

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bahrain-despite-government-promises-07-01-2012,41642.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Bahrain

Double game

Despite government's promises, journalists continue to be harassed and attacked

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Reporters Without Borders deplors the way the Bahraini security forces continue to intimidate and attack journalists despite the undertakings that the government gave after an independent commission of enquiry released its report on the crackdown on anti-government protests during the first half of 2011.

The international community must not be taken in by the duplicity with which the government expresses a desire to punish those responsible for the abuses while continuing to crack down on dissent.

In one of the latest incidents, *DPA* photographer **Mazen Mahdi** was beaten by police in front of the police station in Samaheej, northeast of Manama, on 3 January, despite wearing a vest with the word "Press" on it.

He had gone to cover a protest by a crowd that had gathered outside the police station in response to a youth's arrest, and was taking photos when the police charged the protesters at around 12:30 pm. Two of the policemen challenged him, although he was clearly identifiable as a journalist, and the officers he was arguing with failed to intervene when he was hit violently on the head. After being taken inside the police station, he was released 20 minutes later, but the police refused to register his complaint, he told Reporters Without Borders.

It was the fourth time Mahdi had been attacked or harassed by the police in the space of three weeks.



While covering a demonstration in Tubli, southwest of Manama, on 23 December, two grenades were fired in his direction but fortunately did not hit him (see photo).

During a protest by about 50 people in Abu Saiba, west of Manama, on 15 December, teargas was aimed at him and *Reuters* photographer **Hamad Mohamed** while they were on their way back to their vehicle wearing their press vests. Mahdi's vest was marked with the word "Press". On 7 December, he and a colleague from the *RTR* agency were detained by riot police for 30 minutes after covering a demonstration. Both were wearing press vests and showed their press cards.

The blogger and activist **Zainab Al-Khawaja** ([@angryarabiya](https://twitter.com/angryarabiya)) was manhandled and arrested while attending a demonstration (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sv2Dom8Wtw) in Manama on 15 December and was released five days later pending trial on charges of attacking a police officer, taking part in an illegal demonstration and inciting subversion. She is facing a possible two-year jail sentence.

Teargas was fired at *New York Times* correspondent **Nick Kristof** and his cameraman on 9

December and their equipment was damaged.

On 5 January, the Bahraini journalist **Reem Khalifa**'s trial was postponed yet again, this time until 19 January, because two prosecution witnesses failed to appear. Reporters Without Borders calls on the authorities to withdraw all the charges against her.

France 24 and *Radio Monte Carlo Daouliya* correspondent **Nazeeha Saeed** was told by her lawyer last week that the judicial authorities have not investigated her complaint that she was tortured while [detained](#) in May. Reporters Without Borders call on the authorities to investigate the case.

On 28 November, the court of cassation refused to overturn the three-year jail sentence that **Hassan Matoq**, a nurse and photographer, received from a military court in May on charges of illegal assembly and dissemination of fabricated photos of wounded people.

Matoq has been held since 24 March, when he was arrested while on duty at Salmaniya hospital. His trial before a military court began on 9 May concluded at a second hearing three days later with the sentence being imposed. Although the authorities promised that all the cases of civilians tried by court martial would be reviewed by civilian courts, his initial appeal was heard by another military court, which upheld the sentence.
