



EDUCATION & TRAINING SERVICES

Khaleej Times BAHRAIN FEATURE

New approach to develop human resources

BAHRAIN'S status as an international centre for trade, commerce and finance is fortified by its strategic geographic location, a sound infrastructure, progressive policies and a friendly society. These factors are also catalysts in the country's current drive to consolidate its position as the Regional Centre for Training and Human Resources Development.

According to Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, the current process of restructuring being experienced by the economies of the countries of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) entails a renewed approach towards proper and effective use of indigenous manpower.

Contributors progress

"People are the real wealth of a nation and as such must be effective contributors to social, industrial and economic progress. It is, therefore, essential that they are gainfully employed. They must, however, be appropriately oriented towards a career, seeking constant progress. This in turn calls for a proper programme of training and human resources development. In the context of the AGCC countries, which are characterised by youthful population, such an objective is even more significant. As the world gets more and more competitive, the importance of updating one's skills and knowledge to cope with the evolving trends acquires priority. While the challenges are many, we are confident of achieving the objectives, working together as a single



Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs

entity within the AGCC," he said, in an interview with *Khaleej Times*.

As he mentioned, the fact that training and human resources development are priority issues in the region is proved by the substantial investment made by AGCC states in this connection. The sum allocated by both the public and private sectors in the State of Bahrain is estimated at BD 40 million (US\$106 million) for 1996. It is expected that this amount will increase to BD 50 million (US\$133 million) by the year 2000. It is estimated that the total amount allocated by the other five AGCC states for training is more than BD 750 million (US\$2 billion) for 1996. This sum is expected to increase to BD1 billion (US\$2.7 billion) by the Year 2000. In addition, the six AGCC states spend in excess of BD1.90 billion (US\$5 billion) every year on education.

Al Sho'ala believes in the effective integration of every citizen in

the economic framework, guided by the directives of the Amir of Bahrain, His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Sulman Al Khalifa, who has always stressed the importance of progress and prosperity for the people, while the Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa has said that "people are the most important wealth of the country."

Human development

"It is therefore essential that our policies and programmes are aimed at improving human development, which in turn will lead to social development, economic progress and overall prosperity. Our current drive is aimed at development of human resources to ensure that the benefits of the positive contributions of every individual are available to the country's economy," he said.

Experts are of the view that the efforts currently exerted by the Government of Bahrain have also taken into account the country's demographic profile to plan ahead for future generations. The government is aware that the country's population is growing at the rate of 2.9 per cent per annum and given the fact that Bahraini society is characterised by its extremely youthful population, it is important to design and implement programmes and policies that fulfil the aspirations of the people.

Even as the infrastructure facilities (such as communications education, health, housing, power, water, road works and other amenities) are being constantly upgraded and expanded, the significance of developing human resources has always been recognised in Bahrain. The system of education is being

reviewed to ensure that it keeps pace with the evolving trends and changing needs of the economy and society, he said.

Priority issue

"Provision of employment opportunities to nationals is a priority issue and while we have done well with the cooperation of the private sector, we are constantly seeking improvements. The concept of "the right person in the right job" is being pursued and we are confident that we will be able to meet the challenges with success.

"However, training and human resources development are two most important issues that have been given top priority and no effort is being spared to ensure that every Bahraini capable of doing work is economically active. Apart from helping those seeking jobs with appropriate placements, the ministry is also encouraging Bahrainis to be self-employed. Promotion of entrepreneurial skill is key to the future since the process will not only enable individuals to promote their own enterprises but also in turn generate more employment opportunities," Al Sho'ala said.

Figures released by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs indicate that more than 7,900 individuals were found jobs in 1995 through the efforts of the ministry. In addition, a number of others are reported to have been gainfully employed through their own efforts. As a part of the plan to ensure that the needs of employers in the private sector are properly matched with the qualifications and aptitude of candidates seeking jobs, an Employment Services Bureau was recently established within the



Training and human resource development are being addressed as a key issue

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (see separate story). This is a significant move which will help young job-seekers and potential employers to understand each other's aspirations and needs.

Economic restructuring

As Al Sho'ala mentioned, training and human resources development are being addressed as key issue not only by Bahrain but also by the other AGCC states, all of which are currently undergoing a process of economic restructuring. This process envisages proper integration of all Nationals in the main economic and social framework.

"A number of measures taken by the Government of Bahrain have been yielding the desired results. We have established a High Council of Vocational Training to promote activities related to training and human resources development. The Bahrain Training Institute of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has been conducting programmes and courses for nationals in a number of vocations. Among the other popular institu-

tions are The Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, catering to the needs of the entire region and the Hotel and Catering Training Centre, which offers specialised courses in the related fields."

It is learnt that private sector companies which do not have their own in-house facilities have the benefit of the programmes offered through the government. Such companies contribute a percentage of the wages of their workers. The amount raised is about BD1.8 million each year and this is utilised for various training programmes.

Foreign presence

Apart from such courses, major undertakings of the public and private sectors have also established their own training centres, which have been providing benefits to thousands of employees. Bahrain is also being chosen as the Middle East Training Centre for training by international companies. Among those which have successfully established their presence are the Toyota Corporation of Japan, the Standard Chartered Bank and Citibank, Grundig, the electronics giant of Ger-

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many is due to establish a training centre shortly in Bahrain.

The centre will offer training programmes to any Bahraini National keen to acquire or improve his/her skills in the related field. Grundig also plans to make available training programmes and courses for the personnel of its dealers and others in the countries of the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Sub-continent in the next phase.

Said Al Sho'ala: "We are keen to consolidate the country's status as the regional centre for training and human resources development. Several institutes of international reputation and proven track record have expressed their keenness to establish training institutes. While the government in general, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in particular, will provide all assistance, we are keen to ensure that international standards are met in our pursuit of excellence.

"We have simplified official procedures and formalities to facilitate easy and quick registration of organisations. Two major institutional companies are also considering establishment of training centres in Bahrain to upgrade and update the skills of personnel employed in their own offices and those of their distributors and agents in the Middle East. The Government, in welcoming such organisations, will offer all possible assistance and support. The presence of such institutes will be a boon to the private sector," Al Sho'ala said and added that the private sector response has been positive.

Bahrain aims to be a Centre of Excellence in all its activities. While the projects and programmes of the government have always been designed to promote economic, industrial and social development,

the current plans are meant to cope with the emerging challenges and opportunities.

As Al Sho'ala said, "We pin our hopes on the coming generations to carry on the good work and ensure that progress and prosperity are enjoyed by all sections of 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.

"Bahrain is keen to encourage training institutes of international reputation and proven track record to establish their presence in Bahrain to serve the growing needs of the entire region. Based on economic trends and market needs, such institutes can be assured of commercial success. In addition, many multinational companies are also considering establishment of training centres in Bahrain to upgrade and update the skills of personnel employed in their own offices and those of their distributors and agents in the Middle East. The Government, in welcoming such organisations, will offer all possible assistance and support. The presence of such institutes will be a boon to the private sector," Al Sho'ala said and added that the private sector response has been positive.