

Private sector seeks review of policy on Bahrainisation

PRIVATE sector bosses are seeking a review of Government measures aimed at speeding up Bahrainisation.

Proposals to scale down the measures, introduced in February last year, are to be studied and a consultant is to be appointed to undertake this mission.

The new proposals seek halving the minimum requirement for Bahrainisation, halving the annual increase in number of Bahrainis

By **INDIRA CHAND**

employed and raising the fees for work permits of expatriate workers required by companies not complying with authorities' requirements.

The proposals were made at a meeting yesterday of officials from the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry and representatives of the private sector. The meeting, at Le Royal Meridien Hotel, was chaired by Labour and Social Affairs

Participants also voiced their concern on the issue of allowing job mobility for expatriates, by removing the requirement for a release letter from the employer. "To remove this requirement would put pressure on employers to employ more Bahrainis at higher salaries," said a participant. "We need to study the economic impact of such a move as it might have a negative impact on the economy."

Opinion 'vital in forming labour policy'

CO-OPERATION between authorities and the private sector is vital in providing jobs and training opportunities for Bahrainis, Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala said yesterday.

He said private sector opinion was essential in the formulation of a labour policy based on training and planning.

Mr Al Sho'ala was speaking at a meeting yesterday between Labour officials, businessmen and representatives of public sector companies.

Also present were Assistant Under-Secretary for Labour Affairs Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Abdulla bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Assistant Under-Secretary for Social Affairs Sadiq Al Shehabi and over 40 private sector representatives.

Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala.

The meeting was called more than a year after the implementation of a decision requiring private companies, having at least 10 workers and where the number of Bahrainis is less than 50 per cent, to increase Bahrainisation by five per cent every year.

"This had resulted in a lot of difficulties for companies in meeting their targets, so the Ministry had stopped giving work permits for

expatriate workers to these companies," said a participant. "This raised a big outcry from the private sector." He said the requirement of a five per cent annual increase was "not practical" and, in addition, there were not enough trained Bahrainis available to enable the companies to meet their targets.

"Also, it was not fair on companies having more than 50pc Bahrainis to be unable to reduce this percentage," said the participant, who would

not be named.

There was a need to introduce flexibility and a spirit of co-operation with private employers, he said.

What had been proposed, instead, was to reduce the minimum Bahrainisation requirement to 25pc and halve the annual requirement of five per cent growth in Bahrainisation.

"Most employers said they could not find Bahrainis who fit the job requirements and when they did find one, the Bahraini employee did not stay in the job. So, quality and availability of Bahraini workers is nominal," another participant said.

He said participants had suggested that the annual increase requirement should be about two or 2.5pc.

"Another suggestion was that if a company is unable to meet the proposed minimum requirement of 25pc Bahrainisation, then, instead of being denied permits for expatriate workers, they should be financially penalised," said the participant. "Instead of paying BD150 for a permit, they should made to pay BD500."

It was decided that a consultant be appointed to study the suggestions made.

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