

BAHRAIN HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

2021

EVENTS OF 2020

SPECIAL EDITION MARKING THE
BAHRAINI UPRISING: 10 YEARS ON



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The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) is a London based non-profit organisation focusing on research, investigation, and advocacy for human rights and democracy in Bahrain.

Published in February 2021, to mark the 10th Anniversary of the Bahrain Uprising.

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Design by R Probert.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei - Director of Advocacy

On 14 February 2011, the tiny Gulf island of Bahrain was engulfed by a wave of protests that was sweeping across the Arab world. Inspired by the jubilant crowds in Tunis and Cairo, the people of Bahrain descended in droves upon the Pearl Roundabout in the capital, Manama, to demand democratic reform, social justice and respect for human rights.

While Bahrain's restive population has a long tradition of popular dissent, the movement of 2011 was unique in its size and diversity. The New York Times [estimated](#) that over 100,000 Bahrainis from a population of just over 500,000 citizens participated in the largest demonstrations, making Bahrain's uprising proportionally the largest of the Arab Spring. As long-standing dictatorships began to collapse across the Middle East, many of us who joined the protests felt like change was finally coming to the Arabian Peninsula.

However, within days of the first protests the rulers of Bahrain responded with unrestrained [repression](#), the brutality and scale of which was unprecedented in Bahrain's modern history. With [assistance](#) from Saudi and Emirati reinforcements, Bahrain's security forces crushed the fledgling movement, killing dozens and injuring many more. I was among the thousands subsequently arrested and subject to [systematic torture](#) so severe that several prominent Bahrainis were [killed](#) in custody.

The experience led me to leave Bahrain for exile in London on my release from prison in 2012 and my organisation, from where I have monitored the situation in Bahrain with the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy since 2013. Over the decade since the uprising, we have documented a grave deterioration in human rights as the government has taken extreme measures to suppress all forms of dissent. A [crackdown](#) launched in 2017 after Donald Trump assumed the American presidency, continues to rage to this day, with

civil society progressively [dismantled](#) and a [moratorium](#) on the death penalty abandoned. The situation did not improve in 2020 as Bahrain's rulers [seized](#) on the COVID-19 pandemic to tighten their grip on power, while abroad they remained mired in the devastating conflict in Yemen.

This report, prefaced with a chapter reviewing the legacies of the 2011 uprising, will assess the deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain throughout the last year in a range of areas. The pernicious role of the British government in maintaining the Bahraini regime will also be analysed in detail, as well as Bahrain's growing investment in international sport to distract from - or sportswash - their international reputation.

While the situation remains grim, 2020 also offered glimmers of hope to the long-suffering people of Bahrain. The [commitment](#) by F1 superstar Lewis Hamilton to raise human rights with Bahrain's Crown Prince after [receiving letters](#) from political prisoners demonstrated that the world is finally paying attention to what is happening in the country. There are also early [signs](#) from President Joe Biden that his administration will not tolerate the wanton abuses of the Trump era. However, it is too early to tell whether this will translate into genuine change.

For the people of Bahrain, this change cannot come fast enough. While the hopes of the 2011 uprising have been crushed, the memory of those days lives on and the long struggle for democracy in Bahrain continues.



SAYED AHMED ALWADAEI

Director of Advocacy

KEY EVENTS OF 2020

◆ Bahrain continued to issue death sentences based on torture-tainted evidence:

Bahrain's judiciary issued three new death sentences in 2020, while ten sentences were upheld, including torture victims **Mohammed Ramadhan** and **Husain Moosa**. 27 individuals in Bahrain are currently on death row in Bahrain, of whom 26 are at imminent risk of execution.

◆ The government exploited the coronavirus pandemic to further suppress civil society:

Like other Gulf states, Bahrain seized on the coronavirus pandemic to further restrict citizens' rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Cybercrime legislation was applied aggressively to persecute public figures over their social media activity, including prominent defence lawyers **Abdullah Al Shamlawi** and **Abdulla Hashim**.

◆ Medical negligence and poor conditions persisted in Bahrain's prisons:

Bahrain's government drew criticism for failing to adequately address overcrowding and poor sanitation in Bahrain's prisons during the pandemic, or introduce adequate measures to protect inmates from the virus. While a significant number of prisoners were released in March 2020, releases largely excluded political prisoners, including prominent human rights defenders and opposition leaders. Despite the heightened risk posed by COVID-19 to prison populations, Bahrain continued to deny medical care to political prisoners, particularly aging opposition figures **Hassan Mushaima** and **Dr Abduljalil Al-Singace**.

◆ Bahrain's use of sport to whitewash human rights abuses met unprecedented challenges:

While Bahrain continued investing in professional sport in an effort to distract from their appalling rights record, the governments' "sportswashing" efforts were undermined by F1 champion **Lewis Hamilton**, who spoke out about "consistent and massive" problems with human rights at the Bahrain Grand Prix.

◆ UK government wide-ranging support for Bahrain undeterred by growing criticism:

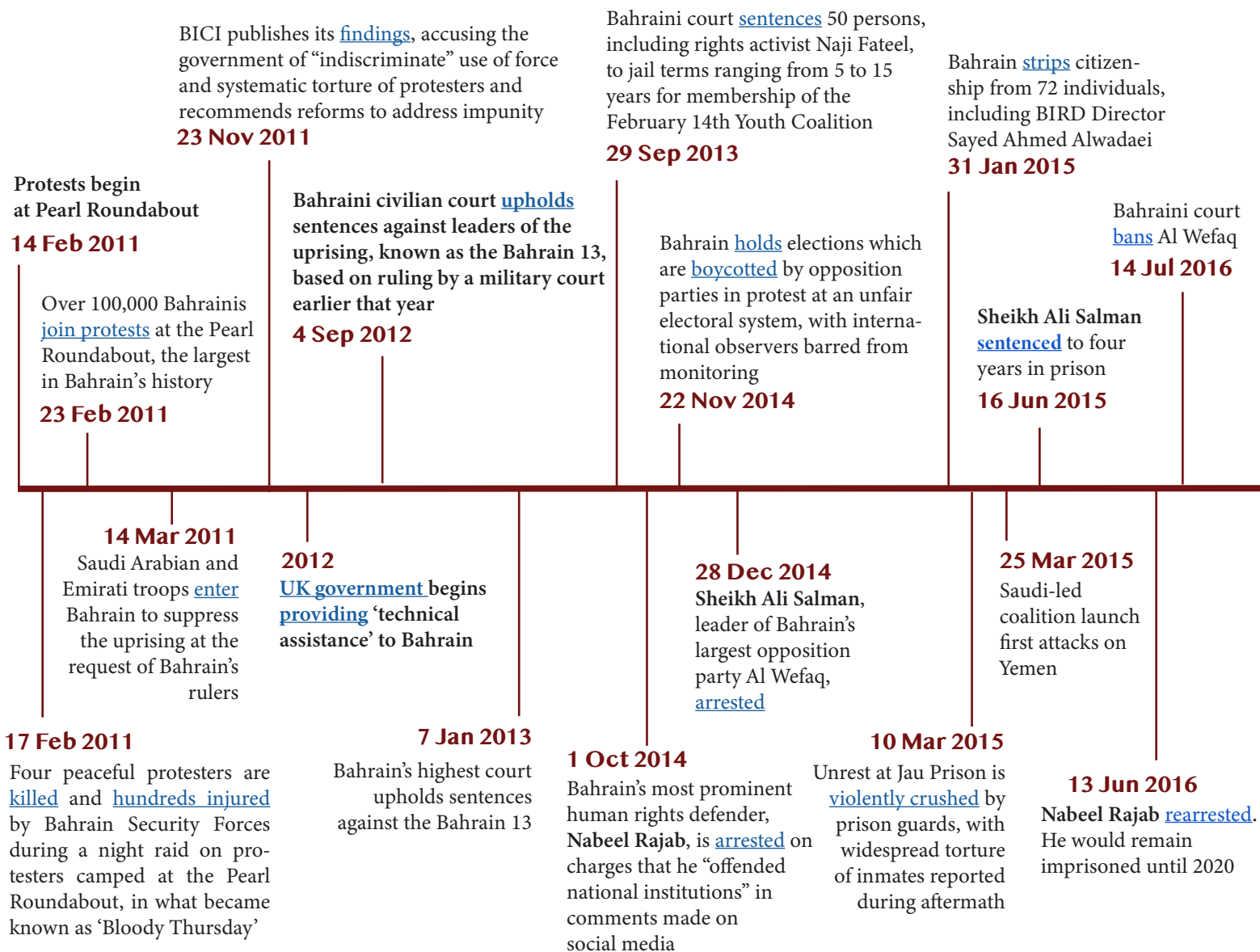
UK support for the Bahraini government remained unwavering throughout 2020, with the government lifting a 2019 ban on arms sales to Bahrain and hosting several delegations of Bahraini officials in Westminster. However, growing consternation among parliamentarians about the secrecy surrounding UK-funding to Bahrain saw unprecedented scrutiny.

