lawyers via social media." The court ordered the referral of the civil case to the competent court without expenses. The Lawyers Association had filed a complaint with the Public Prosecution stating that "the defendant committed the crime of fraud by engaging in the legal profession and providing legal consultations without being licensed to do so. Moreover, he committed the crime of insulting and defamation by verbally attacking all lawyers in Bahrain with insults and defamation on social media."

Social media account holder referred to the Cybercrimes for posting information about curriculum changes

The Ministry of Education (8 May 2023) referred the owner of a social media account to the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate for posting information about changing school curricula to promote normalization with Israel. The Ministry of Education said in a statement, "In light of the



spread of a video of an account holder on social media claiming changing school curricula, the Ministry of Education reports that due to the insults, accusations and inaccurate information contained in the media content, it was decided to refer the account holder's data along with the published material to the Anti-Cybercrime Directorate to take the relevant legal measures."

The Appeal upholds Mohamed Ragab's one-year prison sentence for "undermining the Islamic faith"

On 13th of May 2023, the Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the one-year imprisonment of Al-Tajdeed Society member Mohammed Rajab on charges of "undermining the Islamic faith on social media." The court rejected his appeal for failing to attend the hearing due to being abroad for study. The court postponed the verdict on two other appeals by Al-Tajdeed members Reda Rajab and Jalal al-Qassab until May 14, when the public prosecution will present the case.

The Appeal upholds detention for two members of the Al-Tajdeed Society on charges of "assaulting the foundations of Islamic faith"

The Court of Appeals (21 May 2023) rejected the appeal of two members of the Al-Tajdeed (Renewal) Cultural and Social Society (Reda Rajab and Jalal Al-Qassab) in the case against them for violating the foundations of Islamic faith, upholding the court of first instance's decision to imprison the defendants for one year with enforcement.





Security authorities arrested (22 May 2023) a prominent Shiite cleric, Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour, the preacher of the central Friday prayers for the Shiite community in Diraz, west of Manama, on charges of "delivering a sermon and broadcasting and circulating it through social media."

The head of the Northern Governorate Prosecution stated that the Public Prosecution "received a report from the Criminal Investigation Department at the General Directorate of Investigations and Criminal Evidence that a person was observed giving a sermon and broadcasting and circulating it through social media. The sermon included false news that would harm public order and disturb public peace." It said that it "carried out its investigations by downloading the statements and recordings circulating on social media, examining and analyzing the comments of those who followed them, as well as interrogating the accused in the presence of his lawyer. Therefore, the public prosecution ordered his detention for seven days pending investigation. Sanqour's arrest caused widespread reactions, leading to his release after three days and before the expiration of the specified period of detention.



June 2023

Ministry of Justice alleges 'legal violations' in Friday sermons at Imam Sadiq Mosque, warns those in charge

The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs claimed (5 June 2023) that there were "legal violations and transgression during Friday sermons in a mosque," referring to the Imam Sadiq Mosque in Diraz, west of the capital Manama, threatening those in charge of it with "no tolerance." The Ministry's Religious Affairs Department said in a statement that "slogans were issued by some worshipers containing phrases inciting hatred" and "transgressions during the delivery of sermons," saying that what it claimed "detracts from the sanctity of places of worship and their lofty and solemn mission."

The Department threatened those in charge of the mosque to "not tolerate" what it called "any attempt to bring back the same inflammatory rhetoric."

Ministry of Information says it is working on legislation to regulate "electronic media"

The Ministry of Information (9 June 2023) said it is working on preparing legislation to regulate "electronic media," emphasizing at the same time that "there is continuous monitoring of suspicious practices and activities on social media by the Ministry of Interior and taking the necessary measures regarding them."

This came in response to a question by the member of the Shura Council Ijlal Al-Bobshit sent by Minister of Information Dr. Ramzan Al-Nuaimi. The Ministry confirmed that it is "currently working in cooperation with the legislative authority to enact legislation that would regulate electronic media." "The Ministry of Interior is currently the competent authority to monitor suspicious practices and activities on social media and is authorized to take the necessary measures to combat all types of cybercrimes," the ministry said in its response



Social media user sentenced to two months in prison for insulting the Ministry of Education



The Court of Cassation (30 June 2023) upheld a final ruling to imprison a user of a social media account for two months for "insulting a statutory body, namely the Ministry of Education "Instagram", where he directed to the ministry phrases that are prosecuted by law and represent a transgression and insult to the ministry and its employees.

The Public Prosecution had received a complaint from the Ministry alleging that a person on Instagram had assaulted it in a posted video clip.

