

## Bahrain's Al Wefaq submits amendments

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Al Wefaq bloc has submitted a draft law to amend certain provisions of the rally law “which violate human right principles”.

The bloc says it has sought amendments to strengthen Bahrain’s position at the international level as well as in the field of human rights.

“We have submitted the bill to the legal and legislative affairs committee in the Chamber of Deputies. The panel has referred it to the foreign, defence and national security affairs committee for review,” Wefaq Deputy Jalal Fairouz told the Tribune.

The deputy said the bloc had consulted 53 political and human rights societies on the amendments.

“The problem with the rallies law is that some of its clauses contradict the human right principles. For example, it is mandatory for organisers to take permission from the Ministry of Interior three days in advance. The ministry has powers to change the venue and time of a public gathering or rally.

“Our amendments deal with the problem by reducing the three-day period to 24 hours,” Fairouz said. Under the current law, non- Bahrainis cannot take part in rallies. Fairouz said all individuals had the right to express views and according to the amendments non-Bahrainis invited by the organisers could take part in rallies.

The current law also bans rallies near hospitals, places of worship, schools, airport, malls and security areas.

Al Wefaq draft law has removed the clause. “Every 500 meters there is a school or a health centre so where will one protest? Our bill also seeks ban on the police from dispersing rallies permitted by the ministry,” Fairouz said.

Another amendment demands that only police officials authorised to monitor rallies should be present at the venue. The law stipulates that the organisers of unauthorised rallies will be fined BD100 or jailed for six months and the participants will be fined BD50 and jailed for one month.

The bloc has reduced the jail term but says the guilty should be punished. Fairouz however said it would be difficult for the bloc to convince the foreign, defence and national security affairs committee. “The committee plays a vital role in decision-making on such matters. But the problem is that only two of our bloc could be elected to the panel. We are in talks with fellow MPs on the passage of the bill.” Fairouz has also submitted a proposal seeking amendments to the Penal Code Law.