



SPECIAL SECTION ON

BAHRAIN

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BAHRAIN'S BOOST TO HUMAN RESOURCES

BAHRAIN'S MINISTER OF LABOUR and Social Affairs, Abdulnabi Abdulla Al Shoala got his education in India and knows this country well. I met him again recently in his posh private office in Bahrain Towers after a gap of three years. Last time I met him in November 94 as a top businessmen of Bahrain, having close links with India and this time as Bahrain's Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. Shoala is a tall and handsome

young man with great enthusiasm to work for his country.

Beginning the conversation, he said, "training and human resource development are being addressed on priority by the government of Bahrain and the other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. We are about to enter the 21st century with its challenges and opportunities. The challenge is to prepare, train and enable the national workforce to become ef-

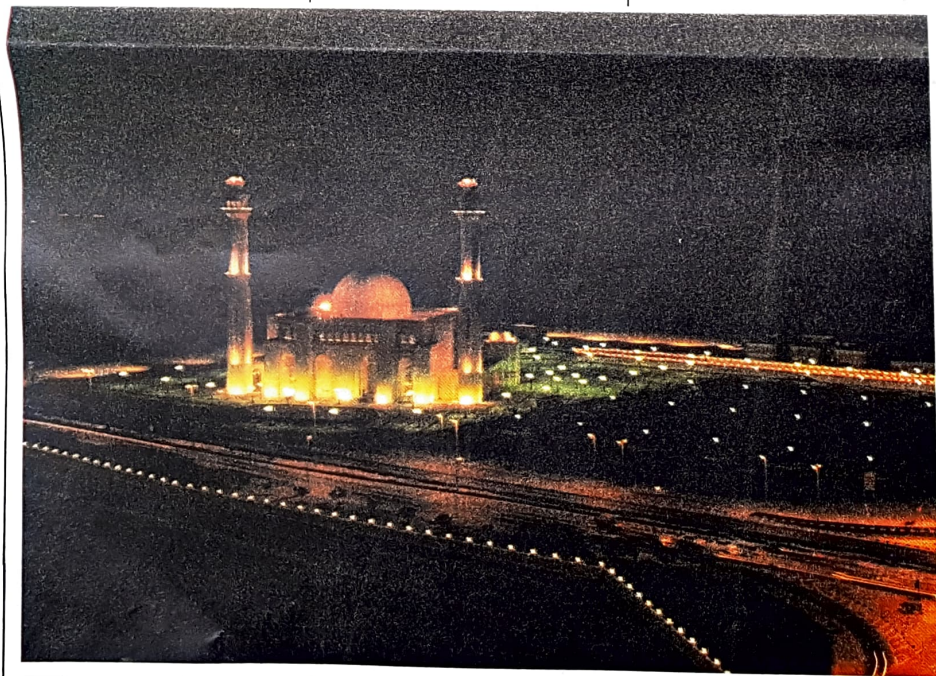
fective partners in economic and social progress."

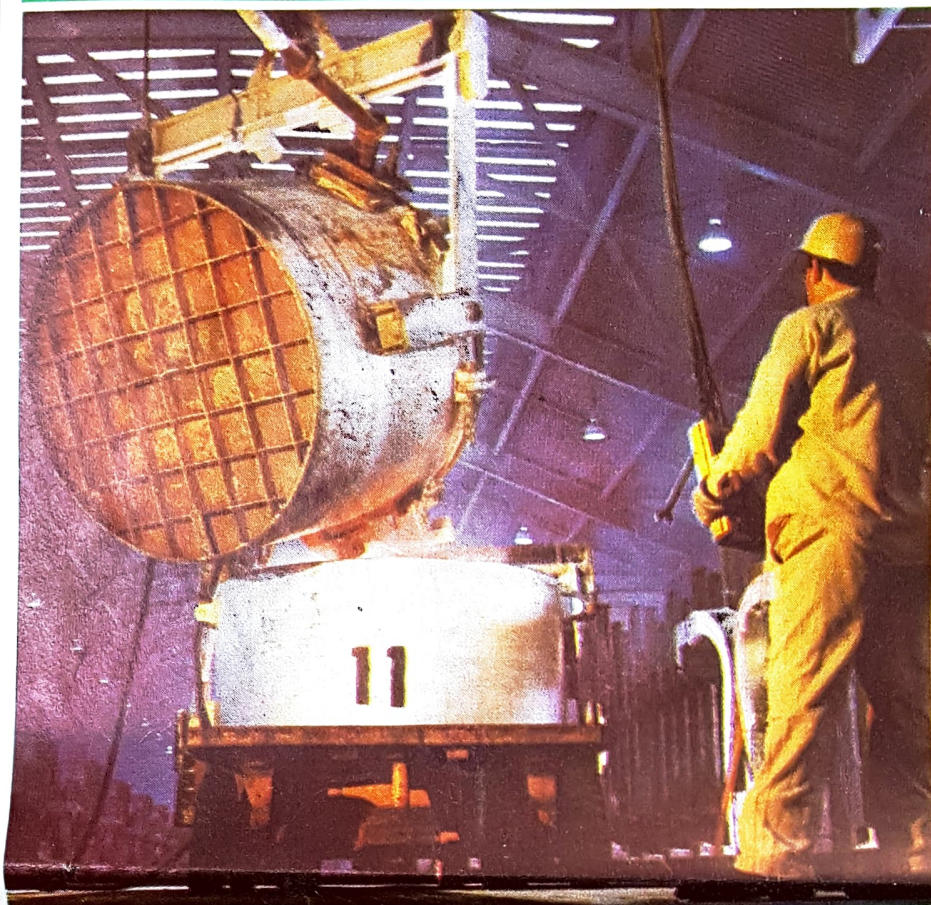
The governments of the Gulf states are united in their policies to develop their human resources potential with the twin aims of creating skilled indigenous workforce and meeting the challenging demands of a dynamic commercial and industrial infrastructure.