June 2023

The "Interior" pardons a Saudi resident who insulted a Shiite Muslim Imam

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate of the Ministry of Interior said (20 July 2023) that "in response to what is circulating regarding tweets that are offensive to a sect, and after monitoring and follow-up work, it turned out that the owner of the account that published those offensive tweets is outside the Kingdom of Bahrain, and the necessary measures are being taken in this regard." The owner of the account in question @shannaf12 is a Saudi resident of Bahrain who wrote a derogatory tweet about a Shia Muslim Imam during the season of Ashura.





On 25th of July 2023, Bahraini authorities abruptly banned Bahraini historian Nasser al-Khairi's book *Qala'ed Al-Nahrain fi Tareekh Al-Bahrain* (The Necklaces of the Two Chests in the History of Bahrain). Al-Ayyam Bookstore, which published the book nearly two decades ago, issued a statement confirming its withdrawal from circulation in what appears to be a response to a directive from the authorities. "There are some books that were issued in certain circumstances and times, but these books should not be considered as historical references because they are nothing more than individual and unsophisticated attempts." The publisher noted that "one of these books is the book called The Necklaces of the Two Chests in the History of Bahrain by Nasser Jawhar Mubarak al-Khairi, which was never considered a historical document and was marred by many questionable narratives and accounts." It added that "the book was issued a short time ago by the Ayyam Kashkool Bookstore, which quickly realized the matter and decided not to distribute it and withdrew the book from the library in order to avoid taking its contents for granted, and because it has not been subjected to any research review and is not considered a historical document."



Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Ali summoned after a speech criticizing the normalization agreement

On 30 of July 2023, the security authorities summoned Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Ali after a speech he gave on the night of the 10th of Muharram in the capital, Manama, in the presence of thousands of citizens who raised slogans against the normalization agreement between Bahrain and Israel. He was interrogated about the speech before being released the next day.

August 2023

A lawsuit to stop the screening of the movie "Barbie"



On 11th of August 2023, lawyer Haytham Bu Gammar filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Information to stop the screening of the movie "Barbie" in Bahrain. The lawsuit states that cinemas have announced the screening of the controversial movie "Barbie" worldwide "because it broadcasts ideas that violate international moral values in general and Islamic values in particular, and the movie, its advertising clips, and those who embody the roles focus on

the idea of homosexuality or so-called homosexuality."

The lawyer, who said that "a number of lawyers and citizens have shown solidarity with" the lawsuit, attached statements from a number of associations rejecting the screening of the film in Bahrain, and some newspaper articles referring to the film's ideas about homosexuality and sexual transformation, as he put it.



Dr. Nader Kazim's books banned in Bahrain



The Bahraini Ministry of Information (August 2023) banned all books by researcher and critic Dr. Nader Kazim from sales in local bookstores. According to conflicting information, representatives of the Ministry toured bookstores and asked them verbally to remove his books from the shelves of bookstores without giving a reason or handing them any official orders documented by the judiciary or any administrative authority.

September 2023

Issa Al-Maawda arrested for criticizing naturalization in a video

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate said (7 September 2023) that a -56-year-old man was arrested after he published a video clip on social media that included transgressions and legal violations. It alleged that he "insulted a public employee (a policeman) while performing his duty, directing inappropriate words and phrases to an official institution, providing incorrect information about the car whose license plates he claimed were stoled and whose ownership does not belong to him, as well as misusing the means of communication."

The citizen in question was identified as Issa al-Maawda, who had broadcast a video in which he criticized the naturalization process, specifically referring to some of the naturalized members of the Ministry of Interior.



Tweeter Sheikha Al-Majed detained for 7 days on charges of "insulting a person who is dignified by a religion"

The head of the Cybercrime Prosecution stated (14 September 2023) that the Public Prosecution ordered the pretrial detention of an accused woman pending investigation for posting videos on her social media account that included "alluding to and insulting a person glorified by the people of a religion."

The tweeter in question is well-known social influencer Sheikha Al-Majid, who had posted videos depicting her trip to commemorate the Arbaeen visit (the Pilgrimage of the Fortieth) to Imam Hussein in Iraq and participate in events

organized by the Shiite community in the city of Karbala. According to the Public Prosecution, the Ministry of Interior "monitored a number of clips in the defendant's publicly available electronic account, which is followed by about one million followers, and those published clips included what constitutes prejudice and exposure of a person who is a subject of glorification among the people of a religion." It added that it "reviewed what was published and interrogated the accused and confronted her with the abuse and insult contained in those recorded clips, and she admitted to publishing those clips, so the prosecution ordered her to be detained for seven days on remand."