CHAPTER 1

THE BAHRAINI UPRISING: 10 YEARS ON

In February 2011, inspired by the wave of protests which had erupted across the Middle East, the people of Bahrain took to the streets to demand democratic reforms, social justice and respect for human rights. Initially centred around the Pearl Roundabout in the capital Manama, the protests grew rapidly, with [hundreds of thousands](#) of Bahraini citizens participating in what remain the largest demonstrations in the country's history.

However, rather than address the protesters' moderate demands, Bahrain's rulers [reacted](#) with unprecedented savagery. Their brutal suppression of the uprising, [bolstered](#) by troops from neighbouring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, [saw](#) dozens murdered, hundreds tortured and thousands thrown in prison or dismissed by their employers for joining protests.



While the outcome of the Arab Spring uprisings remain contested across the region, in Bahrain the interceding decade has [seen](#) the government consolidate repression and tighten its grip over the country. Reforms promised in the wake of the [Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry \(BICI\)](#), which documented the worst excesses of the government's response to the uprising, have largely been reversed or abandoned and Bahrain's once-vibrant civil society has been systematically crushed.

The advent of the Trump administration in 2017, whose antipathy to human rights and international law was evident from the outset, rapidly accelerated Bahrain's descent into authoritarianism, heralding the country's [bloodiest](#) period since the uprising which continues to this day. Abroad, Bahrain has backed Saudi Arabia's devastating war in Yemen since [March 2015](#) and has stoked instability in the region by backing the GCC blockade of Qatar. In this special chapter, BIRD will assess the state of human rights

Donald Trump [meets](#) with King Hamad at a conference in Saudi Arabia, [promising](#) ties with Bahrain will no longer be strained

21 May 2017

Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt [sever](#) diplomatic ties with Qatar, marking the beginning of the Gulf Crisis

5 Jun 2017

Sheikh Ali Salman [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment on bogus charges of spying for Qatar, weeks before controversial election

4 Nov 2018

Bahrain [upholds](#) death sentences against torture victims Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa, after years of desperate appeals

13 Jul 2020

Bahrain [abandons](#) 10-year moratorium on the death penalty, executing torture victims Sami Mushaima (42), Ali Al Singace (21) and Abbas Al Samea (27)

15 Jan 2017

Bahraini court [dissolves](#) the secular National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), the last opposition party operating in the country

31 May 2017

Three relatives of BIRD Director Sayed Ahmed Al-wadaei [sentenced](#) to three years in reprisal for his human rights work

30 Oct 2017

Bahraini court [revokes](#) citizenship of 138 people following mass trial

16 Apr 2019

Bahrain [upholds](#) five-year sentence against Nabeel Rajab

31 Dec 2018

Bahrain's Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa [dies](#) after half-a-century in power. At least 16 people were subsequently arrested for commenting on his death

11 Nov 2020

5 Jan 2017

Bahrain [restores](#) arrest and investigatory powers to abusive National Security Agency, reversing key recommendation of BICI report

23 May 2017

Bahraini security forces [open fire](#) on peaceful sit-in in the village of Duraz, killing five and injuring dozens in bloodiest day in Bahrain's modern history

10 Jul 2017

Nabeel Rajab [sentenced](#) to two years in prison over social media

22 Feb 2018

Nabeel Rajab [sentenced](#) to a further five years in prison

27 Feb 2019

Bahrain [sentences](#) 167 people in mass trial over Duraz sit-in

27 Jul 2019

Bahrain [executes](#) torture victims Ali Al Arab (25) and Ahmed Al Malali (24), along with an unnamed Bangladeshi migrant

27 Jul 2020

Bahrain [sentences](#) 51 people in a mass trial marred by torture and due process violations

20 Jan 2017

Donald Trump is [inaugurated](#) as 45th President of the United States

4 Jun 2017

Bahrain government [shuts down](#) Al Wasat, Bahrain's last independent newspaper

24 Nov 2018

Bahrain [holds](#) elections, in which opposition groups are barred from standing. International observers are again banned from monitoring the election

1.1 Death Penalty

Among the most notable regressions in the human rights situation in Bahrain has been a startling increase in the use of the death penalty, with at least 51 individuals sentenced to death in Bahrain since the uprising. Until 2017, Bahrain had conducted just nine executions since its foundation as a modern state in 1971 and had observed a *de facto* moratorium on capital punishment for over a decade. Over the following two-and-a-half years Bahrain executed six individuals, with a further 26 currently at risk of imminent execution.

Furthermore, considerable evidence [suggests](#) that the death penalty has been used to punitively target opponents of the ruling family, often using overly broad anti-terror legislation. Research by BIRD and Reprieve has found that at least five of the six individuals executed since 2017 were convicted on the basis of confessions obtained under torture in trials replete with due process violations. Of the 12 individuals currently on death row for terrorism-related charges, all but one have also alleged being tortured.

1.2 Police and judiciary

Both Bahrain's security forces and judiciary remain essential components of the government's repressive apparatus. Despite the shocking excesses documented by the BICI, Bahraini police continue to violently attack peaceful protesters and conduct arbitrary arrests. A significant number of protesters have been killed or seriously injured by security forces since 2011: most notably, in 2017 police [opened fire](#) on unarmed demonstrators participating in a sit-in in the village of Duraz, fatally wounding five and injuring dozens more. The use of torture continues to be reported against individuals in police custody, while detainees are routinely denied basic rights including access to legal representation during detention and interrogation. In the decade since the uprising, Bahrain's judiciary has failed to move towards an evidence-based system in line with international standards, remaining dependent on confessions to secure convictions. As a result, judges consistently fail to discount evidence obtained under torture, including in cases involving the death penalty. Mass trials are also commonplace in Bahrain, with the largest in Bahrain's recent history seeing 167 people [sentenced](#) in a single day in February 2019, over their participation in the Duraz sit-in.

Judicial harassment [remains](#) a potent tool of repression in Bahrain, with vexatious prosecutions on spurious charges frequently pursued against critics of the government. The revocation of citizenship as a means of targeting critics has also increased dramatically in recent years, reaching a [peak](#) of 990 individuals in 2019. While international pressure saw Bahrain's government [reinstate](#) citizenship to a significant number of individuals, nearly 300 remain denaturalised, with many rendered stateless, including prominent political figures, the spiritual leader of Bahrain's indigenous Shia majority Shiekh Isa Ahmed Qasim, as well as human rights activists like BIRD Director [Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei](#).

1.3 Civil society

Despite once harbouring among the most vibrant civil societies in the Gulf, civic freedoms in Bahrain have come under sustained assault since the Arab Spring. A sharp deterioration in freedom of expression, association and assembly in recent years has led the U.S. NGO Freedom House to [note](#) that Bahrain has "become one of the Middle East's most repressive states."

Recurrent attacks on the free press have seen Bahrain fall 25 places on the Reporters Sans Frontiers World Press Freedom Index since the uprising, to a pitiful 169th place out of 180 states. In 2017, Bahrain [shuttered](#) the country's last independent newspaper, Al-Wasat, while journalists, photographers and bloggers [continue](#) to be targeted, with many opting to self-censor critical work to avoid prosecution.

According to UNESCO, at least three journalists have been [killed](#) in Bahrain since 2011, including Al-Wasat's founder Karim Fakhrawi who was [tortured](#) to death during the uprising. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [report](#) that at least six journalists are currently imprisoned in Bahrain. Meanwhile, activists and journalists who continue their work from exile risk [reprisals](#) against family members who remain in the country; in 2017, three family members of BIRD Director Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei were [jailed](#), in what the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [deem](#) to be "acts of reprisal" for his human rights work in the UK.

Since 2017, all major opposition parties in Bahrain have been outlawed, including the two largest blocs, [Al-Wefaq](#) and the [National Democratic Action Society \(Wa'ad\)](#). In 2018, a Bahraini court [handed](#) a life sentence to Al-

Wefaq's leader, Sheikh Ali Salman, on bogus charges of spying for Qatar, in what Amnesty International [decried](#) as a "travesty of justice." Laws prohibiting unlicensed gatherings of more than five people, including the [1973 decree and Decree No. 32/2006](#), continue to be used as a pretext to violently suppress public demonstrations, further limiting spaces available for public discourse. Activists and human rights defenders, including many [women](#), have faced arbitrary arrest, torture and imprisonment for conducting their work.

Reflecting fears about the role of social media in fomenting the Arab Spring uprisings, Bahrain's government has mirrored neighbouring regimes by [turning](#) increasingly to repressive cybercrime legislation to further restrict civic space. Political leaders, activists and other civil society figures have been aggressively persecuted over their social media activity. Notably, in 2018 Bahrain's most prominent human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, was [sentenced](#) to 5 years in prison over tweets exposing torture in Bahraini prisons and commenting the Yemen war, while in 2019, the leader of the dissolved secular Wa'ad party, Ebrahim Sharif, was [handed](#) a six-month suspended sentence for tweets critical of deposed Sudanese dictator Omar Al-Bashir.

