

MPs to vote on law setting up global commercial court

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MPs will vote today on a law to set up a new international commercial court in Bahrain, giving it power to hear cross-border trade disputes and allowing appeals to be filed in Singapore.

The draft law, issued by Royal Decree in 2024, lays out the legal structure for the Bahrain International Commercial Court.

It would act as an independent forum for business disputes between parties who agree to refer their cases to it, even where no other court has authority to hear them.

Appeals could be lodged either in Bahrain or Singapore, depending on the parties' agreement and the language used in the judgment.

Review

This follows a treaty signed between the two countries on 20 March 2024, allowing decisions delivered in English to be reviewed by Singapore's courts unless the parties choose appeal proceedings in Bahrain instead.

The court would be headed by a president, assisted by one or more vice-presidents, along with a panel of appoint-

ed judges.

A council formed from these members would be responsible for running the court, setting its rules, managing appointments, and overseeing a budget based on commercial accounting.

Languages

Foreign lawyers would be permitted to appear in cases held in languages other than Arabic.

In Arabic-language hearings, they would need to work alongside Bahraini lawyers licensed to appear before the Court of Cassation.

Judgments issued by the court would take immediate effect and be enforced under Bahrain's existing execution law.

If appealed in Singapore, any decision would still need to be reissued by the Bahraini court before taking legal effect locally.

Launch

Ministries backing the plan say Bahrain must move quickly to launch the court before another country does.

They argue it will raise Bahrain's standing in international legal circles and help attract foreign investment.

Bahrain's legal leap

MPs to debate four major international treaties clearing path for cross-border court

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MPs will debate today a decree that would bring Bahrain into four international treaties on civil and commercial matters, setting the legal groundwork for a new court to deal with cross-border disputes.

The draft law known as Decree-Law No. 8 of 2024 covers Bahrain's entry into three global agreements and a bilateral treaty with Singapore.

Taken together, they would provide the legal tools needed for the country to host international hearings and appeals in line with global practice.

One of the treaties is the 1970 Hague Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad.

Reservations

Bahrain has made two reservations. Only requests in English or translated into English will be accepted.

The section allowing diplomats or consuls to gather evidence will not apply. Both positions are allowed under the terms of the convention.

The 2005 Hague Convention on Choice of Court Agreements



Image used for illustrative purposes only

makes contracts that name a specific court binding.

Agreement

Another agreement adopted by the United Nations in 2018 sets out how settlements reached through mediation in commercial cases can be enforced across borders.

The treaty with Singapore allows for rulings issued in Bahrain to be appealed there, if both parties agree beforehand.

Where such an arrangement exists, and the ruling is in English, an appeal may be lodged

abroad.

Any decision must then be reissued by the Bahraini court before it takes effect locally.

Measure

The Financial and Economic Affairs Committee backed the measure and referred to a consultancy deal signed in March to help the court's early phase.

That work includes drafting rules, training staff and promoting the court abroad.

The Ministry of Justice said the new court would help meet the needs of international busi-



Decree-Law No. 8 of 2024 enables Bahrain to join global accords and a Singapore treaty, allowing it to host international legal proceedings.

nesses and investors.

Flexibility

The Ministry of Legal Affairs said the treaties would allow flexibility in language and legal representation while keeping oversight within Bahrain.

Lawyers from overseas would be able to take part in hearings if working alongside a Bahraini colleague.

The Foreign Ministry said the treaties would assist with requests for evidence, recognition of judgments and enforcement of settlements.

MPs urged to reject 2023 unemployment fund accounts

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Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee has called on MPs to reject the audited 2023 accounts of Bahrain's unemployment insurance fund, with a vote scheduled for today, after net assets fell by BD124 million due to a state transfer and rising benefit costs.

The recommendation follows a four-month review by the committee, which advised against adopting the financial statements approved by the board of the Social Insurance Organisation.

The fund's reserves dropped



Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee members

from BD587.6 million in 2022 to BD463.2 million in 2023.

The fall was driven by a BD200 million government-authorized transfer intended to support employment and wage pro-

grammes.

BD67.67 million was drawn during the year, with the rest recorded as liabilities to be used later.

The committee warned that if such withdrawals continue

without clear legal safeguards, the fund's long-term stability could be placed at risk.

It called for firmer rules to govern transfers and more regular assessments of the fund's ability to meet its obligations.

Although the fund closed the year with a surplus as contributions exceeded payouts by BD54.4 million, the committee raised concern over the direction of travel.

Benefit payments rose by nearly 12 per cent while contributions rose by only 8.3 per cent. If that pattern continues, it said, the surplus may not hold.

The audit, conducted by KPMG Fakhro and endorsed by the Social Insurance Organisation's board, found the statements to comply with international standards. Still, the committee said the numbers did not fully reflect longer-term pressures.

Private school probed over 'inappropriate' student survey

● **Contrary to religious principles, moral norms**

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A private school's management is under investigation after inspectors from the Ministry of Education uncovered a questionnaire handed to students that included questions deemed contrary to religious principles and moral norms.

The ministry's teams visited the school following concerns over the content.

According to their findings, the questionnaire featured items viewed as inconsistent with accepted values.

Material

Several parents were contacted to confirm that their children had received the material.

Once verified, the ministry ordered the dismissal of the staff member directly responsible and opened proceedings against the school's administration.

The ministry said it would continue to monitor educational institutions to ensure they abide by religious, social and regulatory standards, and made clear that any deviation from a school's role in teaching and upbringing would be met with action.

MP's housemaid found after three-day search

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MP Khalid Buanaq has confirmed that the domestic worker who fled from his home three days ago has been found and is now in official custody.

Legal steps are under way, he said.

He told Parliament earlier that the maid had vanished without warning.

"They'll ask me to pay for her flight," he remarked, "but the one who helped her escape won't face anything."

With a dry edge, he added that the woman seen on his home security camera "looked like a wrestler".

Wider problem

Buanaq said the episode reflects a wider problem faced



MP Khalid Buanaq

by many families across the country.

He plans to push for a new law that would criminalise such absconding and set harsher penalties for those who shelter or illegally employ runaway workers.

The lawmaker also called for increased inspections in areas where such workers are believed to be hiding, and urged that both the workers and those found helping them be deported without leniency.

Parliament passes revised draft law criminalising invasion of privacy

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A revised bill from the Shura Council has been passed by Parliament, making it a criminal offence to secretly record private conversations, film accident victims, or share intimate details of someone's life.

In serious cases, offenders could face up to five years in prison and a fine of BD5,000.

The bill amends Bahrain's Penal Code, focusing on Articles 354, 370 and 372.

It draws together two earlier drafts, one put forward by the Shura Council and the other by the government, and presents them as a single law.

Final version

The Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security Committee backed the final version.



MP Mohammed Al Ma'arafi

MP Mohammed Al Ma'arafi, a member of the committee, said the proposal was part of a wider push to improve legal protection for privacy.

He added that the committee had held 27 meetings during the current session, much of that time spent reviewing and debating the Penal Code changes.

Behaviour

The new law covers a range of behaviour. Eavesdropping, filming people without their



The earlier law, introduced in 1976, set the maximum penalty at six months in prison or a BD fine for disclosing private matters.

knowledge in private or compromising settings, and sharing personal material, even if accurate, can lead to prosecution if it causes harm.