

BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

Special Supplement on Bahrain



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Bahrain's Pledge To Boost Human Resources





A Message From His Excellency The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs

*T*raining and Human Resources Development are being addressed as a priority by the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. The challenge is to prepare, train and enable the national workforce to become effective partners in economic and social progress.

The State of Bahrain has exercised the initiative in this connection and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has taken a number of steps to develop manpower resources and encourage expansion of training and human resources development facilities. A comprehensive worldwide marketing campaign has been launched inviting international training and educational institutions of proven expertise and experience to participate in fulfilling the training requirements of the entire Gulf region. Bahrain will play a major role in providing the necessary facilities and incentives with the active support of the private sector.

Our initiative is based on the interest of the GCC countries in providing quality training programmes and facilities for nationals. The GCC region is now undergoing economic restructuring and this process will entail integration of all national manpower into the economic activities of both the public and private sectors. These efforts will however be successful only if all the nationals are provided with opportunities for training and development.

We are in the process of setting up a National Committee comprising top officials from Ministries, government bodies and undertakings of the private sector to ensure effective achievement of our aims and objectives. A Training Promotions Office has been established within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to coordinate the related activities and help with the formalities and procedures.

Governments and private sector undertakings of the GCC have a deep-rooted commitment to help their nationals to integrate into the economic framework, encourage and facilitate free movement of their national manpower within the region and foster closer cooperation and coordination. The region is also committed to the promotion of unified vocational qualification standards as an effective method of achieving integration and mobility of manpower resources.

Hence, there is immense commercial potential and Bahrain will continue to exercise the initiative to promote quality programmes to upgrade human knowledge and skills, thereby consolidating its position as the Regional Centre for Training and Human Resources Development.

Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs
State of Bahrain



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Bahrain moves into the 21st Century with major thrust on its people and their vocation

Bahrain, an archipelago of 33 islands with an area of 690.83 sq kms is fortunate to have one of the best locations in global geography. Located in the middle of the Arabian Sea between Kuwait and the UAE, it sits pretty between a latitude of 25 and 32 N and a longitude of 50 and 20 degrees East of the Greenwich line. It is 25 kms off the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and little more to the North of the Qatar peninsula. This distinguished location has given Bahrain and its people a special significance throughout history, for it comprises the largest number of habitable islands in the Arabian Gulf. It is also very near the Eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula and is a vital international trade centre. Hence, it is a great link between the East and the West.

Indeed, Bahrain has come a long way as the site of the fabled 4000-year old Dilmun Civilization, a proud lineage for its present day generation. Called the Garden of Eden in ancient clay tablets, the islands of Bahrain are endowed with substantial number of natural springs, which have irrigated the fertile northern belt for centuries. Agriculture and pearl diving were one of the earliest known occupations and Bahrainis have been well known throughout the world for their keen insight and great knowledge, be it agriculture or pearl diving and trading. Today, Bahrain is a fascinating blend of the best of the East and the West,

and a curious mix of old and ancient traditions with modern development and cosmopolitan living.

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Accordingly, tremendous emphasis is being placed on education, training and vocational guidance. With the government fully backing the move to give nationals every help in all spheres of human endeavour, it is consolidating its status as the regional hub for human resources planning, training and development.

Bahrain is one of the first GCC states to use demographic statistics. The first census was held in 1941 and since then six census have been held, the last being in 1991. According to the latest figures, Bahrain's population totalled 598,625 out of whom 369,203 were Bahrainis. It has been rightly said that the strength of the country is its people and in this respect Bahrain is on the top of the world in general and in the GCC in particular. A typical Bahraini can be attributed with some of the most sought-after qualities, be it a white collared job, factory work, industrial apprenticeship or any other. As regards entrepreneurship, Bahrainis are second to none, whatever may be the type of enterprise, be it banking, insurance, management or any other specialised profession.





Bahrain as the Regional Training and Human Resources Development Centre



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Bahrain has launched a major drive to promote the country as the regional training and human resources centre and a series of incentives and facilities are being provided to facilitate those keen to establish training institutes and facilities. A dedicated department called, 'The Training Promotions Office' (TPO) has been established within the Ministry.

"A comprehensive strategy is now being implemented. The TPO has been designed to coordinate efforts, evolve promotional campaigns and encourage reputed international training organisations to invest in upgrading the quality of training activities in Bahrain and take steps to expand the potential client base in the GCC. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs renders all possible support including processing of registration formalities, visas and work permits," Mr Ebrahim Hassan Mohammed, Head of TPO said.

