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Highlights on the Crackdown on the Human Rights in the Gulf

SAUDI ARABIA

BAHRAIN

YEMEN

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Demands to Release All Political Prisoners

As the month of April progressed, political prisoners continued their protests. Building 5 prisoners at Jaw Prison refused to end their sit-in, which they launched in early March. Furthermore, other prisoners went on a hunger strike.

The prisoners' moves call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners, who in the first place should not be detained. They put in priority the sick and elderly prisoners. On the other hand, detainees' families planned mass protests supporting their beloved moves. On Al Fitr Eid, a religious ceremony by the end of Ramdan, a royal pardon was declared announcing the release of 1500 prisoners, including a large number of political prisoners.

Although the royal pardon serves as a good step, it is not enough. 556 political prisoners are kept behind bars. Therefore, the prisoners' sit-in kept going on, however, on 16 April, security forces stormed building 5 where political prisoners are demanding to be released and transferred several prisoners to solitary as punishment for taking part in a peaceful sit-in. Responding to the ill-treatment, 14 prisoners housed in building 5 launched a hunger strike demanding an end for the ill-treatment and their release. The prison's administration further cut off the communications between the protesting detainees and their families.

The ongoing prisoners' protests was strung with mass protests and sit-ins in several Bahraini regions with one demand of whitening the prisons by the unconditional release of all political prisoners. The protests continued to be done on a daily basis, although some restrictions were taken by security forces as summons and taking photos for those who shared in the protests.

Dozens of Political Prisoners Suffers from Medical Negligence

Although Bahraini authorities released a large number of political prisoners, hundreds are still behind bars enduring ill-treatment. Medical negligence is one of the most widespread tools of ill-treatment spread in Bahrain's detention centers. Dozens of political prisoners are still suffering from being denied access to medication.

One of medical negligence victims is the opposition figure Hasan Mushaima who suffers from multiple health problems. Although Mushaima is being detained in Kano Medical Center, he is being denied medical care. He has kidney damage, stomach problems, as well as a heart muscle condition. In early April, he, moreover, suffers from a severe knee pain. He requested officially to be referred to a specialist, but his demand was not met and was only provided pain killers. As authorities continue to ignore Mushaima's case, his family, by the end of April, offered to pay for his medical treatment, but they didn't receive any response.

Upon the royal pardon, all political prisoners suffering from Sickle Cell Anemia were released except one. Ali Al-Fardan is the only political prisoner who suffers from Sickle Cell Anemia kept behind bars regardless of his illness. Ali is in great danger due to the detention environment which increases his suffering.

Moreover, on 26 April, the political prisoner Youssef Hasan Mohammad fainted, shivered, and turned pale. His inmates called the security forces, who in turn came after half an hour and transferred Youssef to the prison's clinic. The day following, Youssef was exposed to the same case, and he is still not referred to the hospital.



Aramco and FIFA Announce Global Partnership

Saudi Arabia continues to invest heavily in international sports to launder its public image or to “sportswashing” its human rights’ record. Recently, a new step was announced in this field as FIFA revealed its intention to continue its partnership deal with Saudi Aramco. FIFA made the fossil fuel company, Aramco, a sponsor of the 2026 men’s World Cup as well as the Women’s World Cup in 2027.

“There is a cruel irony that a Saudi Arabian state-owned company should be considered fit to sponsor the Women’s World Cup when women like Salma al-Shehab and Manahel al-Otaibi remain imprisoned in the Kingdom for peacefully speaking out for gender equality. With Saudi Arabia also currently being the sole bidder to host the 2034 men’s World Cup, world football could be dogged by human rights violations for years to come unless urgent action is taken to address the country’s atrocious human rights record,” Amnesty commented.



Targeting Activists Continue With No Real Reforms

Although Saudi authorities are trying to divert the world's attention from its human rights record to other sports or art festivals, it doesn't take the trouble to make reforms. For example, women can now drive and work in jobs they were previously banned from, but dozens are able to travel. Among them is the former prisoner Loujain Al Hathloul.

According to Lina, Loujain's sister, she was arbitrarily brought from UAE to KSA, where she was placed under an illegal travel ban and forbidden from leaving the country and arrested a few months later. Even after her release, Loujain is still barred from leaving the kingdom permanently. Moreover, her entire family was also banned from leaving the kingdom without any legal justification.

Travel bans are not the only human rights' violation taking place in the kingdom; hundreds of political prisoners are still behind bars for their activism. One of those political prisoners is Manahel Al Otaibi. Manahel, in mid-April, was finally able to contact her family after having been forcibly disappeared since November 2023. She explained some of the violations she is being subjected to, such as being held in solitary confinement and being subjected to medical negligence. Manahel added that she being subjected to torture where she has a broken leg as a result of physical abuse.



A Detainee Died in Prison Under UAE's Administration

On 11 April, the Bamatraf family received news declaring the death of his son, Adib Mohammed Bamatraf, in prison being held under Emirati administration. The prison Adib was held in is located in the city of Mukalla, Hadhramout province.

The family explained that severe signs of physical torture was observed on different parts of his body. They further called for an investigation of their son's death. The family, moreover, accused the Emirati officer Faisal Al Kaabi, who is purportedly in charge of the investigations and the conduct of interrogations in Mukalla's clandestine prisons, of being directly responsible for his death.