While the government attempts to project an image of Bahrain as a haven of religious tolerance, Bahrain's government has deliberately stoked sectarian divisions in the country to divide and defang political opposition. Following the significant presence of Bahrain's indigenous Shi'a population in the 2011 protests, the government [arbitrarily demolished](#) over 40 Shi'a mosques, including many of significant historic value. The government has also been [widely accused](#) of rapidly naturalising foreign nationals from Sunni states in an attempt to reduce the Shi'a populations demographic and political significance.

Shi'a religious leaders are routinely harassed by Bahraini authorities; in 2016 a Bahraini court [stripped](#) Bahrain's highest Shi'a authority, Sheikh Isa Qassim, of Bahraini citizenship, before [convicting](#) him a year later on spurious corruption charges. As the U.S Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has [noted](#), Shi'a ceremonies, particularly during the holy month of Muharram, are often violently suppressed by Bahrain's government. Economically, Bahraini Shi'a continue to face widespread discrimination in housing and employment and are disproportionately represented in Bahrain's prison population.

1.4 Prison conditions

A direct result of the 2011 uprising was a significant expansion in Bahrain's prison population. During the suppression of protests, hundreds were prosecuted for joining or supporting protests and by 2019 Bahrain was imprisoning its citizens at a [higher rate](#) than any other Arab nation. The attendant overcrowding led to a severe deterioration in conditions; in 2015, a [report](#) by the government's own prison watchdog, the Prisoner and Detainees Rights Commission, found "insect infestation in some rooms, broken toilets and poor cleanliness"; this has led to recurrent outbreaks of the highly infectious skin condition scabies, which thrives in unsanitary conditions.

Authorities at Bahrain's prisons have been widely accused of committing a range of abuses against inmates, including torture. Political prisoners, who make up the majority of inmates in Bahrain, are routinely singled out for ill treatment and reprisals.

In 2015, Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that guards had indiscriminately fired tear gas into cells and violently assaulted inmates while quelling unrest at Jau Prison the prison. In the aftermath, guards tortured a significant number of inmates with beatings and humiliating treatment including [forcing](#) inmates to defecate and urinate in their clothes, [forcing](#) inmates to chant and dance in their underwear while spraying them with cold water and forcing them to chant slogans supportive of Bahrain's monarchy. While the events of 2015 were particularly extreme, abuses against political prisoners continue to be widely recorded, including against [female detainees](#).

In recent years, medical negligence has emerged as one of the most widespread forms of abuse against political prisoners in Bahrain. In 2018, Amnesty International [reported](#) a "shocking pattern of medical negligence in Bahrain's prison system, where individuals with serious conditions like cancer, multiple sclerosis and sickle-cell anaemia are being denied specialist care and pain medication." Medical negligence has been particularly acute [against](#) the aging leaders of the 2011 uprising, including Hassan Mushaima, Dr Abduljalil Al Singace and Sheikh Mohammed Habib Al Muqdad, all of whom are serving life sentences. In February 2020, 24-year old former political prisoner Sayed Khadem Abbas [died](#) after authorities at Jau Prison periodically denied him cancer treatment over a period of several years.

Given the large representation of Bahrain's indigenous Shi'a population within Bahrain's political opposition, prison authorities in Bahrain also routinely discriminate against Shi'a inmates, who [report](#) being prevented from practicing their religious rites, having religious texts and materials confiscated and being subject to sectarian taunts and insults by staff. Prison guards are composed entirely of non-Shi'a staff, with many recruited from foreign Sunni states.

1.5 The BICI Report and the failure to reform

When published in November 2011, the BICI report laid bare the extent of government repression in the wake of the February uprising, finding a "systematic pattern" of violence and torture against protesters and asserting that a "lack of accountability of officials within the security system in Bahrain has led to a culture of impunity." In response, the commission made a series of recommendations aimed at improving accountability and bringing government practice in line with government standards.

Over the next few years, Bahrain invested considerable energy in appearing to comply with the report's recommendations, yet reform efforts have largely proven a facade. Among the most lauded of Bahrain's alleged reforms has been the foundation of a number of oversight bodies mandated to investigate reports of human rights abuses, established between 2011 and 2014 with [significant assistance](#) from the UK government. These include the Ministry of Interior (MoI) Ombudsman, the National Security Agency (NSA) Ombudsman, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) and the PDRC.

Despite considerable fanfare, these bodies have failed to either reduce the incidence of human rights abuses in the country or act as an effective means of securing justice for the victims of abuses. In 2017, the UN Committee Against Torture [warned](#) that these bodies were "not independent, that their mandates are unclear and overlap, and that they are not effective given that complaints ultimately pass through the Ministry of the Interior."

Similarly, in February 2020, Human Rights Watch [condemned](#) the failure of these bodies to tackle impunity in Bahrain's security forces, noting that "[t]he few prosecutions have almost exclusively involved low-ranking officers, and have - without exception - resulted in acquittals or disproportionately light sentences."

Indeed, buttressed by extensive PR efforts from Bahrain, the establishment of these bodies has done little but provide Bahrain with a convenient veneer of reform, behind which abusive practices have continued apace.

Other reforms informed by the BICI's recommendations have proven equally superficial. Following the identification of Bahrain's notorious NSA with systematic torture during the uprising, in November 2011 Bahrain stripped the agency of arrest and interrogation powers. However, these powers were [reinstated](#) by royal decree shortly after the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January 2017, marking the beginning of Bahrain's bloodiest year since the uprising.

Within months, reports of torture by NSA officers against human rights defenders and political activists began to [emerge](#). Between April and May 2017, female activists [Najah Yusuf](#) and [Ebtisam Al Saegh](#) are alleged to have been tortured and sexually assaulted during interrogations at the NSA headquarters at Muharraq Security Complex in northern Bahrain. Similarly, blogger [Yusuf Al Jamri](#) reported being tortured by NSA officers at Muharraq in 2017; he was subsequently granted political asylum in the UK.

Overall, the Bahraini government's efforts at implementing the report's recommendations have failed, encouraged by the acquiescence of Bahrain's Western allies and Gulf neighbours. As the evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates, Bahrain has regressed in almost every area of human rights over the last decade, with continued reports of police violence and torture and a severe deterioration in freedom of expression, assembly and association.

However, the failure ultimately rests on the government's refusal to address the root causes of the 2011 uprising; an earnest desire by a significant number of Bahrainis for a greater share in the governance of their country. Rather than seek to find consensus with the opposition, the government has imprisoned all who dare question it. Aging leaders of the 2011 uprising continue to languish behind bars on life sentences and a generation of Bahrainis has been lost into Bahrain's prison system.

In November 2020, Bahrain's long-serving Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa died after 49 years in his role, during which he gained a reputation as a hawkish conservative hardliner. Sheikh Khalifa was credited with

masterminding the government's violent suppression of successive pro-democracy uprisings in the 1970s, 1990s and in 2011 and overseeing Bahrain's repressive apparatus. His passing and succession by Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa could provide an opportunity for reconciliation between Bahrain's restive populace and the state. However, until the government seriously addresses the democratic aspirations of its populace, the political crisis in the country will remain unresolved.





CHAPTER 2

HUMAN RIGHTS EVENTS OF 2020

2.1 Death Penalty

Increased use of the death penalty in Bahrain in 2020

Bahrain has experienced a surge in death sentences and executions since a de facto moratorium on capital punishment was abandoned in 2017.

According to BIRD's data, 10 death sentences were upheld by Bahrain's highest Court of Cassation in 2020, including three Bangladeshis first sentenced to death on murder charges in January 2020, as well as one Bahraini convicted of murder, two Bahrainis convicted on drug-related offences and four Bahrainis convicted on charges related to political unrest. The latter includes torture survivors [Mohamed Ramadhan](#), [Husain Moosa](#) - whose death sentences were [overturned](#) in 2018 but [reinstated](#) in January 2020 - and [Zuhair Abdullah](#), and [Husein Khalil Rashid](#). In 2020, Bahrain also upheld the death sentence of one unknown individual in absentia. Since 2011, at least 51 people have been sentenced to death in Bahrain, six of whom have been executed.

Death Row Statistics

According to BIRD's records, as of February 2021, there are 27 individuals on death row in Bahrain, 26 of whom have exhausted legal remedies and are at risk of imminent execution. All but one of the 27 are held in Building 1 of Jau Prison, and one who is at risk of execution, appears to be held in military custody.

At Jau Prison, only one of the 26 on death row is not at risk of imminent execution. Those at risk include 17 Bahrainis and eight Bangladeshis. **12** Bahrainis are sentenced to death on political offences, considered terrorism-related offences, of whom **11** have alleged being subjected to torture. **10** of the 25 at Jau Prison are convicted of criminal murder charges, with **three** sentenced to death on drug-related offences.

suggesting that they had been tortured. The verdict, initially scheduled for Christmas Day 2019, was postponed after international [media](#) exposed Bahrain's exploitation of holidays to conceal harsh sentences.

Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa

On 8 January 2020, Bahrain's High Criminal Court of Appeals reimposed death sentences against Mohammad Ramadhan and Husain Moosa, which were [overturned](#) in 2018 after medical evidence emerged suggesting that they had been tortured. The verdict, initially scheduled for Christmas Day 2019, was postponed after international [media](#) exposed Bahrain's exploitation of holidays to conceal harsh sentences.

Mohamed and Husain's death sentences were [upheld](#) on 13 July 2020, by the Court of Cassation, Bahrain's highest court, exhausting their final legal remedy. The Public Prosecution [announced](#) the Court of Cassation's decision on their Instagram page, with Mohammed's wife [reporting](#) that both she and Mohammed's lawyer were barred entry from the courtroom. The sentences were upheld despite [interventions](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions raising concern that "Husain Moosa and Mohamed Ramadhan raise a prima facie case of torture by Bahrain police."

As of February 2021, they are both at risk of imminent execution.

International Criticism

Mohammed and Husain's case has attracted widespread international criticism due to mounting evidence of that their conviction has depended on torture and due process violations and United Nations (UN) experts twice urged Bahrain to quash the death sentences against the two men, before their trials in [February](#) and [July](#) respectively.

In July, the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) [submitted](#) an amicus curiae brief to the Court of Cassation warning that upholding "the convictions in these cases would be wholly inconsistent with Bahrain's international obligations." The amicus was complemented by an [expert opinion](#) submitted by independent experts at the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), which found that investigations into Mohammed and Husain's torture by the UK-funded and trained Special Investigations Unit (SIU) "failed to meet the minimum professional standards or minimum international standards."

On 10 July 2020, the Chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights Maria Arena and

Chair of the European Parliament's delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula Hannah Neumann issued a joint [statement](#) expressing "grave concern over the failures of the courts in Bahrain to exclude torture evidence" in their case. One the same day, US Congressman James P. McGovern, Co-Chair of the bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, also [condemned](#) the trial, describing it as "a travesty that these two men are still imprisoned and face execution."

Multiple international actors also publicly opposed the executions, including international and Bahraini [rights](#) groups, [members](#) of the European Parliament and the [BHRC](#), all of whom wrote to the King of Bahrain asking that he commute the death sentences of Mohammed and Husain.

UK Response

When challenged about Mohammed and Husain's case, the UK government promised to "publicly and loudly remind Bahrain of [the UK's] opposition to the death penalty" and "seek to have it set aside." However, despite considerable pressure from parliamentarians, including Conservative Father of the House [Sir Peter Bottomley](#), the UK government's response to Bahrain's decision to uphold death sentences against Mohammed and Husain was limited to a paltry [tweet](#) by Lord Ahmad.

Nonetheless, the government's laissez faire approach was repeatedly challenged by parliamentarians from all parties, with urgent debates taking place on Mohammed and Husain's trial taking place in both the [Lords](#) and the [Commons](#). Days later, a cross-party open [letter](#) signed by 46 British MPs was sent to the UK Government calling on them to "urgently intervene" ahead of Mohamed and Husain's final hearing.

Zuhair Abdullah and Hussein Khalil Rashid

On 15 June 2020, Bahrain's Court of Cassation [upheld](#) death sentences against torture survivor Zuhair Abdullah. The death sentence of another individual, Hussein Abdullah Khalil Rashid, was also upheld; both men now face imminent execution having exhausted all legal remedies.

Zuhair was sentenced to death and stripped of his citizenship in November 2018 in an unfair trial marred by due process violations. Zuhair's lawyer maintains that

no physical evidence was presented linking him to the alleged crimes, while the presiding judge refused to issue a court order that would permit two UK-funded oversight bodies, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and the Ministry of Interior Ombudsman, to disclose the findings of their investigation into Zuhair's torture allegations.

During his interrogation in 2017, Zuhair was reportedly subjected to beatings, electrocution and sexual assault by Bahraini security forces in the pursuit of a confession; part of his torture is alleged to have taken place at Bahrain's Royal Academy of Policing, which is provided an exclusive MSc in Security Science by the University of Huddersfield (see Chapter 3.4). Zuhair's citizenship was subsequently reinstated.

2.2 Judiciary

Across 2020, Bahrain's judiciary continued to conduct unfair trials marred by procedural irregularities and the use of evidence obtained under torture. Overly broad [anti-terror legislation](#), which encompasses non-violent offences such "disrupting the public order" and "damaging national unity", remained in place and continued to be applied punitively against opponents of the government.

In September 2020, 17-year old Kameel Juma Hasan was [sentenced](#) to five years in prison in an unfair mass trial of 39 defendants and faces more than 20 additional prosecutions and over 20 years in prison on charges linked to his participation in anti-government demonstrations. However, Amnesty International has [asserted](#) that his "prosecution and imprisonment have been taken in reprisal against his mother," former political prisoner Najah Yusuf.

Najah was the subject of an [international campaign](#) in 2019 after being tortured, sexually assaulted and jailed for criticising the Bahrain Grand Prix on social media two years earlier. Upon her [release](#), Najah continued her activism, including featuring in a BBC Arabic documentary [broadcast](#) in March 2020 surrounding the use of torture by Bahraini security forces, leading to accusations that the charges against Kameel are retaliatory. Another mass trial took place in November, when 51 individuals were [convicted](#) of affiliation with a militant group purportedly under the leadership of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Sentences ranged from five years to life imprisonment, with over half of the defendants sentenced in absentia. According to family

members of one defendant interviewed by BIRD, the trial was replete with due process violations and evidence obtained under duress was used to secure convictions. Just months earlier, five UN experts including the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism [warned](#) Bahrain that "Human rights violations committed in the name of combatting terrorism are counter-productive and undermine the credibility and effectiveness of [Bahrain's] counter-terrorism strategy".



23 July 2020 [Letter to the King of Bahrain on the Cases of Ramadan and Moosa](#)



13 July 2020 [Bahrain to Execute 2 Shiite Protesters After Years of Desperate Appeals](#)



13 July 2020 [Bahrain's highest court upholds death sentences despite evidence of torture](#)



13 July 2020 [Bahrain to execute two activists despite concerns over torture](#)



13 July 2020 [Bahrain top court upholds death sentences against two activists](#)



12 July 2020 [Bahrain found evidence of torture behind confession. But death sentences still stand](#)



12 July 2020 [Trying to save two pro-democracy activists from execution will prove the UK is serious about human rights](#)



11 July 2020 [Foreign Secretary urged to intervene to stop execution of Bahraini activists](#)



09 July 2020 [UK accused of 'empty talk' as Bahrain activists face death penalty](#)

2.3 Suppression of civil society

Government crackdown amid COVID-19

Throughout 2020, Bahrain's government continued to severely restrict freedom of expression, association and assembly, with the government seizing on the opportunity afforded by the coronavirus pandemic to consolidate repression under the guise of public safety. While Bahrain's most renowned human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, was [released](#) from prison in June 2020 on an alternative sentence, numerous prominent political prisoners remain incarcerated for peaceful dissent.

Laws designed to curb freedom of assembly and association, including [the 1973 decree and Decree No. 32/2006](#) outlawing public gatherings, were bolstered by strict lockdown restrictions while [surveillance equipment and digital applications](#) introduced to monitor those self-isolating for "suspicious activity" were [condemned](#) by Amnesty International as the world's most intrusive.

In March, shortly after the start of the pandemic, Bahrain's Office of Public Prosecution [declared](#) that it "will confront decisively ... anyone who publishes or participates in the circulation of false news and biased rumors" during the pandemic. Days later, the government's Cyber Crime Directorate [announced](#) that it had 16 employees "working around the clock" to "monitor and track offending [social media] accounts." The department claimed to have opened over 60 new investigations and referred over 40 social media users for prosecution for "disturbing public security".

In practice, the government's policing of social media has largely targeted civilians who espouse even limited criticism of Bahrain's government. In November alone, at least 18 individuals were arrested for commenting on the [death](#) of Bahrain's long-serving prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, on social media, including a [16-year old girl](#), a [14-year old boy](#) and respected TV producer [Yasser Nasser](#). The crackdown on social media led Amnesty to [accuse](#) Bahrain of exploiting the pandemic "to further crush freedom of expression."

Further restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association

The Bahraini government also used cybercrime legislation to target aggressively prominent civil society

figures. In June 2020, prominent defence lawyer Abdulla Al Shamlawi was [handed](#) an 8-month prison sentence for twitter posts, while lawyer Abdulla Hashim was tried on similar charges. Their prosecutions were [condemned](#) by the Bar Human Rights Council of England and Wales (BHRC); Hashim was subsequently acquitted.

Anticipating backlash against the unpopular decision to normalise ties with Israel, in mid-2020 Bahrain also [introduced](#) legislation preventing criticism of the "government policy or its decisions." At least five individuals were arrested for publicly opposing normalisation, including a popular poet who [published](#) an anti-normalisation poem. In May, Bahraini authorities [shut down](#) an online symposium featuring speakers critical of normalisation, just minutes after organisers began streaming the event on YouTube.

