

Skilled workforce 'vital to progress'

DEVELOPING human resources is essential to ensure social development, economic progress and overall prosperity in Bahrain, says Labour and Social Affairs Minister Abdulnabi Al Sho'ala.

"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.

Mr Al Sho'ala, speaking to mark the World Population Day, reiterated the country's commitment to providing employment opportunities to its citizens.

"The country's population is growing at the rate of 2.9 per cent per annum and given the fact that our 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," he said.

Training and human resource development are top priorities of the Government, he said and no effort was being spared to ensure that every Bahraini capable of doing work is economi-



■ Mr Al Sho'ala ... investing in people

cally active.

Promotion of entrepreneurial skills is also essential for future development of the country, because the process will in turn generate more employment opportunities, he said.

"The ministry helped more than 7,900 individuals find jobs last year and as part of a plan to ensure that the needs of the employers in the private sector are properly matched with the qualifications and aptitude of candidates seeking jobs, an employment services bureau is being established within

the ministry," he said.

Bahrain and other GCC states are undergoing a process of economic restructuring, which requires a proper integration of all nationals in the main economic and social framework.

Measures taken by Bahrain to ensure this integration have yielded the desired results.

"We have established a High Council of Vocational Training to promote activities related to training and human resources development," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

The Bahrain Training Institute has been conducting programmes and courses for nationals in a number of vocations.

Among the other institutions 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.

Private companies, which do not have their own in-house training facilities benefit from the programmes provided by the Government.



■ Women learning new skills under the Productive Family scheme

"Almost BD2 million is raised each year through contributions from private companies and is utilised for various training programmes," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

Bahrain has also been chosen as the regional training centre for several large organisations such as Toyota Corporation of Japan, the Standard Chartered Bank and Citibank, he said.

However the Government has pledged to do even more to improve and enhance the training methods and facilities of the country.

"The fact that the subject has been addressed as a national priority is indicated by the enormous investment in promoting training and human resources development programmes," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

"Bahrain spent about BD35m last year and the amount is expected to move up to BD50m by the year 2000."

Mr Al Sho'ala said that while the Government in general and the ministry in particular would provide all assistance, the country was keen to ensure that international standards were met in

the pursuit of excellence.

"We have simplified official procedures and formalities to facilitate easy and quick registration of organisations," he said.

"Two major institutions, from the US and the UK, successfully completed their formalities in record time of one working day and have commenced their operations in Bahrain to serve the entire region."

Social welfare is also a high priority issue for the Government.

The productive families project was launched several years ago to put to use the talents of people, especially women in the rural areas, in order to make them economically active.

Products made by these families are sold through social centres run by the ministry and the proceeds of the sales accrue to the concerned families.

"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," said Mr Al Sho'ala.

MINISTRY AIMS AT PROVIDING 'HOUSING FOR ALL'

HOUSING for all citizens is a key policy in Bahrain.

The aim of the Housing, Municipalities and Environment Ministry is to promote the highest standard of living for the citizens of Bahrain, said a spokesman.

Policies for providing homes for Bahraini citizens had been well thought out, he said.

"They take into consideration the growth in population, citizens' needs at their different social and income levels, together with customs, traditions, local architecture, environmental characteristics, economical circumstances and

available resources," he said.

"The ministry has prepared a comprehensive urban development plan of Bahrain and endeavoured to achieve the strategic goals set forth by the Government."

Speaking on the occasion of the World Population Day, the spokesman said the ministry had accomplished a "great number" of projects and programmes in the residential and planning sectors over the past 20 years, covering various areas around the country.

"Isa Town and Hamad Town have been built and the construction of neighbourhoods in Umm Al Hassam, East Riffa, A'ali, Sanabis,

Hidd, Muharraq, Busaiteen and others are among the ministry's achievements."

Isa Town accommodates at present 35,000 people and Hamad Town will, after full completion, house 60,000.

The establishment of the ministry in Bahrain coincided with the first UN conference on human settlements, held in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada.

Last month a high-level delegation of the ministry attended the second UN habitat conference in Istanbul, Turkey and took part in the worldwide conference on human settlements, supporting the leading role of the UN.

It shared with others its experience in urbanisation and the development and implementation of housing policies.

"The housing policy is conducted through various channels and several methods are used in providing housing that include the building and distribution of homes to eligible citizens on a 20-year repayment base and the building and renting of apartments," said the spokesman.

"It also provides loans to purchase, to build, or to renovate and extend houses as well as to provide plots of land free of charge to eligible citizens, who have the means of building their own houses."