

# Man gets one-year jail term for setting Qatari flag on fire

Accused was part of crowd staging a rally outside embassy in Bahrain

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Manama: Bahrain's lower criminal court on Monday sentenced a Bahraini man to one year in prison after finding him guilty of burning the Qatari flag.

According to court documents, the man was among a crowd of people who staged a rally in front of the Qatari embassy in Bahrain on June 14 to press for the release of dozens of Bahrain-based fishermen held by Doha for allegedly straying into Qatari waters.

While the protest was peaceful, the unidentified Bahraini was arrested for allegedly burning the Qatari flag, an unlawful act in Bahrain where verbal or written attacks on the leaders, symbols and icons of "sisterly and friendly" states are banned.

The rally was sparked by a bitter standoff between Doha and Manama after Qatari coastguards in May shot a Bahraini fisherman for allegedly entering Qatari waters and ignoring warnings to leave.

The fisherman, Adel Al Taweel, 37, was subsequently treated at a Doha hospital and detained despite repeated calls for his release, until a Qatari court allowed him to go home.

All the other 106 Bahraini and Asian fishermen were earlier released after the leaders of both countries discussed the matter.

## **Bitter dispute**

Manama and Doha had locked horns over a border dispute in the 1990s, but the standoff was resolved by the International Court of Justice in March 2001.

The neighbours accepted the verdict and pledged to start a new chapter in their relations and cooperation that included building the world's largest causeway to link the countries.

However, tension surfaced after Qatar last year opposed Bahrain's nomination of Mohammad Al Mutawa as the next secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Doha is critical of Al Mutawa, the cultural adviser to Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, for his statements on the border dispute during his tenure as information minister.

Saudi King Abdullah eventually stepped in to address the issue and Bahrain nominated Abdul Lateef Al Zayani, the former head of public security, to the position that will be officially announced at the next GCC summit in Abu Dhabi.

Al Zayani, if endorsed by the GCC members, will take over in April next year.

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