

Shura approves unemployment fund accounts after net assets drop



Jamal Fakhro

Members question Ipc wage levy

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

Shura Council has approved the 2023 accounts of Bahrain's Unemployment Insurance Fund after a 21 per cent drop in net assets from a BD200 million transfer to the state, while senior members questioned the need to keep deducting 1 per cent from wages.

At its sitting yesterday, the council backed the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee's call to adopt the audited report for the year ended 31 December 2023, with the committee's written remarks attached.

The accounts show total assets of BD614.9 million against liabilities of BD151.8m, leaving net assets of around BD463.2m.

Liability

The fall is mainly tied to Parliament's earlier move to draw BD200m from the fund to pay for labour market programmes; by the end of 2023, BD67.67m had been transferred and BD133.3m was recorded as a liability.

According to the committee, the core insurance activity continues to produce a surplus.

Contributions again exceeded benefits, leaving a gap of about BD54.4m in 2023, compared with roughly BD51.3m in 2022.

Contributions

Total contributions from the public and private sectors reached BD89m, while benefits paid to unemployed Bahrainis



Dr Abdulaziz Abul

and first-time jobseekers came to about BD34.6m.

Private-sector workers and employers supplied around 81 per cent of contributions, with the rest from the public sector.

Committee rapporteur Dr Abdulaziz Abul told members the account had reached a point where its workings should be reviewed.

"After nearly twenty years of operation, it is time to review how this account works, how its resources are used and how far its scope can be widened while serving the same social goals," he said, noting that the audited report was being laid before the legislature for the first time under a 2023 change to the Unemployment Insurance Law.

Income

Investment income in 2023 rose to BD22.7m, compared with BD434,000 in 2022, driven by returns from financial instruments and interest-bearing assets.

That pushed operating results before the BD200m transfer to around BD75.5m for the year.

First Deputy Chairman Jamal Fakhro told the chamber that, even with that rise, the rate of return on the fund's assets was still below the level suggested by the actuarial adviser.

Balance

He said the account held an average balance of about BD550m in 2023 and earned roughly 4 per cent, whereas the expert had pointed to 6 per cent as a more suitable target.

Fakhro also questioned the need to keep the current deduction in place given the size of the fund's surpluses.

10-year jail terms upheld in BD230,000 Tamkeen and SIO fraud case

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Two defendants have been ordered to serve 10 years in prison and pay BD100,000 each after the High Criminal Court of Appeal upheld guilty verdicts over forged documents and false entries used to draw more than BD230,000 from Tamkeen and the Social Insurance Organisation.

The court also upheld one-year jail terms and BD500 fines for the remaining defendants, while suspending the sentences of two female appellants after they paid the sums due to the Social Insurance Organisation (SIO).

The Financial Crimes and Money Laundering Prosecution said the case began after it received several reports from

the Social Insurance Organisation alleging that a number of company owners had taken more than BD90,000.

Prosecutors said the defendants supplied forged private papers and entered incorrect information into the organisation's electronic system.

The false entries, the prosecution said, included adding and removing insured persons to gain access to social insurance payments.

That, prosecutors said, created fictitious work periods that led to retirement pensions, end-of-service gratuities and one-off compensation being paid without entitlement.

Tamkeen also filed reports, according to prosecutors, alleging that the same defendants took more than BD140,000.

Flexible market

Shura Council unanimously rejects bill to impose limits on foreign work permits

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Caps on foreign work permits have been thrown out by a unanimous Shura Council vote, which rejected a bill to force a national ceiling and kept Bahrain's labour market law on its current flexible footing.

The bill, already passed by Parliament, would have obliged the national labour market plan to carry a fixed upper limit on the number of work permits the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) can issue in a given period, replacing wording that the plan 'may' include such a ceiling with wording that it 'must' do so.

The Services Committee, backed by the government, the LMRA and the Ministry of Labour, had urged members to keep the current wording.

Procedures

Committee rapporteur Talal Al Mannai told the chamber the proposal shackles the authority's discretion and weighs down procedures without achieving its aim', adding that the current permissive text "acts as a safety valve that keeps the law flexible and keeps the market able to adjust in times of need".

He warned that if the state is obliged to fix a national ceiling for each four-year plan, those drawing it up are likely to raise that ceiling as a precaution, turning the rule into a formal duty with little real effect.

