

Verdict set for social development centre director for embezzlement

● Appeals court schedules hearing on 19 January

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Bahrain's High Criminal Court of Appeal has scheduled 19 January for the attendance and swearing-in of a court-appointed expert in the appeal against the conviction of the director of a centre affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development.

The defendant was sentenced to a total of 15 years in prison, fined, ordered to repay more than BD500,000, and had funds linked to the offences confiscated.

Donations

He was convicted of collecting donations without a licence, misappropriating the funds and laundering the proceeds.

A second defendant was sentenced to one year in prison.

The court also sentenced the first defendant to 10 years' imprisonment for offences related to the illegal collection and misappropriation of donations, ordering him to repay BD192,000, fining him an equivalent amount, and confiscating BD89,000.

He received an additional five-year sentence, a BD100,000 fine and the confiscation of BD97,000 in connection with money laundering charges.

On trial over SIM swap theft of BD2,490 through money transfer app

● Court verdict set for 24 January

Mohammed Darwish
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A Bahraini man accused of using a replacement SIM card to get into a money transfer app and drain BD2,490 from his employer's bank account is facing trial, with judges due to rule on 24 January.

The defendant, 36, is still at large.

Prosecutors say the man took advantage of the company owner being out of Bahrain after being trusted with handling limited company matters.

The complainant is a 42-year-old Gulf national who owns a company and is often in another Gulf country.

Authorisation

The owner told investigators he had given the defendant a limited authorisation linked to running some parts of the business in Bahrain.

Audit overhaul

Urgent bill to tighten rules for external auditors and raise professional standards

● Government moves to strengthen oversight, penalties and accountability mechanisms

Mohammed Darwish
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An urgent government-drafted bill will go before Parliament today, changing Bahrain's rules for external auditors by raising the bar for who can practise.

The proposed legislation will also give the ministry stronger checks and penalties, while replacing the current disciplinary body with an 'Account Auditors Accountability Council'.

The draft law, sent with Royal Decree No. 76 of 2025, amends Decree-Law No. 15 of 2021.

Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee has recommended approval in principle after meetings with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Central Bank of



Ahmed Al Salloom, Chairman of Parliament's Financial and Economic Affairs Committee



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Bahrain, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and The Bahrain Accountants & Auditors Association (BAAA).

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce told the committee the rush was driven by the need to update auditing rules in line with international standards, clear up ambiguity in some provisions, and strengthen transparency, independence and accountability.

It said the changes aim to im-

prove audit work and financial reporting, while keeping responsibility for building and running internal control systems with company management.

A key change is who can register as a practising external auditor.

The bill would require a valid professional accounting certification, alongside conduct and experience conditions.

For non-Bahrainis, it adds further requirements, including proof that they remain eligible

to practise in the country where they previously worked.

It also gives the minister more say over how experience is counted, including experience gained outside Bahrain.

The committee has also backed changing Article 10 to add a Bahrainisation requirement for branches of foreign audit firms registered in Bahrain.

Under the committee's wording, those branches must employ Bahraini external auditors at a ratio no lower than the level set

by the Cabinet, based on a ministerial proposal and coordination with the competent authorities.

Rules on changing auditors are also revised by drawing a clearer line between non-listed companies and listed entities.

For non-listed companies, the auditor would be appointed for one financial year, renewable, while the lead auditor responsible for the work and the final report must be changed at most every five years.

The Central Bank of Bahrain keeps its role in setting the rules for choosing auditors for financial institutions, and the committee has recommended that the text also cover listed companies.

The bill rewrites what auditors must report.

They would have to include serious breaches found during an audit that affect a company's activity or financial position, and tell the audit committee, where one exists under the Commercial Companies Law, or those in charge of governance, about other serious breaches that do not affect the company's activity.

'Remote litigation' service

Mohammed Darwish
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Remote court hearings can now be reached through the Ministry of Justice Ministry's website, with users able to join sessions online and listen to witness testimony.

The ministry said on Instagram that the 'remote litigation' service is live on its portal at <https://www.moj.gov.bh/>.

From the home page, litigants can click through to the service and sign in using the upgraded eKey 2.0.

Platform

Guidance on the site says the platform lets users attend hearings, watch a live broadcast of sessions, read instructions and user guidance, and contact technical support through an



Image used for illustrative purposes only

enquiries section.

The ministry has also shared an explainer video showing how to use the service.

Litigants are asked to log in before the scheduled start time.

The ministry warned that if a party joins late, the hearing could go ahead without them and their attendance might not be recorded in the minutes.

The platform also allows doc-

uments and memoranda to be filed online through the national eGovernment portal.

Users are barred from saving or sharing any audio or video linked to a hearing, and are told to keep what is said in court private, especially in cases the court orders to be heard in secret.

Conduct

The guidance also covers conduct during online hearings, including wearing suitable clothing, sitting in a well-lit place with a clear background, and keeping quiet and orderly.

Parties should not speak, intervene or comment unless the court allows it.

The court may also ask for checks to ensure a witness is not being coached or relying on written notes, in line with the duties set by law.

Forum 2026 holds session on using AI in diplomacy

● Marking Bahrain Diplomatic Day on January 14

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As part of the Diplomatic Forum organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to mark Bahrain Diplomatic Day, observed annually on January 14, a session on artificial intelligence in diplomacy was held.

The session was delivered by Manas Chawla, Director of the Oxbridge Diplomatic Academy and Chief Executive Officer of London Politeca.

The session addressed several key topics, including the geopolitical dimensions of AI.

Its role as a support tool for diplomatic decision-making, and its applications in enhancing the performance of diplomatic missions.

It also examined the role of AI in strategic communications and public diplomacy, as well as issues related to security, ethics, and diplomatic protocol, in line with rapid global digital developments.

The session concluded with an interactive presentation on the practical use of AI in diplomatic work, followed by a discussion and questions from heads of the Kingdom of Bahrain's diplomatic and consular missions abroad.

Travel agency partner jailed six years over fake group trips

● Guilty of breaching trust and fraud

Mohammed Darwish
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A partner at a travel agency has been sentenced to six years in prison and fined BD5,000 after the Minor Criminal Court convicted him of breach of trust and fraud.

The court also ordered that the civil claim linked to the case be referred to the competent civil court.

The Public Prosecution said it



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received complaints from several customers who had paid for group trips the agency advertised. The defendant, prosecutors said, collected sums said to cover the cost of travel.

When the departure dates ar-

rived, the complainants found there were no bookings in their names. They later went to the agency's premises and found it closed.

Prosecutors said they opened an investigation, taking state-

ments from the complainants and one person from the office.

The inquiry, they said, showed the defendant had obtained the victims' money through deception. It also found he had taken funds belonging to the agency itself.

The Public Prosecution said the defendant then left Bahrain. An order was issued for his arrest and production, and his details were circulated internationally.

After the investigation ended and the evidence was reviewed, the case was referred to the competent court, which issued the ruling.