

# Reposting fake content 'punishable' under law

Freedom of opinion and expression protected but not absolute: Cybercrime Prosecution head

Mohammed Darwish  
TDT | Manama

Sharing or reposting false, hateful or fabricated material online can leave users open to prosecution in Bahrain, with each repost treated as a separate publication offence, Zahra Murad, Head of the Cybercrime Prosecution, said during an appearance on Bahrain TV.

Murad said freedom of opinion and expression is protected under Article 23 of Bahrain's Constitution and recognised in international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

But she said the right is not absolute and must be exercised within limits laid down by the Constitution and the law, with-

out infringing the foundations of the Islamic faith, the unity of the people, national security or public order.

## Information

Before posting or sharing material, users should check that the information is true, verify its source and make sure the content does not carry hate speech or any form of incitement, she said.

Freedom of expression ends, she added, when harm begins to public security or civil peace.

Murad said Bahrain's Penal Code punishes the publication of false news that harms public security, along with the making and circulation of fake images that damage the public interest.

Stirring hatred against, or contempt for, a given sect is also a crime, she said, because it can

harm civil peace, with penalties reaching up to two years in prison.

She said the law draws no line between the person who creates unlawful content and the person who republishes it.

Anyone who posts or reposts a video, audio clip, image or text is taken to have adopted its content and can be treated as a principal offender if the material harms public order, public morals or public security.

Each act of publication, she said, stands as its own offence.

Murad said Bahrain's criminal law contains a full section dealing with crimes against internal security, adding that offences linked to false news carry added weight under the current exceptional circumstances.

In such conditions, she said, care in publishing and sharing



"Freedom of expression ends when harm begins to public security or civil peace."

— ZAHRA MURAD

material is both a legal duty and a national one.

She said the Cybercrime Prosecution was created in November 2022 by decision of Attorney General Dr Ali bin Fadhel Al Buainain to deal with new forms of digital crime, including cases tied to social media, which often draw wide public interest.

## Cases

Prosecutors handling such cases act independently and are governed by the law alone, she said, not by the noise of social media. When the legal elements of an offence are made out, the law is applied.

When they are absent, no crime arises and innocence remains the starting point.

Murad said the Public Prosecution is dealing firmly with cases affecting public order, na-

tional security and internal security, adding that this stems from its duty to protect society under the powers granted to it by law.

She also pointed to crimes linked to artificial intelligence, including deepfake videos and images falsely attributed to real people.

The Cybercrime Prosecution handles such cases through a method that includes examining the facts, giving the act its legal character, questioning suspects and witnesses, and working with specialist technical bodies, she said.

She referred in particular to the Ministry of Interior's Cybercrime Directorate and its technical laboratory, which examines fabricated clips and prepares reports to determine if the material can be linked to those accused of making or circulating it.

## Lawmaker calls for curb on misleading online accounts

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Online accounts are not beyond the law, MP Jalal Kadhem said.

He urged people to stay clear of baiting posts and take news on regional and world affairs from state media and approved newspapers.

He said some accounts, in Bahrain and abroad, post misleading material under headings that do not match what follows, or push claims that do not come from approved state sources.

Their aim, he said, is to stir rows, draw comments and pull people into exchanges that can do them harm.

"There is no immunity for online accounts from the law," he said. "Official national media is the reference point."

## Warning

Kadhem warned against rushed, emotional replies to online provocation, saying they can hand such accounts exactly what they seek.

A careless word, he said, can inflame disputes and drive deeper splits in society.

He said good sense lies in knowing what deserves an answer and what should be ignored.

Holding back, and dealing with such material in a calm way, shows awareness and a sense of duty, he said.

Kadhem also said some account holders try to dodge blame with lines such as, "The account is not responsible for comments."



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"Keeping the country safe and stable is a shared duty that calls for public awareness and people pulling together."

— MP JALAL KADHEM

That, he said, does not remove legal liability.

Those who run such platforms still bear responsibility for what appears on them, above all where posts stir discord or harm the public.

He said Parliament had agreed the Press and Digital Media Law, and called for it to

be enforced on all without exception, so rights are kept and the media and online sphere are brought under clear rules that serve the public good.

## Hope

Kadhem also voiced hope that the state bodies concerned would act against unofficial accounts that wade into news coverage of regional and international matters, saying they have a direct effect on public opinion.

He urged people to rely on official sources, approved newspapers and national media so that false or misleading reports do not spread further.

The lawmaker said comments and posts on social media do not sit outside legal scrutiny, and warned that a word or remark can leave its writer facing legal action under the laws and rules in force, chiefly where it includes abuse, oversteps the mark, or harms others or social peace.

Kadhem called for anyone who helps spread discord or push misleading content to be held to account.

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