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Middle East & North Africa - Bahrain

Court crackdown

Judicial nightmare for journalists in new wave of prosecutions

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Reporters Without Borders is alarmed by a wave of trials involving journalists although the government lifted the state of emergency and announced the start of a "national dialogue."

In the most high-profile case, three senior journalists with *Al-Wasat*, the country's only opposition newspaper – editor **Mansour Al-Jamari**, managing editor **Walid Nouhid** and local news editor **Aqil Mirza** – are to appear in court tomorrow on charges of disseminating false information and undermining the country's image. All three were forced to resign in April when the newspaper was temporarily banned.

Jamari admits that several articles contained false information but he points that all of this information was sent from the same IP address and he suspects that the newspaper was set up, especially as it has been target of a major smear campaign in the government media in recent months.

Reporters Without Borders urges the court to drop all the charges against these three journalists in line with the spirit of the national dialogue that King Hamad II proposed at the start of July.

As already reported, the prison sentences imposed on 14 Shiite activists including the blogger [Abdeljalil Al-Singace](#) were upheld on appeal on 27 September. According to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), they have begun a hunger strike to protest against the arrests of 40 women activists who staged a protest on 23 September to demand their release.

Around 20 of the women protesters, including **Noor Aqeel Al-Ghasra**, a journalist with the daily *Al-Ahad*, have been charged with illegal assembly, disturbing public order by using violence, and inciting a revolt. According to some sources, Al-Ghasra was tortured by the police during her first night in detention. Her lawyer has condemned the conditions in which they are being held and the court's refusal to let defence witnesses testify.

Ali Almosawi, an *Alam TV* reporter who had been covering the anti-government protests in Bahrain since February, has been awaiting prosecution on treason charges since 12 September. The authorities have censored the TV station's websites and severely restricted its broadcasts.

All Internet activity continues to be closely monitored by the authorities. The [BJDM website](#), for example, has been blocked ever since it posted a statement by former parliamentarian Ali Aswad on 16 August. Aswad and all the other parliamentary members of his party, *Al-Wefaq*, resigned their seats in February in protest against the government's crackdown on the protests.

The authorities recently hacked into the blog of [Basema Al-Qasab](#), a journalist with the daily *Al-Waqt* who is due to appear before a criminal court on 14 November on charges of illegal assembly and inciting violence. The photographer [Moitaba Salmat](#) is due to appear in court the same day on charges of helping foreign TV stations and participating in illegal gatherings.

Al-Qasab was already interrogated on 19 May in connection with several Twitter messages and an article published on the BBC Arabic website on 17 February about violence against demonstrators by the security forces. She was fired from her education ministry post on 20

June.

The lawyer of the detained online activist **Hasan Salman Abu Ali** has condemned the conditions in which he is being held and has called for his immediate release. Ali has reportedly been tortured and repeatedly humiliated since his arrest on 14 May 2009 on a charge of violating state secrecy for posting a list of names of interior ministry employees on an online forum. A court refused to release him in August on the grounds of misconduct in detention.

The photographer **Sadiq Marzouq** did not respond to a summons to appear in court on 16 September because he feared he would be arrested. Marzouq was arrested on 16 March, after covering violence by soldiers against opposition demonstrations, and the following day police searched his home and confiscated his equipment.

The journalist **Reem Khalifa** learned on 5 October from her lawyers that she had been summoned to appear before a judge the previous day. As she did not receive any notification of the summons, a new hearing has been set for 18 October.

Reporters Without Borders urges the kingdom's authorities to stop trying to intimidate journalists in this manner and calls on the courts to dismiss all the charges against them.