The Ministry will assume the role of a catalyst and encourage institutions to offer courses based on market demand and the needs of the economies of the region. An excellent opportu-

nity exists for the private sector to establish and run training institutes on a commercial basis. The market potential is immense considering the fact that the need for training is recognised throughout the GCC region. Bahrain is considered to be the ideal location for training and human resources development, he added.

The GCC region continues to account for one of the most viable economies of the world. With more than 25 percent of the known world oil reserves, the potential for growth is immense. Even as efforts are being concerted to optimise employment opportunities for nationals, the need for foreign labour is recognised in some areas. The contributions of the expatriate population have always been recognised and appreciated. The Government is

also aware that the expertise of foreign manpower will continue to be in demand in a number of areas and the need to enable expatriates to upgrade their skills and knowledge is also recognised. As such, training programmes will not be restricted to Bahraini nationals; instead these will be open to expatriates as well.



*Mr Ebrahim Hassan
Mohammed, Head of TPO*



The region invests heavily on human resources development. The six GCC States (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman) spend more than US \$2.5 billion annually on training and the amount is expected to grow to about US \$3 billion by the turn of the century



"Initial steps have already been taken towards the implementation of the strategy. Training constitutes a major activity in the GCC region and the market offers promising prospects for training institutes of proven track record and for those keen to maintain and promote high standards of quality and excellence. The concept has received enthusiastic response, with many institutes based in Europe, the Far East, the Middle East and the Indian Sub-Continent showing interest. While the government of Bahrain in general and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in particular offer

the necessary incentives, a sense of commitment by reputed institutes will help in promising quality programmes," Mr Mohammed said.

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Ongoing Projects

Establishment of a System for National Vocational Qualifications

The need for establishing a proper and effective system of National Vocational Qualifications has been realised and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been studying a number of systems, including those in vogue in Great Britain. It is however appar-

ent that suitable modifications will be required to meet the needs of the country. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs has held discussions with top government officials, international experts and others in this connection. The Ministry will liaise with the Government of Oman, which has taken substantial measures in this connection, for cooperation and coordination. Bahrain will also take the initiative to persuade other GCC States to adopt the System in order that a common code of National Vocational Qualifications is evolved in the GCC spirit of Unified Economic Agreement for the benefit of the nationals and the organisations in the entire region. Cooperation and coordination of other concerned authorities will also be sought in this connection.

Training Levy:

A Scheme is in existence in terms of which, undertakings of the private sector, which do not have their training facilities contribute towards training. Recent amendments allow the companies to seek reimbursement of the money paid to invest in training Bahraini nationals. While companies





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are encouraged to seek return of their contributions, measures to ensure that the process is smooth are being implemented.

Garment Training Centre:

A Centre to train nationals in the garment industry was recently opened at the Bahrain Training Institute. The Centre, which is a private sector initiative, offers courses in tailoring and all other related areas. The Centre, which has been established to international standards with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation, has a special emphasis to train women.

Expansion Of Bahrain Training Institute:

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the Institute. The BTI is now set on an expansion programme. Estimated to cost BD 15 million (about US \$40 million), the expansion programme will enhance the facilities at the Institute, with the state-of-the-art technology to cater to the growing needs in the field of training and human resources development.





Training Job-Seekers and Enhancing Eligibility

The advantages to employers are obvious. They get not just trainees with the related costs met by the Government but real workers who are expected to contribute to the productivity and success of the business enterprise



The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has prepared an Employment and Training Scheme for about 2,000 young Bahrainis entering the labour market. The scheme combines the best features of the voucher system found in some countries with the employer subsidy system. The Ministry makes available to employers a sum of BD 1,200 per person.

The plan is being implemented through five stages as follows:

- 1) Registration of job seekers and classification as (a) those abandoning studies before completing secondary school (b) those completing their school education and (c) those completing a level of education that is higher than the secondary school but lower than university.
- 2) Guidance and advice to candidates to accept available jobs in the market commensurate their qualifications and aptitude

besides inculcation of work ethics, the expectation of their employers, duties and rights in terms of the labour law in force, the importance of self-learning and self-development, upgrading skills and techniques of communications.

- 3) The trainee job seeker enters into a fixed term one-year contract with the employer. The employer's responsibility is to employ the trainee, allocate specific work and also provide systematic training. The trainee is not considered as an apprentice but as a normal worker,

with the additional responsibility of being committed to receive the training imparted by the employer in addition to contributing to the productivity of the employer.

- 4) The scheme envisages a comprehensive learning experience. Initially the trainee is trained in the core skills, which consist of communications and interpersonal skills, numeracy and information technology.

- 5) The last stage is the trainee's on-the-job training stint with the employer, where he is trained in the specifics of skills and knowledge required by the employer. At this stage, the trainee also absorbs the work ethic of the employer. If required by the employer, the trainee can be given specialised training courses.

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