The court found Disney Nursery owner not guilty of contempt

The Third Criminal High Court (18 September 2023) acquitted the owner of Disney Nursery of the charges brought against her by the Ministry of Education, including defamation and contempt. For its part, the Ministry said in a statement that it had appealed the case against Disney Nursery, and asserted that "the closure decision is still in effect until all stages of litigation are completed."



October 2023

The Ministry of Interior suspends Indian doctor for making insulting remarks about Muslims and Palestine

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate arrested (19 October 2023) an Asian national and referred him to the Public Prosecution, after he posted tweets on the "X" platform containing "insults of a religious nature" and "undermining the requisites of civil peace and social stability," considering that they "negatively affect the security and safety of society." The Directorate elaborated in a statement in 2023 that "the mentioned person was arrested and the necessary legal procedures were taken in preparation for referring the arrested person to the Public Prosecution."

The Royal Bahrain Hospital declared in a statement that it had terminated the services of Indian doctor Sunil Rao following his offensive remarks against Muslims and Palestine on social media.

"Israel will respond with a scorched earth attack, many will be killed, and Hamas will be destroyed," Rao tweeted on X, asking: "What will happen next? If I may ask. Will there be an occupation by military force?" In other tweets, he said he "believes that Islam is a barbaric religion" and that "Muslims are attacking Israel and that Palestine must be destroyed."

Freedom House ranks Bahrain 72nd on its list of unfree online countries

Freedom House (August 2023) ranked Bahrain 72nd in the world in terms of Internet freedom, noting that "violence and torture against cyber activists and journalists is common in Bahrain."

"Internet freedom in Bahrain remains restricted, with authorities frequently blocking websites and forcing the removal of online content,



especially social media posts critical of the government," the organization said, noting that "self-censorship on social media platforms is high due to intimidation by the authorities."

"Journalists and activists working online continue to face criminal penalties and extrajudicial harassment by the state."

November 2023

Historical blogger Jassim al-Abbas arrested after lecture on the history of Shi'ism in Bahrain

On 10th of November 2023, the security authorities arrested Jassim Hussein al-Abbas, the owner of the account and website "Al-Jareesh Years", after summoning him to "criminal investigations". The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate claimed that he "defamed the religious and national foundations of Bahraini society and promoted false historical information that would stir up strife in society and threaten civil peace." Al-Abbas was arrested after he gave a lecture in the village of Ma'ameer on the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and people of Bahrain's adoption of Islam, in which he referred to the precedence of Shiism in Bahrain.

The "Education" refers the management of a private school to investigation for "presenting inappropriate educational content"

The Ministry of Education (21 November 2023) referred a private school to an administrative investigation after the competent supervisory authorities monitored what they called in a statement "providing inappropriate educational content." The ministry also took the necessary measures to stop the use of the educational material and verify the compliance of the curriculum applied by the school.



December 2023

Israeli investor summoned for tweets attacking Palestinians

The Anti-Cybercrime Directorate said (12 December 2023) that it summoned an investor with a foreign (Israeli) nationality "after he wrote provocative phrases on social media, and the necessary legal measures were taken against him." He had posted tweets attacking the Palestinians and supporting the war against them, which sparked public outrage.