The committee's report said the law had been written to let the LMRA react quickly to swings in demand and sudden shocks, such as health crises or abrupt slowdowns, without waiting for long changes in primary legislation.



The proposal shackles the authority's discretion and weighs down procedures without achieving its aim

TALAL AL MANNAI, COMMITTEE RAP-
PORTEUR



The bill would weaken the executive's ability to keep pace with rapid changes in the labour market

DR ALI AL HADDAD, SHURA MEMBER



Other areas suffer from a shortage of specialist skills or involve jobs that citizens are reluctant to take

DALAL AL ZAYED, SHURA MEMBER

Response

Locking a hard cap into the law for the whole life of each national plan, it argued, would leave the authority with less room to respond if labour needs rise in key sectors mid-cycle.

Shura member Dr Ali Al Haddad told colleagues the bill "does not achieve the purpose for which it was drafted; it carries adverse effects that would restrict the flexibility of the executive and weaken its ability to keep pace with rapid changes in the labour market".

He added that the change risked sending "unsettling messages to investors and reducing the appeal of the investment environment, with negative consequences for sustainable jobs for citizens".

Call

Shura member Dalal Al Zayed backed the committee's call to reject the bill and pointed to Article 5 of the Labour Market Regulation Law, which requires

the LMRA to consult other bodies and the public before issuing measures linked to the labour market.

"This provision was not written by chance; it was put there so that no single body takes decisions on the labour market and the economy on its own, and so that balanced decisions are taken after consultation with the parties concerned and with the public," she said.

Al Zayed also said work permits should not be treated in the same way for every sector.

Rules

Some fields, she argued, can bear tighter rules because there are qualified Bahrainis who can be brought in, while other areas suffer from a shortage of specialist skills or involve jobs that citizens are reluctant to take.

In such sectors, she warned, a fixed ceiling might push some employers towards unlawful methods of recruitment or persuade them to scale down or

move parts of their work if they feel their room to hire is too narrow.

In a written opinion, the LMRA backed the government's stance that the bill should be reconsidered, saying the present framework already allows ceilings to be brought in by executive decisions when needed, while leaving space to adjust policy as supply and demand change.

Approach

The Ministry of Labour took a similar line, saying national numerical caps suit countries that deal with very large inflows of migrant workers, while Bahrain bases its approach on actual labour needs and seeks to give Bahraini workers an edge through training and qualification.

After yesterday's debate, the Shura Council agreed with the Services Committee and refused the amendment in principle. It has sent the bill back to Parliament for reconsideration.

United with Jesus Bahrain celebrates Christmas with Filipino community

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United with Jesus (UWJ) Bahrain brought the Christmas spirit to life for the Filipino community in Manama, gathering everyone for a lively Christmas celebration on December 12, 2025, at the InterContinental Hotel's Ambassador Hall.

About 105 people showed up, mostly Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and their families filling the place with laughter, music, and real holiday warmth.

The event was led by Lead Pastor Virgilio Fernandez, with the program hosted by Emcees Francis Mirador and Anne Santillian, and supported by Joni Rose Longabela and Annaliza Fernandez.

A heartfelt exhortation was delivered by Rhenz Christopher Borja, who emphasized that Christmas that Christmas is truly merry because of Jesus Christ. He conveyed that, "The most significant present of Christmas is Jesus, a gift bestowed by God for all, and urged the group to remember that



Filipino workers and their families gather for fun

Christmas represents the love of God in action, encouraging believers to embody that love in their everyday lives".

The night buzzed with group performances and dance numbers. Teams represented the Houses of John, Luke, Peter, James, Mark, Timothy, and Paul.

The White Team, from the House of James, really wowed the crowd.

The White Team (House of James) was recognized as the

People's Choice Awardee, receiving warm applause from the audience.

Games, Awards, and Festive Highlights

The fun kept rolling with a Christmas Quiz on Kahoots, hosted by Kathy Camposano featuring Bible-based questions, Ina Jeshiah Fernandez nailed the answers and took home the win.

Edna Tuayon showed up as Lady Santa and snagged Best

Dressed Female, while Ronnie Sunga grabbed Best Dressed Male.

Raffle prizes, gift exchanges, more dance and song, and joyful laughter kept everyone in high spirits all evening, strengthening the bond among the OFW community.

At the end, everyone left with full hearts and stronger friendships. UWJ Bahrain's Christmas party did more than just celebrate the season.