

Formula 1 in Bahrain: Four Things To Know

Since the beginning of the 2011 democratic uprising in Bahrain, the kingdom has faced ongoing instability and unrest fueled by protests for reform. As you travel to Bahrain for the Formula 1, here are four things to consider:

1. Be Careful What You Say and Tweet

Criticizing the king or other parts of the government often lands people in jail. “Insulting the king” carries a penalty of up to seven years in prison. The authorities have also decided that supporting the attacks on Yemen has now put Bahrain on a war footing. Bahrain’s leading human rights activist Nabeel Rajab was arrested in early April and is expected to be charged with spreading rumors in war time after criticizing Bahrain’s role in the attacks. These charges carry up to ten years in jail.

2. Don’t Expect a Fair Trial if You Get Charged With Anything

Defendants routinely report being tortured in custody to extract confessions. Since peaceful pro-democracy protests in 2011, thousands of people have been jailed. Medics who treated injured protestors, teachers, and other human rights activists are still in prison serving long sentences after having made confessions extracted under torture. The judicial system is not independent or fair.

3. Expect an Increased Crackdown on Dissent

Bahrain is governed by a ruling family where the king’s uncle has been the country’s unelected prime minister for over 40 years. Although the 2011 protests for reform were peaceful, some have developed a violent edge and over a dozen police officers have been killed in the last few years. The Formula 1 usually marks a period of heightened tension in the country with leading activists being rounded up in the days before the race.

4. Expect To Be Contacted By Rights Activists

Foreign media access to Bahrain is severely restricted apart from the week of Formula 1, and local journalists are commonly targeted and jailed for reporting on the political unrest. Dissidents are likely to use the presence of foreign media during the F1 to highlight their grievances, hoping that some journalists will take the opportunity to report on human rights issues as well as the race.

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