Royal pardon for two members of Al-Tajdeed Society after serving their sentences

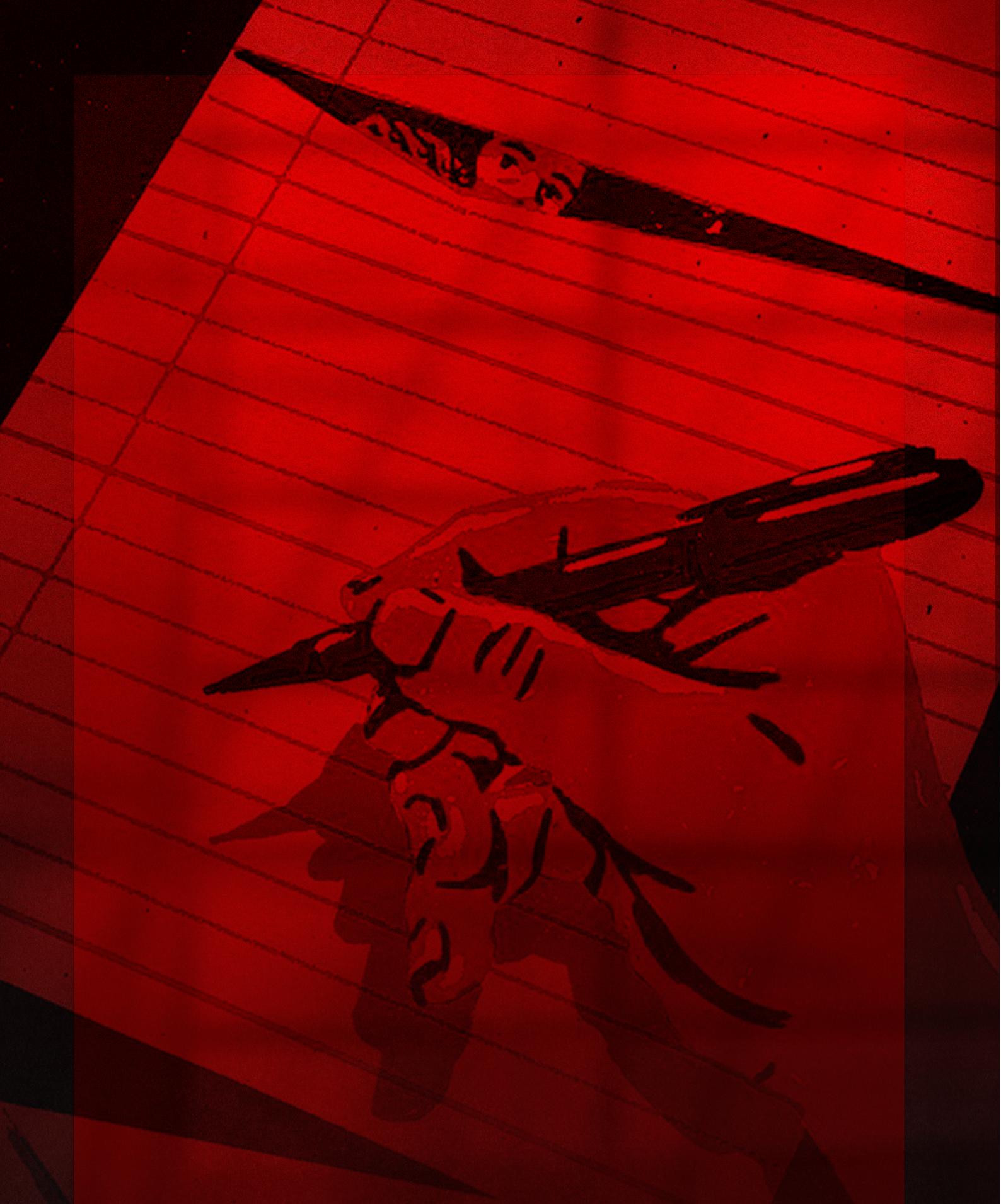
On 15th of December 2023, the security authorities released Reda Rajab, head of the Al-Tajdeed (Renewal) Cultural and Social Society, and Jalal Al-Qassab, head of research at the Society, as part of the royal decree to pardon and release 168 inmates convicted in various cases, after they had served their sentences on the occasion of Bahrain's national holidays.

Dissident Ibrahim Sharif arrested for criticizing Bahrain's joining a naval alliance

On 21st of December 2023, the Bahraini Public Prosecution ordered the detention of the former secretary-general of the Waad Association, Ibrahim Sharif, for seven days pending investigation on charges of "disseminating false news in time of war."

The Bahraini authorities arrested Sharif after he condemned the Bahraini government's joining the US-led naval coalition against Yemen.






IV: Recommendations



Recommendations

- » The Bahrain Press Association condemns the targeting of journalists, bloggers, photographers and people of opinion, which it believes has become a systematic and common practice. The Association calls on the United Nations, the countries that have friendly ties with Bahrain and all international organizations and bodies concerned with defending the freedom of opinion and expression, press and media freedoms to intervene urgently and exert pressure on the Bahraini government to
 - » Immediately and unconditionally release all photographers, media professionals, and civil society activists detained for practicing their work or exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression.
 - » Adopt a more serious and open government policy towards the rights of journalists and civil society activists to exercise their constitutional and legal rights to express their opinion and exercise the right to criticize without fear or targeting.
 - » Stop arbitrary prosecutions and arrests and judicial trials on charges of “inciting hatred of the regime,” “misuse of social media,” and all what restricts freedom of expression in the country.
 - » Secure freedoms of media and the press, and reconsidering the work priorities of the Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security Administration, especially with regard to its authority to censor Internet users.
 - » 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.
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