Discrimination by Bahrain's government against Bahrain's indigenous Shi'a community also continued apace in 2020. At least 16 individuals were arrested during the holy month of Muharram, with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), [noting](#) that "the government arrested Shi'a religious figures and imposed restrictions on the observance of the Ashura holiday beyond reasonable and lawful restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus."



[14 September 2020 Prominent Bahrain lawyer gets suspended sentence for 'inciting hatred'](#)



[3 November 2020 Bahrain convicts 51 people in mass trial amid crackdown](#)

As of February 2021

**27 sentenced
to death**

**26 at risk
of imminent
execution**

12

**Charged with
Political
offences**

11

**Charged with
murder**

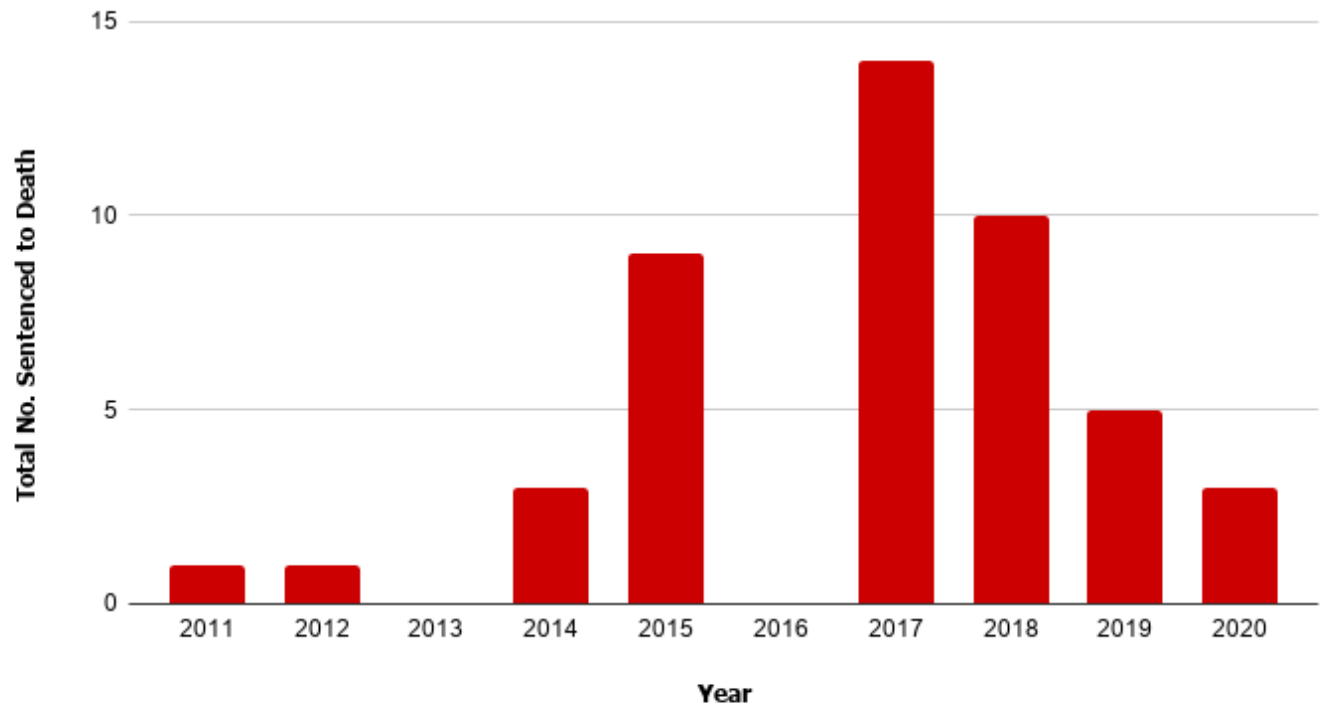
3

**Charged with
Drug related
offences**

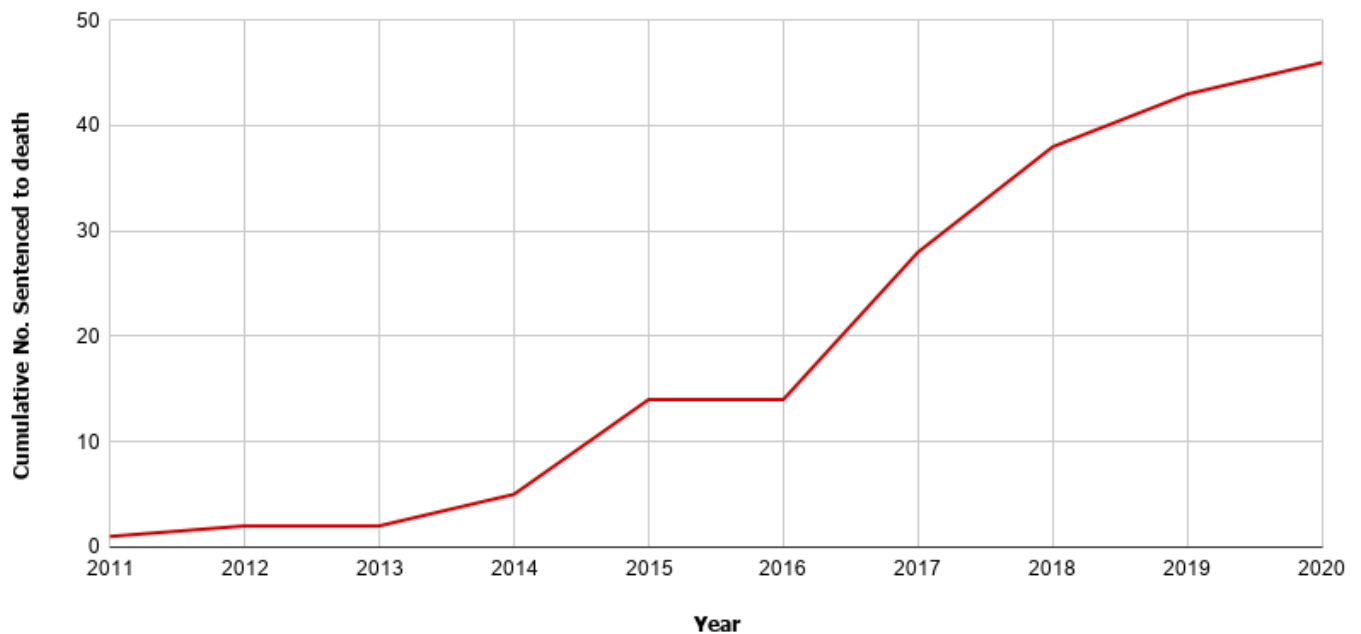
11

**Allegations of
torture**

Number of Individuals Sentenced to Death Per Year



Total Number of Individuals Sentenced to Death Since 2011



2.4 Prison conditions and political prisoners

COVID-19 and Bahraini detention centres

Repressive restrictions introduced during the coronavirus pandemic were experienced particularly harshly by political prisoners in Bahrain. Despite [warnings](#) by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that prison populations are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, prison authorities failed to introduce effective measures to protect prisoners from the virus.

While the government released 1,486 prisoners in March to ease dangerous levels of overcrowding, these largely [excluded](#) political prisoners, who now make up the overwhelming majority of inmates. Furthermore, authorities [failed](#) to distribute the remaining prisoners among prison buildings, meaning that up to 14 prisoners continued to share cells designed for eight people, with social distancing impossible and many forced to sleep on the floor.

The threat posed to prisoners in Bahrain by COVID-19 was compounded by notoriously poor sanitation in Bahraini detention centres, which led to scabies outbreaks at [Jau Prison](#) – Bahrain’s largest prison – and the [Dry Dock Detention Center](#) in December 2019 and January 2020. Almost half of the Dry Dock Detention Center’s prison population was infected. Despite the heightened risk of transmission, prison authorities also failed to provide prisoners with masks or other forms of personal protective equipment other than Dettol, with which they were expected to disinfect their own cells.

In March 2020, shortly after the first infections were recorded in Bahrain, prison authorities indefinitely [cancelled](#) all family visits. At the same time, prices for making calls were [more than doubled](#) for inmates in buildings housing political prisoners, while all prisoners were forced to limit external calls to just five numbers. In a country where the [average family size](#) is over five per household, the restrictions prevent many inmates from contacting members of their families. The restrictions led 99% of the 335 inmates held at Building 23 of Jau Prison to [strike](#) from making calls in September.

Prison authorities also conducted reprisals against prisoners who attempted to raise concerns about the lack of protection against COVID-19. In April, CPJ [reported](#) that Jau Prison placed imprisoned journalist

Mahmood Al Jaziri in solitary confinement after an audio recording of him disputing reports that Bahraini authorities had taken measures to protect prisoners from the spread of COVID-19 was posted on YouTube.

Medical negligence amid COVID-19

Since the arrival of coronavirus in Bahrain, prisoners have faced serious issues regarding the provision of medical treatment. In March 2020, Jau Prison’s administration suspended appointments at external hospitals for all inmates. While Bahrain’s prisons have long been notorious for medical negligence against political detainees, the COVID-19 restrictions have further limited inmates access to healthcare, violating the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, known as the [Mandela Rules](#), which stipulates that prisoners “should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.”

