

Budget for tourism faces tough scrutiny

● Heated discussion in Parliament

Mohammed Darwish
TDT | Manama

A demand for a full breakdown of public spending on tourism festivals and exhibitions since 2023 sparked a sharp exchange in Parliament. The debate followed comments by Tourism Minister, Her Excellency Fatima Al Sairafi, who said the private sector funds and runs a large share of events, making it unfair to focus solely on budgets managed by the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA). MP Basema Mubarak told the Council of Representatives that backing tourism should not weaken scrutiny, and asked for clear figures on budgets, out-

goings, payments to event firms and the measured return. “Our support for tourism does not mean disabling oversight, nor does it mean we close our eyes to the legitimate question about public funds,” she said.

Exhibitions

H.E. Al Sairafi said many events and exhibitions are carried out with private partners, with the ministry and the BTEA providing support alongside them. “A large part of the events and exhibitions held in the Kingdom are organised through cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism and the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority on one side, and the private sector on the other,” she said. The minister pointed to revenue growth since the tourism plan for 2022 to 2024 was launched.



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— H.E. FATIMA AL SAIRAFI, TOURISM MINISTER

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ister said, linking that rise to the Economic Recovery Plan announced in 2021. She also cited tourism’s share of the economy, saying it stands at about 6.8 per cent of GDP, and said visitor numbers have climbed, with annual growth running between 15 and 20 per cent. Mubarak said MPs had backed events that helped drive spending across hotels, restaurants, transport and retail, but said the figures still mattered. “It is a right to ask: how much was spent, how much came in, and does the return match the cost?” she said. **Ceiling** She asked what budget was set for tourism events from January 2024 to December 2025, whether the approved ceiling was kept to, and if any overrun took place, how much it was and which budget line covered it.

The lawmaker also asked for the total sums paid to organising companies and if the economic return was measured. “Transparency is not a luxury; it is a constitutional duty,” she said. H.E. Al Sairafi said the state’s role is to regulate and ensure the needed groundwork is in place, while the private sector remains the main operator. She said support can include funding, as well as logistics and marketing help, alongside work to ensure venues and wider tourism facilities can support a fuller calendar. Mubarak also raised the issue of jobs linked to events, saying MPs had seen young Bahrainis helping as volunteers. She thanked them for their efforts and said they were “the real force behind the success of any event,” while pressing for clearer detail on costs and returns.

MP seeks detailed information on residential tourism violations

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MP Hassan BuKhammas told Parliament yesterday that the Tourism Ministry had not provided the detailed information he sought about tourism venues operating in residential areas in Juffair and Adliya. He warned that the Council could move to tougher scrutiny if the requested data is not supplied. “After reviewing the response provided and listening to the general justifications it contained, I state before this Council that the ministry has not provided an adequate answer and has not assumed responsibility for the situation in Juffair and Adliya,” BuKhammas said. **Comfort** He added that “troubling tourism establishments are still operating within residential neighbourhoods”, affecting residents’ comfort and community considerations.



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Tourism Minister, Her Excellency Fatima Al Sairafi, said the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA) had increased inspection visits in the Fourth Constituency this year, recording about 779 visits to date, up from 300 in 2024. She said recorded tourism violations had also risen, to about 103 in 2025 compared with about 40 last year. The minister said inspections were being carried out with other state bodies, rather than by the authority alone. “Today, the Authority does

not carry out inspections on its own; joint inspection visits are also conducted with the relevant government agencies,” she said. **Licences** H.E. Al Sairafi also said tourism activity licences and tourism establishment licences were no longer issued for areas classed as residential, with applications routed through the commercial licensing system and the Sijilat platform for review by the authority and other government bodies under the relevant laws and regulatory

decisions. “I would like to confirm that today we do not grant licences to operate a tourism activity or licences for tourism establishments in areas classified as residential,” she said. BuKhammas said the Council had asked for detailed data, the names of the establishments involved, and specific steps taken, but that the response did not include the figures needed for effective parliamentary oversight. **Activities** The lawmaker said the continuation of the same activities in the same locations, alongside an admission of dozens of violations, required a review of licensing and inspection policy. He said talk of future plans and studies did not address ongoing concerns, and told the Council that continued lack of a root solution, and failure to provide the requested data, would lead Parliament to take oversight steps in line with its constitutional powers.

Book fair delayed again for ‘missing private-sector partner’



“The matter has stalled at the search for a private-sector partner to come in with us as an investor or share part of the large cost of hosting a very large number of participants.”
— H.E. RAMZAN AL NUAIMI, INFORMATION MINISTER

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“Starving minds while feeding stomachs” was how MP Eman Shuwaiter described the repeated postponement of Bahrain’s International Book Fair in Parliament yesterday, after the event was delayed again following an October 2025 announcement. The fair was last held in 2018. **Plans** Shuwaiter told MPs that plans were announced year after year, only for the date to be pushed back again before it began. “Each year, a plan is announced to hold the book fair and we feel hopeful, then we



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are surprised a few months later, before the launch date, by news of its postponement,” she said. **Restrictions** She pointed to the lifting of Covid restrictions on 28 March 2022 and said no international book fair had been organised since then, despite Bahrain continuing to host other exhibitions. “This raises legitimate questions about how serious the government is about caring for the book fair,” Shuwaiter said. Information Minister, His Excellency Ramzan Al Nuaimi, told Parliament the issue mattered because culture and literature fall within the remit of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities.

Developing national ambulance operations



The Chief of Police, H.E. Lt-General Tariq Al Hassan received the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, H.E. Dr Lulwa Al Showaiter and the Chief Executive of Government Hospitals, Dr Mariam Al Jalahma. The meeting follows the Cabinet’s decision to task the Ministry of Interior to coordinate with the Ministry of Health to explore ways to develop national ambulance operations. Lt-General Al Hassan commended the level of cooperation among the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, and health institutions.