In 1996 more than US \$ 11.4 billion was spent on education and

training throughout the gulf region. "Of this, US \$ 3.9 billion was spent on human resources development and according to our estimates this figure is US \$ 5 billion. This is in addition to an amount of US \$ 9 billion incurred as recurrent expenditure every year on education," the minister said.

Bahrain is playing a major role in the Gulf states' drive for Arabisation and has established a strategy to consolidate its position as the regional centre for training and development of human resources. "The strength of a country is its people and in this respect Bahrain is on top of the world. A Bahraini can be attributed to a some of the most sought after qualities, be it in a white collared job, factory work, industrial apprenticeship or any other area of work. Bahrainis are hard-working and they are second to none as regards entrepreneurship, whatever may be the





type of enterprise, be it banking, insurance, management or any other profession," Shoala said.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs looks for quality, not quantity, in the workforce from abroad. He highly praised Indian workers in Bahrain and called them guests instead of expatriates.

When asked about unemployment in Bahrain, Shoala said, "Considerable effort is going into addressing our employment challenge. Bahrain is a small country and our unemployment rate is 1.6 per cent or 3800 people only out of a total workforce of 272000 in the country. We are working closely with international organisations such as the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to ensure that Bahraini policies and practices are at the forefront and comply with international standards."

On Bahrainisation he said, "The share of Bahrainis in Ministries and

other government bodies has reached 90 per cent and in private sector it has reached a level of 37 per cent which may reach 40 per cent by the end of this year. We have humane behaviour towards our guests (foreign workers) and give five years time to leave the country and without penalties. We don't throw people out of Bahrain."

Bahrain and its GCC neighbours have accorded training a high priority. "Bahrain alone invested in excess of Bahraini Dinars 50 million (US \$ 130 million) in training while the combined training expenditure of the region exceeds US \$ 2.5 billion per annum. More than 31000 Bahrainis have benefited from our training programmes. We have provided 3 million 700 thousand hours of training. Our expenses on training are highest in the region per capita," he disclosed.

The governments of the Gulf region are keen on diversifying their economies and are aware that availability of skilled human resource at-

tracts investments from home and abroad. The response from overseas training institutes and organisations involved in human resources development has been encouraging. "Many Indian companies like Birla Institute responded favourably," Shoala said.

Bahrain's strategic location, a favourable time zone, a sound infrastructure, sophisticated system of communications, friendly policies of the government, freedom of movement of capital, absence of taxes, a tolerant society and hospitable people are factors that had contributed to its status as an international centre for trade, commerce and finance, the minister said.

Talking about other social activities in the country Shoala said, "We are very keen to uplift the social environment in this country. Government has projects for deaf and dumb, disabled, mentally retarded people and elderly people. We have opened rehabilitation centres and issues related to weaker sections in society are taken care of."

Government of Bahrain is providing training and jobs to women who constitute 22 per cent of National workforce. Government had given BD 3.8 million cash contributions to the women organisations for their upliftment."

About Indo-Bahraini trade and bilateral relations Shoala said, "They continue to be stronger and they are embedded now in the destiny of the two nations. Indians in our workforce will create a landmark in these relations as they were somewhere, somehow involved in building infrastructure in Bahrain. We are very close culturally; our habits and ways of life are similar. Your *Biryani* is very popular in Bahrain. There are 22 Indian clubs and societies in Bahrain and they play important role in bringing the two peoples together. Recently an Indo-Bahrain friendship society has been formed," he concluded. □

BY ARIF MOHD. KHAN