

Job opportunities priority

LABOUR

While optimisation of employment opportunities for Bahraini nationals is a priority item on the national agenda, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala believes in the scientific approach applying the elusive concept of "the right person in the right job."

With a vision that is futuristic and a plan that is pragmatic, he has been spearheading an aggressive campaign that takes into account not just the need to foster employment opportunities, but also to enhance the skills and competence of the indigenous workforce, in essence a link between national objectives and individual ambitions.

"Unemployment is not the problem in Bahrain - the issue concerns the 'unemployability' of a

large number of those who enter the labour market straight out of schools," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

With proper orientation, imparting of skills and shaping of the aptitude, Bahrainis have proved that their performance is second to none.

Training is therefore the *sine qua non* of any human activity - no less a pre-requisite in the employment market.



◆ Mr Al Sho'ala

This will be considered as a year of great significance for the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry. Apart from interesting developments relating to the employment sector, the quest for consolidating Bahrain's status as the Regional Centre for Training and Human Resources Development found fresh ground, all aimed at achieving the national objective of enhancing human values and the wealth of the nation.



◆ Youngsters show off some of their intricate craftwork to the Prime Minister

Mr Al Sho'ala said a similar situation existed in other GCC countries and therefore there was a need to provide appropriate training programmes.

"Bahrain has taken the initiative in this connection and an aggressive marketing campaign has been launched worldwide to invite training institutions and companies of proven track record to establish their presence in Bahrain, taking advantage of the facilities and incentives

being offered and address the markets of the entire region," he said.

Realising the fact that finding jobs for Bahrainis is not an end in itself, the Ministry has been working hard to ensure that the needs of employers willing to employ nationals match with the qualifications and experience of the job-seekers.

While optimisation of indigenous human resources is a pronounced national objective, the challenge is to

strike a proper match between those who seek jobs and employers and the process has often defied a proper solution.

Bahrain marked a significant milestone in this connection in July this year when Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa opened the 'Employment Service Bureau,' on the ground floor of the Ministry building in Isa Town.

The bureau offers professional recruitment

services for private sector companies, matching their needs with the qualifications and aptitude of those seeking jobs.

"While optimisation of employment opportunities to Bahrainis is a national priority, it is imperative to not only ensure that they are found job placements commensurate with their qualifications, aptitude and aspirations, but also to identify and determine the requirements of employers themselves," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

We recognise the importance of "the right person in the right job" in order that even as individuals pursue a successful career, those employing them satisfy their own objectives of enhanced productivity and profitability.

In effect, the Employment Services Bureau will add a new dimension to the efforts being concerted to secure gainful employment for Bahraini nationals.

A team of professionals offer appropriate counsel to both employers and candidates seeking jobs.

"The former are now able to meet their potential employees, spelling out their requirements, while the latter will have the benefit of job appraisal," said



◆ Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa cuts the tape to open the Employment Services Bureau in July this year.

☞
Mr Al Sho'ala.

While the companies of the private sector are being encouraged to improve their training facilities and programmes, the challenge faced by the Government is to reduce the level of unemployment (1.8 per cent) in the country.

As per official records, more than 8,400 job-seekers were found placements during January-October this year through the Ministry (while many others found gainful employment on their own) and the efforts to increase the share of the nationals in the private sector are continuing.

This compared with 6,371 for the corresponding period in 1995 and 7,963 for the whole of 1995.

Statistics indicate that on an average about between 7,000 to 8,000 students graduate from Bahrain's schools and universities each year, of which at least 6,000 enter the employment market.

While some of them seek employment on their own, a majority approach the Ministry for help.

The challenge of finding jobs for all of them appears formidable but the authorities are confident of achieving the objectives.

The measures adopted in recent months indicate that the Government is also committed to the task of improving the training facilities available in the country.

Companies that have taken the issue seriously have been the beneficiaries.

Major organisations in the public and private sectors operate training centres with all the appropriate facilities.

The programmes offered at the centres of these companies have helped them to achieve a high percentage of nationals in their workforce, who are all well trained.

They are among the most commercially successful companies in the country, say experts and analysts.

There is however a need to increase and improve the training facilities.

International training institutes of proven track record are being encouraged to establish their presence in Bahrain and contribute in promoting the country as a regional training centre.

Since the issue of providing appropriate training programmes to nationals is common to all the countries of the six member States of the GCC, institutes which structure their programmes to suit the needs of the region will be commercially successful as well.

Bahrain has a sound and sophisticated infrastructure and all the necessary services and facilities to justify its role as the Regional Training Centre.

Bahrain has launched a major drive to consolidate its position as the regional training and human resources develop-

Aggressive campaign is launched



LABOUR

ment centre and a National Committee is being created, while a Training Promotions Office has been established within the Ministry to assist those keen to establish training institutes and facilities said Mr Al Sho'ala.

