

ITV's coverage of Saudi Arabia opening world Cup match to feature warnings from human rights activist on the state's purchase of Newcastle United

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A report on Saudi Arabia's relationship with sport will feature in ITV's coverage of its opening World Cup match against Argentina today [Tuesday 22 November].

With scrutiny on World Cup host nation's hosting of the tournament amid controversies around its human rights record, the report focuses on its fellow gulf state's ambitions within sport, which have also met with concern because of its record on human rights. Amnesty International have described Saudi Arabia's human rights record as "appalling".

The report presented by Gabriel Clarke, features an interview with the sister of Loujain Al-Hathloul, who led a successful campaign in 2018 to lift the ban on a woman's right to drive in Saudi Arabia. A tribunal later found Loujain guilty of crimes against the state, which she denies.

Loujain was imprisoned and Lina Al-Hathloul claims her sister suffered appalling torture at the hands of the Saudi authorities.

Lina tells the ITV report: "She spent one thousand and one nights in prison, she was electrocuted, water-boarded, flogged, beaten, sexually harrassed. Of course they [Saudi authorities] deny it and it is so easy for them to do so, because no one can get any evidence of anything."

Loujain is currently in Saudia Arabia, but is banned from leaving the country.

The Saudi government were approached for comment, but declined and ITV were unable to speak to Loujain in Saudi Arabia.

Lina issues a warning to Newcastle United supporters and the UK more broadly, about the Saudi kingdom's Public Investment Fund's purchase of the club.

Lina says: "The ones who are saying it [the purchase of Newcastle United] is not about politics, it is only about football, it will backfire on them. It will backfire on the UK as well, if they don't stop a dictator from investing and having so much power in their country."

The ITV report also focuses on the killing of the Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi at the country's Istanbul embassy, with Lina claiming that the purchase of Newcastle is intended to distract from such incidents.

Lina says: "When they think about Saudi Arabia, they didn't want people to think about Khashoggi anymore, they didn't want people to think about women being tortured. This is the important part. It covers up a crisis. It is not about human rights any more, it is about sport and that is the dangerous part of it."

The report also examines the views of federations, promoters and others who say partnerships with Saudi Arabia can be an agent for progress there and provide

much needed investment in sport.

The report will feature in ITV's live coverage of Argentina v Saudi Arabia, which begins at 9am today on ITV1 and will be followed by live coverage of Denmark v Tunisia at 12.10pm on ITV1.

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