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## Employers' commitment to labour drive is lauded

AFTER just one year of existence, the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry's Employment Services Bureau (ESB) has grown in leaps and bounds thanks to the people it was set up to help.

The ESB was set up last July as part of the Ministry's strategy to increase employment and training opportunities for Bahrainis and provide a pool of

Bahraini jobseekers for employers to choose from.

"As part of the process we required the full support of the private sector and I am personally very pleased with the level of commitment shown by the employers who have come forward in large numbers to help," said Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al

Sho'ala, speaking on the bureau's first anniversary, which is celebrated today.

"They have taken part in meetings, talks and seminars identifying the challenges we face and have now formed committees to find workable solutions to those issues."

Mr Al Sho'ala said the Ministry felt encouraged at the large number of job-

seekers who had used the service, showing their enthusiasm to learn job-search techniques and the qualities required by employers. "At the same time I would like to thank the management and staff of ESB who have worked very hard to offer personal attention and a professional service to each and every customer," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

# Education 'essential to help job-seekers'

By INDIRA CHAND

COMPULSORY completion of secondary school education should be considered to get more Bahrainis into private sector jobs, says a leading Bahraini consultant.

Transportation also needs to be improved to enable Bahrainis to take up the jobs available, which were often far from their homes, said KPMG Fakhro managing partner and Shura Council member Jamal Fakhro.

He said a study done by his consultancy firm found that the main reason Bahrainis were not accepting jobs was transportation.

"Poor wages took second or third place among the reasons given by Bahrainis for not accepting work available," said Mr Fakhro.

"Easy transportation is needed to get Bahrainis to their jobs, if Bahrainisation is to be enhanced."

Authorities should also consider making it compulsory for a person to complete secondary education, he said.

"A lot of drop-outs are coming into the market and most of them are untrainable for many jobs," said Mr Fakhro.

The number of drop-outs during the 1995-96 school year was 2,600, which was an increase of 1,047 over the 1994-95 school year, he said, citing official figures.

"In terms of percentage, this was a 2.5

per cent increase but in terms of numbers, this is a big increase," said Mr Fakhro.

"These young people are going to be a liability to the community as they will not be as attractive to an employer as a school graduate, even for jobs of office boy or photocopier."

Even many secondary school graduates were unable to make themselves attractive to employers and this was reflected in employment figures.

Figures from the General Organisation for Social Insurance (Gosi) show that the number of Bahrainis employed by Gosi-registered companies grew only 1,550 last year, compared with 1995.

The number of Bahrainis employed by these companies totalled 36,962 last year, compared with 35,412 the previous year.

"In the first five months of this year, only 315 more Bahrainis have been added, bringing the total number of Bahraini employees in Gosi-registered companies to 37,277 at May-end this year," said Mr Fakhro. "The numbers are small so we have a big problem."

"The main reason for this is we do not

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have good, trained people, so there is a need to expand training facilities.

"Also, the education system does not necessarily produce people who are trainable and there is a lack of new jobs."

The Gosi workforce actually shrank last year, compared with the previous year. The total workforce in Gosi-registered companies decreased by 1.4pc to 119,225 last year, compared with 120,984 in 1995.

So far during this year, the number of workers increased by 240.

"More money is required to go into training and the scope of training increased by expanding existing facilities and attracting new ones," said Mr Fakhro.

Education was definitely an aspect that needed to be looked at, he said.

Bahrain University has a year-long orientation programme to prepare school-leavers for university, as most school-leavers were not properly prepared for higher studies or the job market. Mr Fakhro said the example of



■ Mr Fakhro

Bapco was often cited as a huge success story in producing qualified Bahrainis who had become leaders in their fields.

"Millions of dinars have been spent on qualifying these people and our private sector and training centres do not have those kind of resources," he said.

"Our private sector is made up largely of small companies." Only 240 companies employ more than 100 workers.

"Small organisations cannot have human resource development functions and facilities," said Mr Fakhro.

"Most private companies are so small that they are unable to even identify their needs. In fact, authorities should help them identify their needs for the next 10 years and then gear training towards those needs."

Bahrainisation targets should be set by authorities but these targets should be realistic and achievable, he said.

"I do not know how the Bahrainisation target of a five per cent annual increase was set but targets should be formulated through proper study and discussion among all those involved," said Mr Fakhro.

"If you take a look at the labour market, you will find that 76pc of non-Bahrainis, employed by Gosi companies, are employed in retail sales, restaurants and hotels, downstream industries and the building

and construction sector. "Are we really able to replace these expatriates and substitute them with Bahrainis in these jobs?"

"I think we really need to think about our Bahrainisation targets." There is a need also to accept the fact that Bahrainisation cannot be achieved in the short term. "It would take five to seven years to see any results," said Mr Fakhro.

He said job mobility for expatriates could be considered, but only after a comprehensive study on the economic impact of such a move.

The study should take into account the cost of doing business in Bahrain, he said.