

Nightclub owner claims blackmail

● Six officials accused of taking bribes

By BASMA MOHAMMED

A NIGHTCLUB manager has accused tourism inspectors of blackmailing her into handing over hundreds of dinars every week to avoid being shut down.

The 26-year-old Moroccan woman is one of 15 people rounded up in a tourism corruption scandal.

She rents a 24-hour coffee shop and a disco at one of Bahrain's hotels, but was detained as part of a major police investigation in which six Bahraini Tourism Directorate employees were also arrested.

The six officials, who work for the Culture and Information Ministry, are accused of accepting bribes in exchange for turning a blind eye to violations by hotel outlets between 2004 and 2008.

However, the Moroccan woman told investigators that she was blackmailed into handing over BD200 to BD400 a week to one of the defendants or face having her business closed.

The nine defendants standing trial alongside the Tourism Directorate officials are all hotel investors.

Another two are also wanted for questioning by prosecutors, but are understood to have fled the country.

Evidence

All 15 defendants denied the allegations against them during their first appearance in the High Criminal Court.

Defence lawyers argued their clients had been arrested without solid evidence linking them to the case.

However, prosecutors responded by claiming no suspect would be brought to trial unless there was sufficient evidence against them.

"No defendant present is without evidence that implicates them," one prosecutor told the court.

Judges adjourned the trial until January 25 to summon defence witnesses and provide lawyers with copies of case documents, but refused a bail request.

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■ From left, Mr Boyle, Mr Christian, Mr Duke and Mr Ankrah ... enjoy playing in Bahrain

Top soul band back in Bahrain for Upstairs Downstairs concert

By AIDAN PAYNE

LIVERPOOL-based UK band The Christians are looking forward to performing again at the Upstairs Downstairs Restaurant in Adliya 21 months after their debut appearance back in 2007.

"We enjoy playing out here in Bahrain and get a good reception from the audience, especially having a laugh and a joke with fellow scousers in the crowd, they are everywhere!" says Garry Christian, lead vocals and original founder band member.

The group, described as a soul-influenced sophisti-pop band, was formed in 1985 by Garry along with his two brothers Roger and Russell and friend Henry Christian Priestman, hence the name The Christians.

"My earliest influence through music was constantly hearing fellow Liverpool group The Beatles who were enjoying their first Christmas Number One hit *I Want To Hold Your Hand*. It was a favourite of my older sister, but what attracted me was the harmonies and the sound which gave me a good musical grounding.

Mr Christian also cited the Motown sound with groups such as The Temptations and the Four Tops in the Sixties and the influence of Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye which persuaded him that his future was in music.

The Christians got started in 1984 when Mr Christian who played bass with a jazz fusion band Joe Public on Merseyside decided it was time to form his own group and met up with Priestman, a keyboard player with the group Immaterial who had decided to leave.

In 1986 the newly formed The Christians signed a record deal with Island Records.

Success was soon to come and singles releases in 1987, *Forgotten Town*, *Hooverville* (And They Promised The World), *When The Fingers Point* and *Ideal World* all

made the top 40 in the UK, with the latter reaching number 14 along with the debut album *The Christians* entering the charts at number two.

The group reached the peak of its popularity when they released a cover of the Isley Brothers song *Harvest For The World* reaching number eight in the UK, with all proceeds going to charity and picking up a number of awards for the video animation accompanying the song.

The group was also involved in the making of *Ferry Across The Mersey* charity single to raise funds for the families of victims of the Hillsborough Stadium football disaster in April 1989.

At the time of making the single they rubbed shoulders with legendary ex-Beatle Paul McCartney.

Success

"It was great meeting and working with the man who has been a phenomenal influence on the music scene," said Mr Christian.

Words released at the end of 1989 was the last single to reach the top 20 peaking at number 18 but the second album *Colours* reached the coveted number one spot in 1990.

"It was great and exciting being a member of a successful group, but sometimes it was stifling with all the attention and in the end you have to make a decision and I decided to quit in 1995 and moved to Paris to do solo work for four to five years," said Mr Christian.

The group was re-formed in 2000 and went on a 32-day sellout tour playing at venues around the UK with Garry being joined by Russell Christian, Henry Priestman and

Mike Bulger.

"It was great to know during touring that we were still liked," said Mr Christian.

Looking at the present music scene Mr Christian reckons that it is trendless and no one format dominates anymore.

"It's different these days as it seems that anything goes and most people listen to whatever they want through the Internet which is so accessible to everyone."

Favourite venues of the band according to Mr Christian are the Camden Jazz Cafe in London and The Jam House in Birmingham which belongs to Jools Holland, the jazz blues pianist and television music shows presenter.

"We also enjoyed playing at the Mathew Street Festival back in Liverpool during the annual Beatles Week Festival and venues in our home city as the fans always give us a great reception wherever we play," added Mr Christian.

The present line-up has been five years in the making and comprises Garry Christian on vocals, Jay Ankrah on acoustic guitar and backing vocals, Stewart Boyle on guitar, Cliff Watson on bass and Lionel Duke on drums.

The group, which released an album in January this year entitled *Soul From Liverpool*, also toured France this year.

Future plans include a number of gigs in the New Year in Ireland at venues in Dublin, Cork and Belfast.

Last night the club performed at the Dilmun Sports Club in Saar to a large crowd.

Tickets are still available for the show tonight at Upstairs Downstairs Restaurant in Adliya, with a three-course dinner served at 7pm and the concert getting underway at 9pm. Tickets cost BD30. Call 17713093 for more information.

Agony of families forced apart by poverty

TIMES like this always make me think of the people we cannot be with and it reminds me that there are thousands of workers in Bahrain who do not see their spouses or children back home, for years on end.

Near where I work is a labour camp which is always bedecked with decorations for the festive season, the twinkling lights strung up with the laundry hung out to dry on the dormitory balconies.

The vast majority of the men inside will get to go home only every two years at best and they will be spending National Day, Christmas and the New Year with only each other for company.

If they are lucky, they will be able to afford a phone call home to their wives and children, but many such workers across the country will not have money to spare even for that.

It is not just labourers, but housemaids, shop workers, street cleaners, hotels staff, doctors and nurses who will be working here while their families are thousands of kilometres away.

Many of those housemaids will be working in Christian homes, helping their employers celebrate by preparing the food and watching the children open gifts, while their own do so without them.

They will not be in their own homes to share in the joy, which will be tinged by sadness over their absence.

Those of us who can afford to travel whenever we choose (airline strikes and work commitments permitting), or are lucky enough to have our families with us, should spare a thought for the children opening their presents without their mothers or fathers, who must work abroad to clothe and feed them.

To them, Mum or Dad is just a photograph on a bedside table or a voice on the phone – a 'visitor' they get to see every few years.

It must be heart-breaking for labourers and other workers at the poorer end of the scale, to miss out on their children growing up, to never be there for their smiles, or to wipe away their tears.

Many fathers working here never get to hold the newborn babies conceived while they are on leave, since they cannot go home again for years.

I know of one father-of-two who gets home just once every four years, which meant that by the time he saw his second child for the first time, she was already of school age.

What is already a tough life for many is made even harder by forced separation from those they love.

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