In April, BIRD, Human Rights Watch and 17 other rights groups [signed](#) an open letter calling on Bahrain to free “all those solely imprisoned for their peaceful opposition to the government.” They also stressed that those with preexisting health conditions are at greater risk of complications linked to COVID-19, including jailed human rights activists Ali Al Hajee and Naji Fateel and aging leaders of Bahrain’s 2011 opposition uprising (see Box 1).



[15 August 2020 I have been tortured and jailed in Bahrain for seven years. Does the UK support that too?](#)



[9 April 2020 In overcrowded cells, Bahrain's political prisoners fear coronavirus threat](#)



[10 April 2020 Bahrain puts imprisoned journalist in solitary confinement after reporting on COVID danger](#)

Box 1: Denial of Medical Care for Prominent Opposition Leaders

Among the most renowned political prisoners incarcerated in Bahrain are political opposition leaders, activists and human rights defenders [convicted](#) by military tribunal for their roles in the 2011 pro-democracy protest movement in the “Case of Leading Activists.” All are [serving](#) lengthy prison sentences and many are elderly and/or suffer from pre-existing health conditions which make them particularly vulnerable to diseases like COVID-19. Among them are Hassan Mushaima (72) and Dr Abduljalil AlSingace (58), whose torture at the hands of Bahraini security forces were [featured](#) in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, as well as Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad.



Hassan Mushaima

Mushaima, 72-year-old former leader of opposition group Al-Haq who is in remission from cancer suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure, an ongoing problem with his prostate and is losing his ability to hear from his right ear. Despite the plethora of medical issues he suffers from, Mushaima has consistently been denied consultations with medical specialists. Since 2017, prison authorities have [routinely refused](#) to take both Hassan and Dr Al Singace to medical appointments due to their [refusal](#) to submit to wearing humiliating shackles which violate the Rule 47 of the Mandela Rules prohibiting the shackling of prisoners who do not pose an escape risk.



Dr Abduljalil Al Singace

Over the past four years, Al Singace, 58-year-old academic and blogger who was spokesperson for the Al Haq opposition group, has regularly been denied appointments with medical specialists. AlSingace suffers from post-polio syndrome, requiring crutches to walk, vertigo, causing him to lose his balance and fall, a slipped disk in his back and neck, causing chronic pain, and paresthesia in his muscles and limbs. For several months, Al Singace has not been provided with necessary medication and the replacement of rubber stoppers for his crutches is consistently and unnecessarily delayed. In the past year, he has been forced to attach his slippers to his crutches to prevent falls.



Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad

AlMuqdad, 58-year-old political opposition leader and religious figure, was sentenced to multiple life sentences in connection with his role in the Bahrain Uprising of 2011. AlMuqdad, a Bahraini Swedish dual citizen, has been suffering from various injuries sustained during his arrest and torture in 2011. AlMuqdad lives in pain so severe that it restricts his ability to move; he is still waiting for three operations to unblock his coronary arteries, repair a hernia and operate on his prostate. As of February 2021, the prison administration continues to delay his surgeries, blaming the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER 3

UK-BAHRAIN WATCH

In a year where both the Coronavirus pandemic and Brexit dominated British politics, the UK government's cosy relationship with Bahrain nonetheless came under unprecedented scrutiny.

Growing consternation about the lack of transparency surrounding UK-support for GCC states, coupled with outrage over the Bahraini government's deteriorating rights record, saw parliamentarians table over 185 questions related to Bahrain, as well as 3 EDMs which accumulated over 100 signatures. Emergency debates were held in both houses on the eve of Bahrain's decision to uphold death sentences against Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa, while a bruising Backbench Business Debate in October on secretive government funding to Bahrain saw the government pledge to increase the transparency of payments to the GCC.

However, the increased scrutiny did little to compel the UK government to diminish their support for Bahrain. Despite findings by the UN implicating the Saudi-led coalition - of which Bahrain is a partner - in war crimes in Yemen, the UK [resumed](#) arms sales to the coalition, overriding a [temporary ban](#) in 2019. Equally, the government reaffirmed their commitment to their controversial technical assistance programme to Bahrain, despite evidence that bodies that have received UK-taxpayer funding have been implicated in torture and other human rights violations.

3.1 UK Military Support for Bahrain

In 2020, the UK government increased their military support for Bahrain, despite the government's participation in the Saudi-led war on Yemen. In July, Secretary of State for International Trade Liz Truss [announced](#) that the UK would resume arms exports to Saudi Arabia and other coalition partners including Bahrain, overriding a 2019 [ban](#) on such sales which followed a High Court [ruling](#) that deemed

them unlawful on the grounds that civilian casualties linked to coalition airstrikes may break international law. A UN report published two months later confirmed that war crimes had been [committed](#) by all sides during the 6-year old conflict, which the UN has [deemed](#) the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Within a month of the decision to resume arms exports, the Royal Navy [announced](#) that the BAE Systems-built warship HMS Clyde would be sold to Bahrain. The sale came despite evidence [suggesting](#) that the Bahraini Navy has participated in the Saudi coalition's naval embargo on Yemen's Red Sea coast, which has [blocked](#) vital imports of food and medicine, [pushed](#) 10 million people to the brink of famine and been found to [violate](#) international law. The Royal Navy has also [provided](#) regular training exercises to Bahrain since the blockade began in March 2015.

The resumption of arms exports also came just days after it [emerged](#) that despite the export ban, "hundreds" of GCC military personnel had received military training in the UK over the course of 2019. Bahraini troops were found to have attended multiple courses on how to counter improvised explosive devices as well as a four-week sniper training course in Warminster on how to "command a sniper platoon on operations" and to "improve their marksmanship skills" with UK-made sniper rifles. Human rights groups have previously [raised concerns](#) about UK sniper training to Bahrain, after the government was accused of using snipers to shoot protesters during the 2011 uprising.

As well as military equipment and training, in 2020 it was also [revealed](#) that Bahrain was among 17 other countries rated "not free" by NGO Freedom House to which the UK had sold a total of £75 million worth of spyware, wiretaps and other surveillance equipment since 2015. Like its Gulf neighbours, Bahrain is notorious for using surveillance equipment to unlawfully monitor opponents of the government, both

in Bahrain and abroad. In 2015, Bahrain was [exposed](#) for using the invasive spyware software FinFisher to hack the phones of journalists and opposition politicians. FinFisher has offices in the UK and Germany.

3.2 Technical assistance & UK government funding to the Gulf

Since 2012, the UK government has spent over £6.5 million of taxpayer money on a technical assistance programme to Bahrain, established in the wake of the Arab Spring and [aimed](#) at “building effective and accountable institutions, strengthening the rule of law, and justice reform.” However, the programme has attracted sustained criticism for failing to improve the human rights situation in Bahrain and for the government’s refusal to permit scrutiny of the way taxpayer money is spent on the programme.

Investigations by BIRD into the programme revealed it to be funded by the Integrated Activity Fund (IAF), a secretive £20m a year fund [introduced](#) in the 2016/2017 financial year reserved exclusively for the six GCC states. While the government has insisted that the fund [focuses](#) on largely benign activities like “aquaculture, sport and culture, healthcare and institutional capacity building”, research by BIRD has found the IAF has supported institutions implicated in human rights abuses. Among them are oversight bodies mandated to investigate human rights abuses, including the Special Investigations Unit, which received taxpayer-funded training as recently as 2019, according to Freedom of Information act requests (FOIs) sent by BIRD. The SIU and other UK-backed oversight bodies have been [criticised](#) by the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) as “not independent” and “not effective.”

In 2020, the IAF came under intense scrutiny from parliamentarians, spurred by the government’s use of blanket national security and international security exemptions to avoid disclosing information about the fund. During a [Backbench Business Debate](#) on IAF transparency, Labour’s Shadow Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Wayne David [accused](#) the government of failing to follow their own human rights due diligence policies when allocating funds from the IAF. Citing FOIs received by BIRD, David revealed that the government had failed to conduct a mandatory Overseas Justice and Security Assessment (OSJA) on two IAF-funded visits by Bahraini judges to the UK.

During the debate, MENA Minister James Cleverly made an apparent U-turn on previous government policy by promising to publish a summary of future activities funded by the IAF, which he announced was to be renamed the Gulf Strategy Fund (GSF). Subsequent research by BIRD revealed the decision to establish the GSF was made due to negative public perceptions of the IAF, with the FCO advocating a “root and branch overhaul of the [IAF].” At present, there has been little palpable increase in the transparency of UK funding to Bahrain and parliamentary questions regarding the [IAF](#) continue to be rejected on security and international relations grounds.

3.3 Official Visits

A number of high-profile diplomatic visits between British and Bahraini officials took place over the course of 2020, despite ongoing concerns about Bahrain’s human rights record.

