

By RANA YOUSEF

TWO-WAY communication between the private sector and the Government is a positive step in the right direction, say leading Bahraini businessmen.

The businessmen attended a meeting with Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala yesterday, at the ministry as a follow-up to the two Bahrain At Work symposia, held in March and May.

The meeting was held to discuss some of the key issues, which were raised by Bahrain employers and to form committees to tackle those issues and come up with workable solutions.

Twenty-eight employers, who took part in the symposia attended the meeting to offer their help in finding solutions, which they felt would work to achieve the ministry's objectives.

"Commencing a dialogue with private sector employers has helped create a new era of co-operation," said

# Private sector talks 'start of a new era'

Mr Al Sho'ala.

"For the first time employers and ministry personnel have come together in a cohesive partnership using their joint expertise to the benefit of the whole community."

He said the ministry was open to suggestions from employers and welcomed the time and commitment given by them to help provide opportunities for Bahrainis in the workforce.

Two committees were

formed yesterday; one to address the issues of employee/employer attitudes and human resource management and another to look at the issue of Bahrainisation percentage requirements and labour law interpretation.

The committees will be holding its first meeting next Sunday and will be meeting over the next few months to find solutions to the issues before presenting their findings to the Minister at the

end of October.

"Even if nothing comes out of this, the major issue is that there is a change of climate, there is a fresh breeze," said Awal Gulf Manufacturing Factory managing director Adel Mattar.

"Instead of the ministry implementing laws without talking to employers, now it is inviting us to come in and discuss the laws before they are implemented.

"Previously laws were

implemented and we just had to take it or leave it, we had no choice."

He said even if employers did not come up with constructive decisions, they would all be contributing just by discussing their problems.

"In my opinion, this openness is very important so people can discuss how they feel on issues such as employment and Bahrainisation," said Mr Mattar.

Mazin Al Umran Consulting

Engineers managing director Mazin Al Umran said he thought yesterday's meeting was very beneficial to employers.

"It was an openminded discussion between the private and public sectors, which I think is very beneficial, because the ministry is asking the employers, the people who are facing the day to day problems, to come up with the solutions," he said.

"We are aware of the problems more than anyone else."

Mr Al Umran said Mr Al Sho'ala was open to all suggestions put forward by the committees and any unanimous suggestion would be implemented even if laws were to be changed.

## Positive

Bahrain Duty Free general manager Maurice Burke said such talks were a positive step in the right direction.

"It's very beneficial to employers, because it is giving us a chance to speak with the Ministry about our problems and give them a chance to sort things out," he said.

Mr Burke said such openmindedness was a positive step in the right direction, because it meant that there was follow-up action to employers' concerns.

Jashanmalls and Sons managing partner Bharat Jashanmal said the meeting was conducted in an encouraging way to employers.

"Mr Al Sho'ala expressed very clearly the aims to improve in full the opportunities for Bahrainisation and other issues which will serve to increase that," he said.

"Each of us will be playing our own part in achieving that but what is very positive is the openness in which this is being conducted with nobody imposing anything on anyone."

The committees have been asked to create a draft report by the end of September with a view to presenting this to the overall working group on October 12. A report of the complete findings will be presented to the Minister on October 26.

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