The Training Promotions Office has been designed to co-ordinate efforts, evolve promotional campaigns, 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.

Officials say the Ministry will render all possible support including processing of registration formalities, visas and work permits. Mr Al Sho'ala said the Ministry would 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.

"It is important to note that an excellent opportunity exists for the private sector to establish and run training institutes on a commercial basis," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

The market potential is immense considering the fact that the need for training is recognised throughout the GCC region.

"Bahrain is ideally suited to function as the regional centre for training and human resources development. As such, training programmes will not be restricted to Bahraini nationals. Instead, they will be open to all, including expatriates."

The Government is aware that with the country's population growing at the rate

of 3 per cent and with its extremely youthful population, it is important to design and implement programmes and policies that fulfill the aspirations of the people.

Social welfare is also an issue which occupies a place of priority in the plans of the Government.

The Ministry launched several years ago the Productive Families Project aimed at putting to effective use the talents of people, especially women in the rural areas, in order to make them economically active. A wide range of products made by these families are sold through the Social Centres (run by the Ministry), with the proceeds of such sales accruing to the concerned families.

As a measure of support to the economically weaker segments of the society, the Directorate of Research and Social Assistance of the Ministry offers regular financial aid to more than 10,000 needy families and individuals.

But Mr Al Sho'ala said that, while it is essential to support the weaker sections of the society, financial assistance should neither be considered as a remedy for economic ailments, nor as a permanent feature.

"Such assistance is at best a short-term treatment. But in the long term, it is imperative that such sections of the society are also integrated into the mainstream of the economy. We must find a cure that is lasting and effective," he said.

"It is our desire that rather than

expanding the financial assistance given to the needy, improvements and expansion are sought to schemes such as the Productive Families Project.

"We must promote the concept of 'Work Is Worship,' explore and expose the available talents and put them into proper use.

"The continued progress of our country will depend, to a large extent, on our ability to transform the needy families into productive families.

"It is only through sustained efforts that we can hope to achieve our objectives on the one hand and ensure proper utilisation of all the available national human resources on the other."

It is also essential to train young men and women in various vocations, including handicrafts, to help them to improve their economic status.

"Institutions of the private sector will hold the key to future development," say Ministry officials.

"This is a trend worldwide. In this process, individual initiative will play a decisive role.

"The Productive Families Project, in effect, aims to help people to be self-employed and their own success will generate further employment opportunities, leading to continuous growth and progress."

Clubs and associations are considered as an integral part of social development, promoting an effective rapport among the people. Figures show that 150 associations (of which about 60 are expatriate clubs and societies) are registered with the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry. Many of them are involved in community welfare, pursuing their own projects and programmes.

"Bahrain aims to be a Centre of Excellence in all its activities. While the projects and programmes of our Government have always been designed to promote economic, industrial and social development, our current plans are meant to cope with the emerging challenges and opportunities, said Mr Al Sho'ala.

"We pin our hopes on the ensuing generations to carry on the good work and ensure that progress and prosperity are enjoyed by all sections of the society.

"As our population grows and as young people pursue their education and later a career either as employees or entrepreneurs, we are confident that they will build upon our success and promote concepts of social welfare and human development.

"People are our greatest asset and I am gratified to observe that their talents and competence will continue to contribute towards Bahrain's onward march into the 21st century."

1.4 million training hours

Bahrain Training Institute (BTI) exists to serve the human resource development (HRD) needs of Bahrain.

BTI attempts to realise its mission through a variety of training programmes, based on the specific training needs of industrial, commercial, service and public sector organisations.

The pivot of its activities is, however, the trainee and BTI's philosophy is based on the firm belief that any effort to develop human resources must focus on the needs of the youth and their aspirations.

Its professional development programmes are aimed at updating and enhancing the skills and knowledge of those already in employment.

Company-specific programmes are designed exclusively to cater for identified training needs within individual companies or groups of industries, while job-seekers' training is aimed at preparing newcomers for the job market.

Returner programmes are aimed at people who have discontinued their regular education and who seek vocational qualifications.

Technician programmes are aimed at developing technicians in a range of specialisations, including engineering, business studies, information technology and communication skills.

An innovative programme has been launched in co-operation with the well-known British organisation CareerCraft. This programme brings the trainees and employers together and offers guaranteed high quality trained personnel to employers.

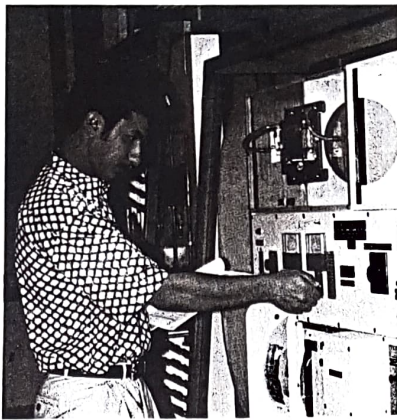
In support of its activities, several new organisational changes have been made this year.

