

GRAND PRIX HYPOCRISY IN BAHRAIN: Formula One's (F1) governing body announced Grand Prix will go ahead as planned

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Al-Khalifa despots rule Bahrain repressively. Bahrainis want democratic change. In summer 2010, sporadic protests began. In mid-February last year, major ones erupted.

They continue daily nonviolently. Courageous Bahrainis brave vicious security force attacks. Saudi troops are involved. In March 2011, they entered Bahrain guns blazing.

They remain. They're terrorizing Bahraini men, women, children, doctors, other medical professionals, journalists, human rights activists, and foreign observers. So do state police.

They're beating them, arresting them, torturing them, imprisoning them, and killing them. No matter. Let the race begin.

On April 13, Formula One's (F1) governing body announced Bahrain's Grand Prix will go ahead as planned, saying:

"Based on the current information the FIA has at this stage, it is satisfied that all the proper security measures are in place for the running of a Formula One World Championship event in Bahrain."

"Therefore, the FIA confirms that the 2012 Gulf Air F1 Grand Prix of Bahrain will go ahead as scheduled on Sunday, April 22."

In protest, Bahraini youths promised "three days of rage" from April 20 - 22. In 2011, they and human rights activists got F1's race cancelled. It's governing body did the right thing. This year, president/CEO Bernie Ecclestone claims all's well. We're coming, saying:

"I know people who live there, and it's all quiet and peaceful." At age 81, perhaps senility replaced reason. Money always matters most. Bahrain's 2010 F1 Grand Prix drew 100,000 visitors and grossed half a billion dollars.

The Al-Khalifa monarchy wants it this year for reasons besides revenue. It's seen as a way to improve Bahrain's image and create an illusion of normalcy despite daily state-sponsored terror against peaceful protesters.

Amnesty International (AI) highlighted "flawed reforms," saying:

"With the world's eyes on Bahrain as it prepares to host the Grand Prix, no-one should be

under any illusions that the country's human rights crisis is over."

"The authorities are trying to portray the country as being on the road to reform, but we continue to receive reports of torture and use of unnecessary and excessive force against protests."

A Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report said:

"(A)uthorities had committed gross human rights violations with impunity, including excessive use of force against protesters, widespread torture, and other ill-treatment, unfair trials and unlawful killings."

Participating drivers ducked commenting on racing in a virtual war zone. Seven-time world champion, Michael Schumacher, dismissed conditions, saying: "I don't want to mix the sport with political things. I am here for the sport."

Like others involved, he's also money driven. Earnings amount to millions. From May 2010 – May 2011, Forbes magazine said he earned \$34 million.

On April 19, The New York Times headlined, "Unease Surrounds Bahrain Grand Prix," saying:

"It was almost business as usual for Formula One in Bahrain on Thursday, as the teams prepared their cars in their garages and the drivers met the media for the Bahrain Grand Prix on Sunday."

Throughout months of vicious crackdowns against nonviolent protests, The Times remained largely dismissive.

On April 20, Reuters headlined, "Protests rage as Bahrain Grand Prix practice begins," saying:

Ahead of Friday's practice session, "protests had flared in villages surrounding the capital, far from the circuit where the race will be held. Police fired tear gas and stun grenades to disperse demonstrators in clashes that have been building in the week leading to Sunday's round of the World Championship."



Protests in Bahrain against the Grand Prix on Friday April 20

According to Index of Censorship's Kirsty Hughes:

"The Bahraini government wants to bask in the positive international publicity it anticipates receiving through the Formula One motor race going ahead."

"Yet all the signs are that the government is likely to intensify its harsh clampdown on local activists before and during the Grand Prix."

Escalated Crackdowns Ahead of F1

On April 18, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) said:

"...Bahraini authorities have escalated their violent crackdown against pro-democracy protesters and human rights activists."

“Villages and houses have been attacked continuously for the past few days. Pre-dawn house raids are being conducted and dozens of protesters are either arrested or wanted for arrest.”

“As F1 is approaching, human rights activists in Bahrain Center for human rights are being targeted with arrests and prosecution, in an effort to undermine thier work in reporting the violence against protesters during the F1.”

On April 15, BCHR’s Sayed Yousif Al Mahafdha and two Human Rights Watch (HRW) members (Tom Malinowski and Nadim Houry) were attacked and arrested while observing a peaceful protest. They were held, harassed, interrogated, and released.

According to Al Mahafdha, when protesters reached the main road, riot police confronted them violently. Tear gas and stun grenades were used. Al Mahafdha took shelter in a nearby home. Police stormed it. They pepper-sprayed and beat those inside.

In recent weeks, BCHR president Nabeel Rajab was arrested several times for exposing human rights abuses, as well as expressing his views freely and participating in peaceful demonstrations. Authorities accused him and others of “participating in an illegal assembly.”

Rajab was formally charged with violating Bahrain’s Assembly code. On May 6, his trial begins. The repressive Assembly law lets police repressively disrupt nonviolent public gatherings. Its article 11 states:

“No one shall organize demonstrations or marches or rallies that are held or going near shopping malls.”

Those convicted face fines, imprisonment, or both. BCHR members are repeatedly targeted. Sixteen-year old Mansoor Al Jamri assisted their human rights abuse documentation efforts. He was arrested, beaten, tortured, and detained.

Hunger striker Abdulhadi Alkhawaja is a former BCHR president. April 21 marks his 73rd day without food. His life hangs by a thread. He could go any time. Al-Khalifa despots face a dilemma.

They want him dead but need him alive through Sunday’s Grand Prix. They’re also concerned about creating a world-renoun martyr. They could avoid it by freeing him, but won’t.

A Final Comment

Commenting on Bahrain’s Grand Prix, a London Guardian editorial headlined, “Bahrain: chequered flag,” saying:

The event “backfired before it has even begun....The race has become a magnet for protest, a magnifying glass of dissent bubbling away below the surface. ‘Don’t race over our blood,’ the slogan goes in Manama, but that is what Formula One teams propose to do today.”

Coverup and denial can’t hide daily security force brutality. Videotape evidence documents it. So do independent media reports.

“Britain and America make clucking noises but are just as cynical as the Bahraini royal family itself. Strategic alliances trump human rights. What is the difference between Bahrain and Syria?”

The hypocrisy is glaring. Al Khalifa terror rages. F1 engines won't drown it out. Washington maintains silence. Bahrain's a valued ally. It's home to America's Fifth Fleet.

In contrast, the Obama administration actively aids Syrian insurgents. Doing so violates America's Constitution and international law.

At issue is imperial dominance. Supporting regional despots and replacing independent regimes with client ones furthers it.

Human rights abuses don't matter when valued allies commit them. Regimes confronting Western-generated violence responsibly are called terrorists.

Sunday's F1 spectacle won't change things. Daily repression continues whether or not it's held. Washington's presence supports it.

Ending its rage to ravage humanity matters most. Imagine if Americans matched Bahraini courage. Imagine peace instead of war.

Imagine a socially responsible nation instead of one benefitting its privileged alone. Imagine one fit to live in, not feared.

Imagine if Americans cared enough to go all out for it. The possibilities are breathtaking.

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