In March, Bahrain’s Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, National Security Advisor and fourth son of King Hamad, visited the UK, despite a 2014 UK High Court ruling [stripping](#) him of diplomatic immunity over allegations that he was personally involved in torturing protesters during the Arab Spring. During the trip, Nasser met with several prominent government officials, including MENA Minister [James Cleverly](#), National Security Advisor [Sir Mark Sedwill](#), Senior Defence Advisor for MENA [Sir John Lorimer](#) and [Prince Charles](#). The visit came just weeks before UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab [announced](#) the introduction of a “Magnitsky-style sanctions regime” allowing the government to sanction individuals accused of human rights violations, raising concerns that sanctions will not be used to target high-ranking officials from allied states.



Bahrain's Foreign Minister Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani also visited the UK in September, meeting with Foreign Secretary [Dominic Raab](#), MENA minister [James Cleverly](#) and MENA Minister for the House of Lords, [Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon](#). During the meetings, the UK government [asserted](#) that "Bahrain is taking steps in the right direction to improve its human rights record."

In December, Home Secretary Priti Patel [paid](#) an official visit to Muharraq Police Station while in Bahrain to attend the IISS Manama Dialogue, alongside Bahrain's Chief of Police, Tariq Al Hassan. The visit came despite considerable evidence of torture at the location in 2017, including against human rights defender Yusuf Al Jamri and [Ebtisam Al Saegh](#) and activist [Najah Yusuf](#).

Concerningly, the UK government has long been aware of abuses at Muharraq, confirming as recently as April 2020 that it had seen a [BBC Arabic documentary](#) featuring extensive testimonies from both women about the torture and sexual assault by security officers at Muharraq. The Home Office granted asylum to Yusuf Al Jamri in 2018 based on his account of torture he experienced at Muharraq. Both Tariq Al Hassan and his brother [Fawaz Al Hassan](#), who was director of Muharraq at the time of the alleged torture are former recipients of UK-funded training.

3.4 Security Training by Third Parties: University of Huddersfield

While the efficacy of the UK government's OSJA process, which assesses potential human rights impacts UK security assistance, has been hotly contested, growing concerns have emerged around the involvement of private entities in providing security training to foreign states, which are often subjected to even less oversight.

Since 2018, the University of Huddersfield has [provided](#) officers at Bahrain's Royal Academy of Policing (the Academy) with an exclusive MSc course in Security Science. Although the Academy falls under the auspices Bahrain's Ministry of Interior, a department heavily implicated in human rights abuses, FOI requests sent by BIRD reveal that University management failed to conduct adequate human rights due diligence before the contract was signed, relying solely on an outdated [FCO report](#) and a cursory [country profile](#) by the BBC.

In February 2020, [The Times](#) and The [Yorkshire Post](#)

reported that at least 10 political prisoners had been tortured at the Academy. According to testimonies received by BIRD, victims reported being subject to beatings, electrocution and sexual assault, as well as threats against the lives and dignity of family members. The controversy was exacerbated after it emerged that [Brigadier General Fawaz Al Hassan](#) was [promoted](#) to Director General of the Academy in December 2019. Al Hassan, who [benefitted](#) from UK taxpayer-funded training in 2015, was director of Bahrain's Muharraq Security Complex when female activists [reported](#) being sexually assaulted and tortured by security officers.

Since the revelations were published, several other individuals have [come forward](#) with testimonies of similar abuse at the Academy, including individuals on death row, [juveniles under the age of 18](#) and [UK-based asylum seekers](#) and refugees. According to his family, Ali Al Arab, who was executed by Bahrain's government in 2019, was also tortured at the Academy. However, despite the severity of the allegations, the university has [doubled down](#), refusing to drop the course or reveal the value of their contract with Bahrain, conservatively estimated to be above £1million based on standard market rates. Vice-Chancellor Bob Cryan is the second most highly paid university official in Yorkshire, [pocketing](#) £385,000 a year.

When challenged, the University stated that "the delivery of this course is closely aligned to the mission advocated by the UK Government's Department of International Trade" and that they maintain regular communication with the British Embassy in Manama. However, FOI requests sent by BIRD and parliamentary questions asked by [Chris Law](#), have revealed no communications about the course between either DFIT or the FCDO and the university.

Similarly, despite claims by Huddersfield management to



BBC

عربي

[13 December 2020 Priti Patel under fire over tour of Bahrain police station where human rights activists were tortured](#)

[24 March 2020 Bahrain: Breaking the Silence](#)

be in regular contact with the British Embassy in Manama, emails obtained by BIRD through FOIs also found very limited communication between the two organisations. Emails were exchanged between University staff and the British Ambassador to Bahrain, Roderick Drummond, immediately after the torture allegations were published last February, although the University ignored advice from the ambassador that they acknowledge the worrying nature of the allegations presented to them by BIRD.

The total lack of government oversight in the provision of advanced security training to an institution associated with torture and other severe human rights violations is deeply concerning and demonstrates Bahrain's willingness to circumvent the government's already weak human rights safeguards through the private market.

3.5 Bahrain Embassy Siege

In September 2020, Bahraini photojournalist Moosa Mohammed was [convicted](#) of trespass on a diplomatic premises at Westminster Magistrate's Court, after he [scaled](#) the roof of the Bahrain's London Embassy during the summer of 2019 and unfurled a banner calling on Boris Johnson to intervene and prevent the [execution](#) of two torture victims in Bahrain. He was sentenced to a 36 month conditional discharge and a fine.

During his trial, the court viewed video evidence previously broadcast by Channel 4 which appeared to show embassy staff [assaulting](#) Moosa while he was perched precariously on the edge of the roof. The assault ended when Metropolitan Police made the unprecedented decision to force entry to the Embassy. Metropolitan police officer Sergeant Chris Browne testified that he and other officers had been extremely concerned for Moosa's safety and this had informed their decision to break into the building.

Moosa's lawyers presented a defence of necessity, arguing that Moosa believed his protest to be the last means available to prevent the execution of Ali Al Arab and Ahmed Al Malali, and that he was acting to prevent a greater crime being committed. The two Bahraini torture victims were killed by firing squad hours after Moosa's protest, in what were [condemned](#) as "arbitrary killings" by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Agnes Callamard, whose expert testimony on the matter was relied upon by the defence and considered by the court.

However, while the Chief Magistrate [found](#) Moosa's belief that he was acting to prevent death or injury to be reasonable, they rejected Moosa's defence of necessity, countering that his actions were neither reasonable nor proportionate. In January 2021, Moosa's appeal against his conviction was heard at Southwark Crown Court.



8 October 2020 [Over 40 global academics call on Huddersfield University to suspend teaching at alleged 'torture hub'](#)



6 July 2020 [Refugee calls on Huddersfield University to end teaching at centre in Bahrain amid torture claims YP](#)



3 July 2020 [Revealed: Hundreds of Saudi and Gulf military personnel trained in Britain as Yemen war continues Daily Maverick](#)



19 February 2020 [British University training Bahrain police based at 'torture hub' where electrocutions, rape and beatings all reported Independent](#)



16 February 2020 ['This isn't humanity': Inside the Bahraini women's prison overseen by officials trained with UK money Independent](#)

CHAPTER 4

SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In recent years, Bahrain and other states in the GCC have invested heavily in professional sport as a means of improving their international reputations and distracting from their dismal human rights records, a practice known as “sportswashing”.

While opportunities for sportswashing were limited in 2020 due to the widespread cancellation of international sporting competitions by COVID-19, Bahrain was able to expand its sporting portfolio with investments in the lucrative world of professional football. However, Bahrain’s human rights record also came under sustained criticism when Formula 1 (F1) champion Lewis Hamilton publicly raised concerns about human rights abuses in Bahrain after being contacted by current and former political prisoners ahead of the Bahrain Grand Prix.

4.1 Lewis Hamilton and the Bahrain Grand Prix

Since the suppression of the 2011 pro-democracy uprising, the Bahrain Grand Prix has become a focal point of popular protest and Bahraini security forces have routinely reacted with violence, [killing](#) at least one protester. Critics of the race have frequently been targeted by the state; in 2017 female activist [Najah Yusuf](#) was tortured, sexually assaulted and jailed after criticising the race on social media.

In August, following the postponement of the racing season due to COVID-19 and the cancellation of several races, F1 announced that they would be expanding their operations in Bahrain by hosting the Bahrain Grand Prix and a new race, the Rolex Sakhir Grand Prix, at the end of November. In response, BIRD facilitated the delivery of two letters of concern to F1’s chief executive Chase Carey, from [30 British Parliamentarians](#) and [18 leading human rights groups](#) respectively. In addition, BIRD launched the #Race4Rights campaign on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) to raise awareness about rights abuses linked to the Grand Prix.

In light of his [emergence](#) as a powerful voice for social justice and the Black Lives Matter movement, BIRD also [delivered](#) three letters to F1 champion Lewis Hamilton from current and former political prisoners in the run up to the Bahrain races. Najah Yusuf, Ali Al Hajee and Mohammed Ramadhan shared their experiences of torture and arbitrary imprisonment and urged Hamilton to take a stand on behalf of political prisoners in Bahrain.