A board of directors was formed and is chaired by Labour and Social Affairs Under-Secretary Shaikh Ahmed bin Sager Al Khalifa.

BTI now has three major divisions, training services, student services and administrative services.

In order to generate greater resources in keeping with its financially autonomous status, the BTI has established the Department of Marketing and Industrial Liaison.

The efforts of this department have enabled the BTI to participate in several major national and international training exhibitions, including Gulf Careers 2000 in Bahrain, the Worlddidac in Basle,



◆ A student works on an electrical project



◆ Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala unveils the new BTI logo this year



Switzerland, the International Federation of Training and Development Organisations (IFTDO) event in Cairo and the Rotaract Club-initiated Careers Day.

BTI's efforts have been rewarded with an overwhelming response from employers and trainees.

In 1992, the total number of sponsored trainees in the regular programmes was only 15.

This year, the number grew to 250.

The number of applicants in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 was 671, 797, 988, 1,691 and 1,700 respectively.

This year, the number of applicants rose to 2,744, of whom 850 were admitted.

There is a similar demand for the institute's corporate programmes.

From 500 in 1991, the number of trainees in these programmes rose to 4,500 this year.

"As a result of these increases, BTI today handles a total of 1.4 million training hours a year," said its director Dr Najji Ahmed Al Mahdi.

The success rate of BTI's training programmes is also high and at the last convocation, held under the patronage of Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa, 200 trainees obtained certificates.

In order to ensure that its training programmes reflect the genuine needs of employers, BTI maintains systematic links with industry.

Representatives of industry figure prominently on the High Council for Vocational Training and the BTI Board of Directors.

In addition, every department has a programme development committee which includes eminent personalities from the industrial and services sector.

They are deeply involved in the design and monitoring of all BTI training programmes.

As an innovative, quality-conscious organisation, BTI is constantly engaged in upgrading its resources, said Dr Al Mahdi.

Several new laboratories, workshops and classrooms have been added recently and the latest equipment installed.

A self-access centre enables trainees to learn at their own pace and in their own chosen style.

Student counselling programmes exist both at the departmental and institutional level.

A new department has been established to provide students with employment opportunities and it has been successful in placing a great majority of those who graduated this year.

"It is gratifying to note that an increasing number of concerns from the private sector are coming forward to provide on-job training to BTI trainees," said Dr Al Mahdi.

"This has had a positive impact on the employment potential of the trainees."

The Department of On-the-Job Training and Graduate Follow-Up was successful in placing every one of the trainees in on-job training programmes this year.

The BTI also boasts a spacious library, stocked with more than 10,000 volumes and a large number of periodicals.

A new facility, specially designed to meet the needs of communications skills programmes, has been commissioned.

This is in response to a heavy demand for specialised courses in communication and English language skills.

"A matter of deep gratification is BTI's success in extending its training services to other GCC states," said Dr Al Mahdi.

Training has been conducted for leading establishments in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE, both on-site and in Bahrain, with arrangements on anvil with establishments in Qatar.

"This is BTI's modest contribution to the efforts of the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry to promote Bahrain as a regional centre for

training and HRD," said Dr Al Mahdi.

To enhance job opportunities for its graduates, BTI makes constant efforts to address new areas of productive endeavour.

A new fully-equipped aluminium fabrication workshop has been constructed, to allow Bahraini youth to take advantage of the opportunities in the downstream aluminium industry, and a new garment training centre has opened to train Bahrainis to contribute to the garment industry in Bahrain.

BTI training programmes cover a wide range of programmes with high employment potential.

These include craft level programmes in computer

applications, accounting and business administration, first diplomas in five engineering disciplines, information technology and retailing, advanced diplomas in administration and secretarial studies and national diplomas in a variety of areas of technology.

Quality assurance is guaranteed through extensive internal mechanisms, as well as through academic and accreditation links with reputed British bodies, such as the National Council for Vocational Training, the Business and Technical Council, the Royal Society of Arts, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Chartered Institute of Marketing and the Associa-

tion of Accounting Technicians.

As part of its continuing effort to expand training opportunities for Bahrainis, BTI is launching a new Higher National Diploma (HND) from next September.

In response to market needs, the HND will initially be offered in three disciplines, business information systems, electrical and electronic technology and mechanical engineering.

TRIBUTE TO BAHRAIN

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Congratulations and Best Wishes to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Prime Minister, His Highness the Crown Prince and the people of Bahrain on the occasion of National Day.

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◆ Labour Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala presents a certificate during the BTI convocation this year, watched by Dr Al Mahdi, centre