

# Expat fury over traffic law plan

EXPATRIATE community leaders are outraged over a new traffic law that will ban some foreigners from driving unless their job requires it.

They described the controversial legislation as “unwarranted” and “discriminatory”, saying it could harm Bahrain’s image on the international arena.

Their comments were made after Minister of State for Information Affairs and the government’s official spokeswoman Sameera Rajab this week questioned the constitutionality of article 20 of the draft law, which states expatriates would still be allowed to drive using a licence issued in their country of origin for the first three months following their arrival in Bahrain.

“This discrimination is unwarranted and it reflects badly on the image of Bahrain,” said Migrant Workers Protection Society chairwoman Marietta Dias.

“The article, if approved, will contradict Bahrain’s statement that it regards expatriate workers as ‘guests’. Is this how you treat your guests?”

“As long as the country doesn’t have a proper public transport system in place, this law will have negative effects.”

Bahrain Federation of Expatriate Associations secretary-general Betsy Mathieson said they were approached by many foreign workers who feared they could not support their families living in Bahrain if their licences were withdrawn by authorities.

“We have been flooded with panic calls from people in response to the announcement of the law,” she said.

“Many who fear their driving licence will be cancelled doubt the ability to support their families in their daily activities and



■ Ms Dias

to enable them to carry out their duties at work and thus jeopardising their employment.

“There is much confusion and uncertainty amongst the public and

we believe it is unconstitutional, in contravention of basic human rights and discriminatory against a large part of Bahrain’s population.”

She added that the adoption of the law would be a “logistical and administrative nightmare” which could waste government resources.

Indian Community Relief Fund chairman Bhagwan Asarpota said the law was not practical enough to be implemented.

“Speaking on behalf of the expatriate community as a whole, I would say that the decision is not practical.

“Leaving aside the rights issues and the legalities involved

in terms of constitutional violation, one should always see how well a law can be implemented.

“Theoretically, it may be justified, but once the law is in place, it is all about successful implementation.”

Meanwhile, MRH Law Firm attorney Dr Mohammed Abu Hussain stressed the law was without a doubt unconstitutional and violates international treaties signed by Bahrain.

“The draft law is absolutely unconstitutional and against human rights,” he told the *GDN*.

“Bahrain is in agreement with many international treaties, which highlights the provision of protection for foreigners. These agreements state that foreigners have to be treated equally.

“By adopting such a law, we are bringing in discrimination, which is illegal.

“The law, prior to an official adoption, must be reconsidered and re-looked into, to save the country from projecting itself in a bad light internationally.”

Shura Council members last week said they approved the disputed article – despite huge reservations – because they did not want the entire 64-article law to be shelved.

It was parliament that first inserted the article into the draft traffic law and MPs have twice since refused to omit it, because they claim that most traffic offences are committed by expatriates.

However, Dr Hussain said the government should find logical ways to overcome traffic problems.

“We have to address the infrastructure issues or other means to fight these, as preventing a group from practising their legitimate rights is unwarranted,” he added.

The *GDN* earlier reported that the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it would try to block the draft legislation, noting the adverse economic impacts of the law.

The legislation, which has been pending for seven years,

includes much tougher penalties that would quadruple some punishments for motorist offences in Bahrain.

Some of the proposed punishments include jail terms of up to six months and fines of up to BD500, or both, for deliberately jumping a red light.

It has been referred to His Majesty King Hamad for ratification.

A plea has also gone out to King Hamad to refer the offending article to the Constitutional Court to ensure it is not in breach of the Constitution.



■ Dr Hussain

## Society urges donations for Ramadan drive

By ANIQA HAIDER

A CAMPAIGN to feed hundreds of disadvantaged families and individuals over Ramadan is in need of donations.

The Al Islah Society expects to help 2,500 Bahrainis and expatriates who are either widowed, divorced, orphaned, sick, aged or disabled.

A donation of as little as BD1 could help ease the lives of these beneficiaries, who are all pre-registered with the organisation, a spokesman told the *GDN*.

“The provisions to be given include rice, flour, macaroni, chicken, cooking oil, sugar, tea and dates,” he said.

“It will be delivered by volunteers to the aged and to those who do not have the means to reach our office.”

Thousands of people will also benefit from free Iftar meals every day during Ramadan, to be distributed from various locations around the country.

“Our volunteers will be giving Iftar meals to people who are unable to reach home on time,” said the spokesman.

“They will be assigned to stand near bus stops, traffic lights and major malls, to give the packs to those who cannot afford to buy it or those who cannot be at home for it.

“Ramadan is the month of charity and goodness, so we want to do more for the unfortunate people among us who cannot afford happiness.

“We don’t want them to feel they are alone and not cared by anyone,” he added.

For more information on the society and its Ramadan campaign call 17333090.



■ Students from Safra Intermediate School for Girls visited Junaid Perfumes factory in Sitra to learn about how perfumes and incense burners are made. Company staff greeted students and showed them around the factory, where they saw some of the historic perfumer’s exclusive range of products. Above, students label perfume bottles as part of their visit.

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