

Bahrain outpaces **GCC** with **48% Fintech** cost advantage



EY benchmarks show leadership

● **EY confirms 48% edge**

● **Office costs 60% lower**

● **Talent fees 24% cheaper**

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Ali Al Madaifa, Chief of Business Development at the Bahrain Economic Development Board

Bahrain has emerged as the Gulf's most cost-effective base for financial services firms operating tech hubs, with a commanding 48 percent cost advantage over its regional peers, according to a new Ernst & Young LLP report.

Published by EY's US office,

the 'Cost of Doing Business in the GCC' study benchmarked Bahrain against five other GCC states across key expense categories such as business setup, labour, office space, and regulatory fees. The report found Bah-

rain led in every major category, offering companies a chance to reduce operational costs while accelerating innovation.

Office Space, Talent, Licensing

According to the report, businesses in Bahrain enjoy 60 percent better value for office rentals, while labour costs for tech professionals - such as data analysts and developers - are 24 percent more competitive than the GCC average. Licensing and business setup fees were also found to be 85 percent lower than in peer states.

Ali Al Madaifa, Chief of Business Development at the Bahrain Economic Development Board, said the Kingdom is positioning itself as a "regional leader" by providing "a supportive environment that combines cost-efficiency, cutting-edge infrastructure, and a forward-looking regulatory framework."

"Our goal is to empower global financial institutions to leverage Bahrain's unique advantages and highly skilled talent to drive technological advancement across the region," he said.

Momentum for Innovation

Bahrain's regulatory structure - overseen by the Central Bank of Bahrain - simplifies financial operations under a single licensing system. This approach allows fintech firms to operate with flexibility and reduced administrative burden.

Andrew Phillips, Partner at EY and co-leader of its QUEST unit, said Bahrain's cost profile offers a powerful incentive. "Tech hubs are the heartbeat of modern financial services... Bahrain's cost advantages allow firms to direct financial resources toward innovation rather than basic operating expenses," he said.

The report noted that tech

hubs typically employ large numbers of data analysts and software developers, whose salaries represent a major cost driver in the industry - a factor that tilts decisions in Bahrain's favour.

Global Firms Bet on Bahrain

Bahrain's global competitiveness has already drawn major players. Citi's Global Tech Hub has pledged to hire 1,000 Bahraini coders, while J.P. Morgan's Global Technology Centre is expected to create 200 high-quality tech jobs in the country.

According to the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking, Bahrain ranks 4th globally for skilled labour and 6th for digital and technological skills - reinforcing its growing reputation as a digital finance hub.

With its strategic location, future-focused regulation, and measurable cost advantages,



Bahrain's Central Bank was the first in the GCC to launch a regulatory sandbox for fintech startups in 2017, accelerating its early leadership in cost-efficient digital finance. (Source: CBB official records)

Bahrain appears to be pulling ahead in the GCC's fintech race.

More firms are likely to follow as operational costs weigh heavier in expansion decisions.

Cricket's Indian Premier League value surges to **\$18.5 billion**: report

New Delhi, India

The Indian Premier League's business value has been estimated at \$18.5 billion with reigning champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru its wealthiest franchise, according to a report by an investment bank.

The world's richest cricket tournament has been a top revenue earner for the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and in 2020 was estimated to generate more than \$11 billion a year for the Indian economy.

According to US investment bank Houlihan Lokey, which

has valued several sports franchises around the world, the brand value of the 10-team T20 franchise tournament has seen a sharp rise of 13.8 percent to \$3.9 billion over the past year.

Bengaluru, who along with star player Virat Kohli won their first IPL title this year,

have overtaken five-time winners Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians to achieve a brand value of \$269 million.

Mumbai is second with \$242 million, followed by Chennai at \$235 million.

The Houlihan Lokey report called the IPL "a global phenom-

enon" that has become more than just a cricket league.

"The IPL continues to set benchmarks in sports business. Franchise valuations have soared, media rights deals have reached record highs, and brand partnerships have diversified across sectors," Harsh Talikoti

from Houlihan Lokey, said in a statement.

The report said the 2025 final had more than 678 million views on the official streaming platform JioHotstar, surpassing the India-Pakistan clash during the Champions Trophy in February this year.

Further Enhancing Operational Resilience: NBB Becomes the First and the Only Bank in Bahrain to Operate a Tier 3 Certified Data Centre



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The National Bank of Bahrain (NBB) has officially inaugurated its new revamped Data Centre, marking a significant step in strengthening the Bank's digital footprint. Following the completion of an extensive migration process, NBB has become

the first and the only bank in the Kingdom that has designed, built, and is operating its own Uptime Institute Tier 3 certified Data Centre, a unique distinction that reflects the highest international standards of operational reliability and infrastructure quality.

NBB has successfully completed an 18-month strategic

infrastructure transformation, with the support of the Central Bank of Bahrain. This initiative, marked by the modernisation of legacy systems and over eight phased migration activities, exemplified best-in-class risk management and execution. The seamless transition of the Bank's digital ecosystem has resulted in a Tier 3 certified facility, meeting

the highest international standards for security, sustainability, and operational excellence.

Commenting on the occasion, Usman Ahmed, Group Chief Executive Officer of NBB said, "The new Data Centre represents NBB's continued investment in infrastructure that delivers long-term resilience. It strengthens the Bank's operational backbone

while advancing its ESG goals by embedding energy optimised technology directly into its core infrastructure. Delivering a transformation of this scale required synchronised execution from teams working across multiple phases to ensure a smooth transition. Every aspect of this major project was guided by a commitment to providing a fric-

tionless and stable experience for customers. We are incredibly proud of what the NBB team and its partners have built together."

With a steadfast focus on digital innovation and operational excellence, NBB continues to reinforce its role as a key player in enhancing service delivery standards within Bahrain's banking sector.