

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bahraini-and-syrian-authorities-04-04-2011,39946.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Yemen

Journalists hounded

Bahraini and Syrian authorities try to impose news blackout, kidnapping in Yemen

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BAHRAIN

Reporters Without Borders condemns the Bahraini government's attempts to impose a news blackout on the ongoing demonstrations and the police crackdown. Closure of opposition media, forced resignation of senior media personnel, harassment of local journalists and foreign TV crews, intimidation of Bahrainis who talk to foreign journalists, arrests of bloggers, government propaganda and military court orders – the authorities are resorting to all possible means to limit coverage of the protests and to smear their organizers and participants.

Yesterday, the information ministry announced the closure of *Al-Wasat*, an opposition newspaper founded in 2002. Access to its online version was also blocked. The day before, the national television programme "Media Watch" had accused *Al-Wasat* of trying to harm Bahrain's stability and security and of disseminating false information that undermined the country's international image and reputation.

The Information Affairs Authority, the government agency that regulates the media, subsequently gave *Al-Wasat* permission to resume publishing from today but three of its most senior journalists – editor **Mansour Al-Jamari**, managing editor **Walid Nouhid** and local news editor **Aqil Mirza** – were forced to resign. The board of directors announced the appointment of Abidily Al-Abidily to replace Jamari as editor.

Jamari told the Associated Press that the government was trying to silence independent media in Bahrain.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) meanwhile reported that the military prosecutor general issued a decree on 28 March – Decision No.5 of 2011 – under which the publication of any information about ongoing investigations by military prosecutors was banned on national security grounds (<http://www.fidh.org/Bahrain-risk-of...>). The decree reinforces the arsenal of measures that authorities can use to silence any reporting about human rights violations.

CNN journalists **Scott Bronstein** and **Taryn Fixel** were briefly detained on 29 March while interviewing Nabeel Rajab, the head of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, at his home.

Reporters Without Borders also condemns the harassment of Bahraini bloggers. Photos of bloggers and human rights activists labelled as "traitors to the homeland" have been circulating on the Internet for several days. They include **Mahmood Al-Yousif** and **Manaf Al-Muhandis**, who were arrested on 30 March and were released the following day.

Mohamed Al-Maskati, who blogs under the name of Emoodz, is still being held in an unknown location since his arrest also 30 March. After blogging actively in the past few weeks and posting videos of recent events on his blog (<http://emoodz.com/>) and on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/emoodz>), he was threatened by a presumed member of the royal family, Mohd

Al-Khalifa (<https://twitter.com/#!/MohdSAIkhali>). Since his arrest, he has been able to contact his family only once, on 31 March.

Khalifa meanwhile continues on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/#!/MohdSAIkhali...>) to threaten anyone calling for Makati's release: "#FreeEmoodz anyone that's living in Bahrain and is supporting the terrorist emoodz, will have his IP address taken and will get arrested!"

There is still no news of **Ali Abdulemam** and **Sayid Yousif Al-Muhafdah**, two bloggers who disappeared on 16 March, and **Abduljalil Al-Singace**, a blogger who was arrested the same day. The blogosphere has reported the silence of several of its members without knowing whether they have been arrested or have gone into hiding to escape the police crackdown. Reporters Without Borders urges the government to end its hate campaign against bloggers and to immediately release all those it is holding.

SYRIA

Journalists working for foreign media targeted

The Associated Press reported that two of its correspondents in Syria were ordered to leave the country on 1 April. They were given one hour to comply. The Jordanian media meanwhile reported that the Syrian authorities arrested two journalists working for *Arab Broadcasting Services*, **Akram Abu Safi** and **Sobhie Naeem Al-Assal**, on 24 March. In all, a total of six journalists have now been deported.

Reporters Without Borders condemns the way the authorities are treating the journalists who are covering the street protests taking place in Syria and urges them to release all of the Syrian journalists that are currently detained.

