

MPs scrap BD500 Bahrainisation fee

● **LMRA warning:**
Businesses may favor
foreign workers
over locals

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A plan to remove the BD500 fee that allows firms to bypass Bahrainisation quotas was passed by MPs yesterday, despite strong objections from the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) and the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). The LMRA cautions that scrapping this arrangement may lead businesses to rely more on foreign hires instead of locals. It believes the fee — tacked onto each extra expat permit — currently encourages companies to stick to Bahrainisation quotas. Without it, the regulator contends, employers will lose a key nudge that keeps Bahraini workers front and centre.

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- MP BADER AL TAMIMI

The chamber also raised concerns, arguing that several jobs need expertise from abroad. In its view, removing the fee system could trigger workforce gaps, dampen quality, and weaken Bahrain’s economy.

Joblessness

It favours an all-encompassing overhaul of labour rules that tackles joblessness at the roots yet still gives firms enough room to operate. Since 2016, this scheme has run under a Cabinet directive on LMRA charges. It has been tweaked over the years to adjust to changing con-



ditions, and officials say it lines up with Bahrain’s goals for the labour market between 2023 and 2026.

Steps

The LMRA has likewise introduced other steps to shore up local hiring — firms must post vacancies in-country and interview Bahraini applicants before picking expat workers. Employers are also required to wait 21 days while these steps unfold, so that foreign recruitment isn’t the default. “The plan is meant to lift Bahraini employment in the private sector,” explained MP Bader Al

Tamimi, one of its backers. “Right now, some businesses hand over the fee rather than bring on local staff. This was originally designed to help companies needing extra permits who hadn’t met their Bahrainisation target, but it’s turned into a handy escape hatch.” Al Tamimi referred to LMRA figures showing 12,251 new permits and 27,849 renewals in 2023 alone. “This surge in foreign permits reveals where employers are putting their focus,” he said. “We’ve got a dire job crunch, and we need to prioritise Bahraini workers.”

Home-grown talent

“It’s not about punishing companies,” he added. “It’s about giving Bahrainis a proper go. If a firm truly backs home-grown talent, it shouldn’t need a fee to steer it in that direction.” Parliament’s Services Committee examined the plan and gave it the green light. Most members believe it will help steady the employment scene.

BD50,000 VAT payment fraud using stolen bank cards

H Naser
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An Asian man, aged 34, used stolen bank cards to pay VAT taxes totaling BD50,000, the High Criminal Court heard yesterday. Ironically, the defendant’s illicit activities were first discovered when he used a locally-owned bank card to purchase BD300 worth of cryptocurrency.

This transaction led investigators to uncover a larger scheme involving the stolen cards and significant VAT payments.

The defendant allegedly utilised these stolen cards, originating from an Asian country, to make payments to a contracting company through the government’s e-services portal.

He later expanded his operations by entering the cryptocurrency market, employing the locally-owned bank card among others.

Kicking off his illicit dealings, the 34-year-old reportedly offered a local contracting company the chance to pay its VAT tax at reduced rates in exchange for cash payments, which he sent abroad to unknown individuals believed to be aiding his crimes.

“We paid the defendant in cash via BenefitPay, unaware that stolen bank cards were being used,” testified an employee of the company. A tax official from the Na-



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tional Bureau for Revenue stated that the contracting company made VAT payments totaling BD21,056 in August 2024 (33 separate online payments) and BD23,748 in October 2024 (47 separate online payments). “These payments were processed through the agency’s standard online system, making refunds to the original cardholders impossible,” he added.

The defendant’s decision to expand his activities into cryptocurrency trading proved to be a significant miscalculation. “Out of the blue, I received a call from an Asian man requesting to buy cryptocurrencies on behalf of clients. He paid me through BenefitPay, and I transferred the purchased currencies to his wallet,” recounted a local cryptocurrency trader.

MPs approve stricter rules for delivery riders amid rising violations

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Stricter rules for restaurant delivery riders were approved by Parliament yesterday after more than 4,000 traffic breaches were logged by November 2023, with reckless riding and food hygiene concerns sparking a tougher stance.

The push, put forward by MP Maryam Saleh Al Dhaen, aims to rein in the growing disregard for road rules among riders while ensuring food transport boxes meet hygiene standards. A joint committee made up of members from the Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee and the Services Committee backed the plan, calling it necessary for public well-being. Concerns have been piling up



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over risky behaviour, with riders weaving through footpaths and dodging traffic signals. “These shortcuts put pedestrians and other road users in danger. We need stronger enforcement to put a stop to it,” she added. Al Dhaen pointed to Interior Ministry figures showing a steady rise in violations: 2,378 in 2020, climbing to 3,227 in 2021

and 3,932 in 2022. By November 2023, the tally had hit 4,188 despite stepped-up policing. “The ministry has made it clear it won’t turn a blind eye to this,” she said, adding that 364 motorcycles had been impounded for serious breaches. The crackdown also tackles food safety, with Al Dhaen pushing for tighter rules on cleanliness and handling.

Muslim convert granted divorce by High Sharia Court after 10-year separation

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The High Sharia Court has granted a divorce to a woman who converted to Islam after a 10-year separation from her Christian husband. The woman, an Asian national, had been married to her husband for 16 years under a marriage contract issued in their home country.

According to her lawyer, Ib-tisam Al Sabbagh, the relationship broke down in 2014, with no contact between the couple since. The woman moved to Bahrain in 2017. The pivotal point in the case, however, was the woman’s conversion to Islam, confirmed by a certificate issued by the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs

and Endowments. This conversion, coupled with the prolonged separation and the Islamic prohibition against Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men, formed the basis of her divorce petition. The court’s judgment pointed to the Islamic principle that a marriage contract can be annulled due to a huge impediment arising after the marriage.

MPs push private schools to hire Bahraini teachers over expats



MPs hold session
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A proposal to make private schools prioritise Bahraini teachers over expats — potentially affecting thousands of jobs — was approved by Parliament yesterday after being postponed from the 7th January session due to the Education Minister’s absence.

Lawmakers argue the move is needed to curb reliance on foreign hires and get more local graduates into work. Acting Labour Minister, His Excellency Yousef Khalaf, assured MPs that the government is already laying the groundwork to help Bahrainis land these roles.

“We’re putting together a training scheme with the Education Ministry to equip Bahrainis with the skills they need for jobs in private schools,” he said. “The plan will be announced soon, and those keen to take part can sign up.” Education Minister, H.E. Mohammed Mubarak Juma, said efforts were already in motion to keep Bahrainis in the sector. “Tamkeen is still helping to cover the wages of Bahrainis



”**“Tamkeen is still helping to cover the wages of Bahrainis working in private schools.”**

- H.E. MOHAMMED MUBARAK JUMA,
EDUCATION MINISTER

working in private schools,” he said, stressing that keeping jobs steady was key. He also confirmed that his ministry and Tamkeen were keeping an eye on contract terminations. “We’re across every case and will step in when needed,” he said. Juma also addressed concerns over career progression, revealing that more than 5,300 education workers were



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promoted last year, including teachers, senior teachers, assistant principals, and principals. “There are no promotions stuck in the pipeline,” he said. “If a teacher has hit the top pay bracket or hasn’t put in enough years yet, they’re dealt with under the usual rules.”