After reading the letters, Hamilton [accused](#) F1 of a “consistent and massive” problem with human rights in the country’s they choose to race in. He was particularly [moved](#) by a drawing he received from Mohammed Ramadhan’s young son, Ahmed, asking him: “please save my father.” At a press conference in Abu Dhabi in early December, Hamilton [vowed](#) to fight to improve human rights in Bahrain, pledging to raise the matter with Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. He also expressed a desire to meet with the prisoners who wrote to him, in order to see how he could “positively impact” the Grand Prix in future.

However, Hamilton’s intervention [triggered](#) an indignant response from F1. In an interview with CNN, Chase Carey repudiated accusations of sportswashing, stating that F1 was “proud of our commitment to human rights” and “proud to partner with Bahrainis.” F1 have been widely accused of failing to implement a human rights policy [adopted](#) after [mediation](#) with rights groups in 2015, following years of violence at the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Several other countries with poor human rights records host F1 races, including China, Russia, Uzbekistan and the UAE, while F1 has faced growing criticism over its decision to [launch](#) a new race in Saudi Arabia in 2021. Women were prohibited from driving in Saudi Arabia until 2019, while the leader of the movement for women’s right to drive, Loujain Al-Hathloul, was [sentenced](#) to almost six years in prison in the final week 2020.

F1 has 'massive' problem to address over human rights, says Lewis Hamilton

- Bahrain' regime has been accused of human rights abuses
- 'As a sport we need to do more to improve human rights'

FORMEL 1 IN BAHREIN

Weniger Pressefreiheit, mehr
Hinrichtungen, mehr Vo

Hamilton praised for improving human rights

By JEROME PUGMIRE November 27, 2020



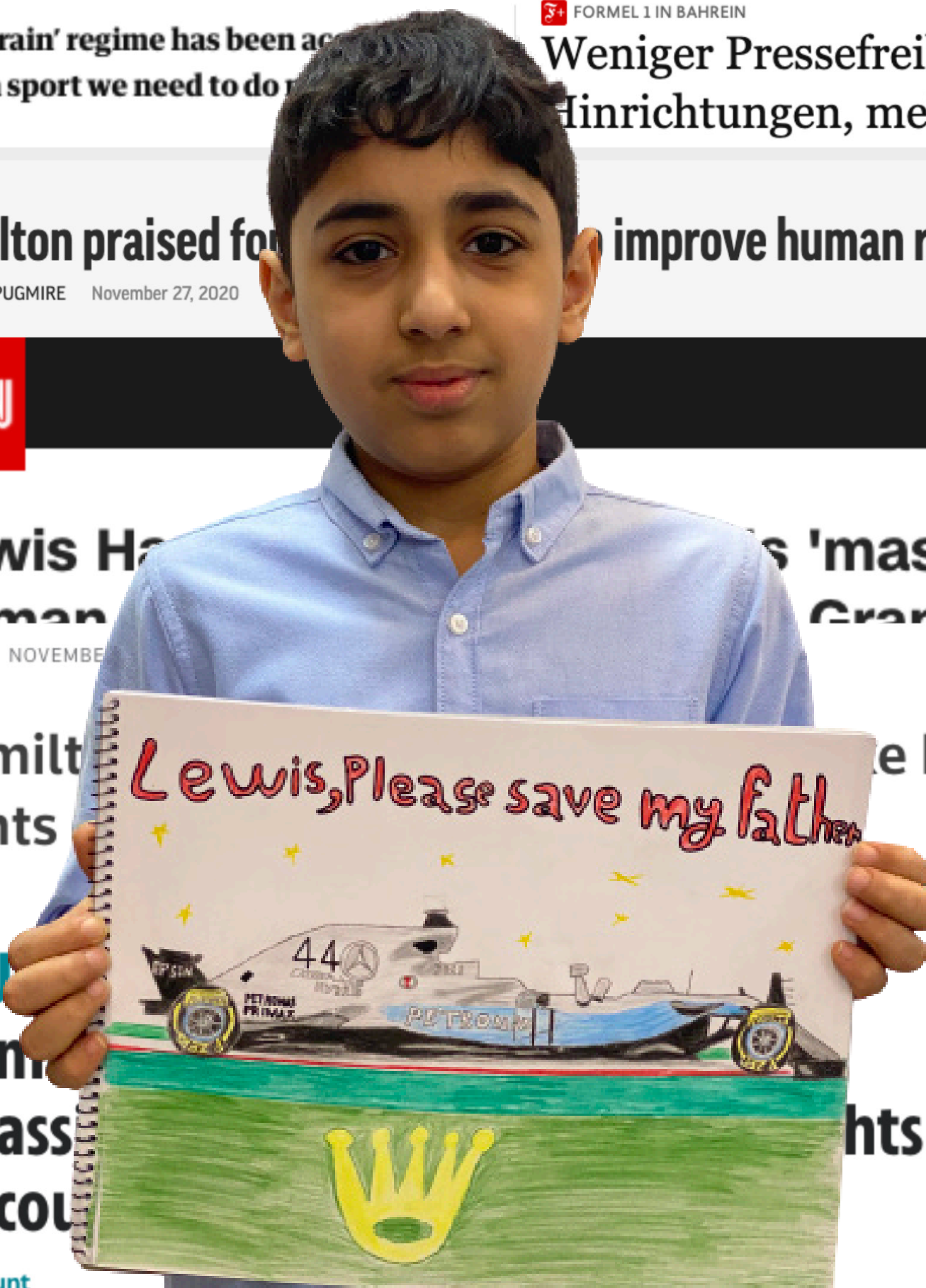
Lewis Hamilton has 'massive' problem to address over human rights

SPORT NOVEMBER 27, 2020

Hamilton praised for improving human rights

MUHAMMAD HAMMAD 'massive' problem to address over human rights in country

Ben Hunt
27 Nov 2020 9:39 | Up



4.2 Football

Unable to draw on the same, near-bottomless reserves of its GCC neighbours, Bahrain's investments in professional sport have typically skirted the more competitive markets, focusing on assembling a diverse portfolio that includes interests in [athletics](#), [combat sports](#), [professional cycling](#) and [esports](#). However, 2020 marked Bahrain's entry into the lucrative world of professional football, with significant investments in two European clubs.

In December 2019, the purchase of lower league Spanish club Cordoba CF was [announced](#) by Prince Nasser, who as president of Bahrain's Supreme Council for Youth and Sports has masterminded the country's sportswashing strategy. While the purchase was made through a holding company, Infinity Holdings, Prince Nasser is thought to be [involved](#) in the acquisition. Bahrain's relationship with Spain came under scrutiny in 2020 following [revelations](#) that Spain's disgraced former king Juan Carlos had received a suitcase containing a \$1.9m cash gift from Bahrain's King Hamad in 2010, which he promptly carried to Switzerland.

Bahrain's most notable sportswashing venture in 2020 came in July, when Bahrain [announced](#) the purchase of a majority stake in French Ligue 2 side Paris FC, with the aim of promotion to France's top flight. The purchase means that Paris FC shirts will be adorned with the phrase "Victorious Bahrain", which Prince Nasser [affirmed](#) "serves the promotion of Bahrain and displaying its accomplishments and achievements... in an effort to achieve the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030, which encourages taking advantage of all international events to promote Bahrain's successes".

The announcement follows a period of warming ties between France and Bahrain. In 2019, King Hamad and Prince Nasser [paid](#) an official state visit to President Macron, in which they committed to expanding trade ties between France and Bahrain. Notably, human rights concerns were [explicitly omitted](#) from their discussions. In July 2020, Bahraini state media [reported](#) that Macron and King Hamad held a telephone conversation where they discussed "ways to bolster the strong relations between the two countries and to reinforce their strategic partnership at all levels" and "hailed the progress of the Bahraini-French cooperation in the youth and sports fields."

THE  TIMES

14 December 2020 [Boy's death row plea drives Lewis Hamilton to make human rights pledge](#)

AP

12 December 2020 [F1 star Hamilton vows to fight to improve human rights](#)

 REUTERS

12 December 2020 [Motor racing-Hamilton says Bahrain 'death row' letter hit home](#)

CNN

2 December 2020 [Proud to partner with Bahrainis,' says F1 boss amid human rights criticism](#)

 REUTERS

1 December 2020 [Activists criticise F1 boss for human rights comments](#)

AP

27 November 2020 [Hamilton praised for urging F1 to help improve human rights](#)

CNN

27 November 2020 [Hamilton addresses F1's 'massive problem' with human rights ahead of Bahrain Grand Prix](#)

 REUTERS

26 November 2020 [Hamilton, in Bahrain, urges F1 to make human rights push](#)

The Guardian

26 November 2020 [F1 has 'massive' problem to address over human rights, says Lewis Hamilton](#)



26 November 2020 [F1 told to 'put people above profit and human rights above racing' as MPs up pressure on Bahrain Grand Prix](#)

The Guardian

25 November 2020 [Formula One faces charge of aiding sportswashing by racing in Bahrain](#)

The Guardian

25 November 2020 [Bahraini political prisoners appeal to Lewis Hamilton for his help](#)



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