"Whether Syrian or foreign, the journalists covering the demonstrations must not be regarded as participants," Reporters Without Borders said. "They are there just to report what is going on. Nonetheless, they are the victims of a crackdown by the government, which is trying to block access to information by imposing a media blackout. The arrests and disappearances are part of an unacceptable policy of intimidating the media."

Reuters reported that **Khaled al-Hariri**, a Syrian photographer working for the agency, was released yesterday after being held for six days in Damascus. Three other *Reuters* journalists – two Lebanese and a Jordanian, were also released in the past few days, after being arrested. *Reuters* had lost contact with Hariri on 29 March.

Aged 50 and based in Damascus, Hariri was the last *Reuters* employee still being held by the Syrian authorities. **Suleiman Al-Khalidi**, the *Reuters* correspondent in Amman, was released on 1 April. *Reuters* TV producer **Ayat Basma** and cameraman **Ezzat Baltaji** were expelled on 28 March after being held for two days. **Khaled Ya'qoub Oweis**, a Jordanian journalist who had been the agency's Damascus correspondent since 2006, had his accreditation withdrawn on 25 March.

A number of Syrian journalists and bloggers have also been arrested. According to the London-based Syrian Human Rights Monitoring Centre, **Doha Hassan**, a journalist who works for several websites, and **Zaher Omareen** were arrested on 27 March. Reporters Without Borders has been told that they are being held at the headquarters of the General Directorate for State Security in Damascus.

Despite the announced lifting of the state of emergency and the release of 260 detainees, the Kurdish blogger **Kamal Hussein Sheikou**, the blogger **Ahmed Hadifa** and the journalist and writer **Mohamed Dibo** are all still detained. They have been held since the start of the protests.

Mohamed Radwan, an Egyptian blogger with US citizenship who had been working in Syria for the past nine months as an engineer, was released on 1 April after being arrested on 25 March

and held incommunicado. The Syrian authorities accused him of spying for Israel and, using a procedure beloved of the Iranian government, showed him on national television making a "confession." His family dismissed the charges as nonsense (see: <http://www.aolnews.com/2011/03/28/f...>).

As a result of Syrian government pressure, the signal of *Orient TV*, a privately-owned TV station broadcasting from the United Arab Emirates, has repeatedly been suspended on Nilesat and Arabsat, two of the satellite services that normally carry it.

An *Orient TV* representative told Reporters Without Borders that the station has changed its broadcast frequency several times since the start of the unrest in Syria in mid-March. "Since 25 March, we have only been broadcasting on the Internet three times a day," he added. The station's employees have also been harassed.

YEMEN

Abdelghani Al-Shamiri, the former news director of the state-owned radio and TV service, was kidnapped by national security officials while on his way home on 31 March in Sanaa and was taken to an unidentified location. He was released the next day after pressure from the Union of Journalists.

Shamiri recently resigned from his positions within the ruling party and declared his support for the protesters who have been calling for President Ali Abdallah Saleh's resignation. Thereafter, he had been getting many messages threatening him or members of his family with reprisals if he continued to support the opposition movement.

Samia Al-Aghbary, a woman journalist, has also received many threatening phone calls.

LIBYA

Reporters Without Borders reiterates its concern about three Al-Jazeera journalists – Mauritanian reporter **Ahmed Vall Ould el-Dine**, Norwegian photographer **Ammar Al-Hamdane** and British photographer **Kamel Ataloua** – who were arrested in early March and are still being held by pro-Gaddafi forces in the west of the country.

A fourth Al-Jazeera journalist who was arrested at the same time, Tunisian reporter **Lotfi Messaoudi**, was released on 31 March and has returned to Tunisia. Reporters Without Borders calls for the immediate release of the other three.

OMAN

Amnesty International reports that an Omani journalist, **Ahmed Al-Shizawi** (<http://www.amnesty.name/fr/library/...>), was arrested on 29 March in Sohar while participating in a sit-in with human rights and opposition activists.
