

Speech at the Closing of the Passport to Success training held at YDF
from 12th August 2014 to 10th September 2014
by the
Chief Guest, Hon'ble Secretary, MoLHR

Distinguished Guest, the participants of first 'passport to Success' training Program and Ladies and gentlemen

At the outset, I would like to thank the YDF for inviting me to join the closing of the first PTS program. I hope YDF will organize many more such programs for our youth, many of whom are struggling very hard to find a foothold as productive citizens. I understand that the components of this training will provide the participants with the skills needed to make them not only employable but also successful in whatever endeavours they undertake. It sounds almost like a magic wand which is needed by almost all our young and women entering the new phase of their life; the world of work.

I am sure the most important goal of the participants at this moment is finding gainful employment which unfortunately is not any easy task for anybody these days. I need not elaborate on the employment, or more accurately the unemployment situation the country is confronted with. We just completed the National graduates Orientation Program last month during which the employment and unemployment situation was explained by the government in detail. I am sure all the Participants, if they are seeking employment, would have read the newspapers and watched the various programs on the TV. Nonetheless, I would like to share the most up to date information on the employment and unemployment situation in the country which may be of interest to the participants. When we talk about unemployment situation in Bhutan we are basically talking about youth unemployment, for there are very few older men and women looking for jobs. The older Bhutanese are either gainfully employed or they are in the rural areas engaged in farming. Who are looking for jobs in urban areas are the school leavers and the university graduates who have completed their education a few years or a few months ago.

Unemployment in Bhutan is an urban Phenomenon. This means most of the unemployed young men and women are in urban centres. According to the labour force survey, 2013, only 1.5 percent of the rural labour force were unemployed against 6.5 percent of the urban labour force being unemployed. One of the more worrying developments in the labour market is the increasing unemployment amongst the young women. The same labour force survey reported female unemployment of 3.7% against the male unemployment rate of 2.2%. This situation is a serious cause for concern for all of us as unemployment is, more often than now, cited as the main cause of anti-social activities amongst the youth, such as substance abuse, prostitution leading to increase in HIV/AIDS cases, etc. Understandably also Thimphu tops in unemployment. Last year out of the 9, 916 unemployed, 37% were residing in Thimphu. Obviously, all job Seekers are rushing to Thimphu as all opportunities are perceived to be available here.

As of yesterday, there were 9,182 men and women registered for jobs with the Ministry of Labour and Human resources. Out of these, 2,536 are graduates, 74 are diploma and certificate holders, 4345 are class 12, 1800 are class 10 and 427 are class 10 and below.

The government has committed for full employment which is defined as 97.5% of the labour force. This means that 97.5% of all Bhutanese who are eligible to work will have gainful employment. Given that 82,000 additional jobs need to be created by the end of the 11th five year plan meet this target it is by no means an easy task for the country especially given that we have a very small economy. The government is therefore exploring all possible means to create employment opportunities. The most notable and visible ones are the employment promotion programs that the government has launched recently. They are, as you have read and heard, guaranteed Employment Program which consists of three components: Direct employment scheme under the MoLHR is

persuading the employers to employ job seekers on cost sharing basis. The government's contribution of more than 50% of the salary is to subsidize for the learning phase of the Job. During the government's support period job seekers are expected to learn on the job and gain the experience all employers ask from the job seekers. After the required experience is gained, the employers are required to employ them permanently and must pay the minimum of the salary paid during the government support period. I am sure most employers will pay more than this as the employees would have by then gained much more experience than required by the job. Since the launch of the program till date, 295 job seekers have been placed under this Program. A task force consisting of six officers have been assigned to carry out this task.

Second is the overseas employment program. Under this program we send Bhutanese to work overseas either directly or after training in country or out country. The training providers are paid only after job placements are confirmed and 484 have been placed under this program since July 1st.

The third program is the youth Employment skills program under which training for jobs available in the labour market are outsourced to in country training providers. Like the Second Program the training providers are paid by the government only after successful placements of the graduates of the program. 237 job seekers have been placed under this program so far.

In addition to these three targeted programs, the MoLHR continues to promote and implement programs such as direct placement into jobs, internship, Apprenticeship and regular HRD program. You will now agree that the Royal Government is doing all it can to tackle the unemployment in the country. However, given that more than 20,000 young men and women with qualifications ranging from elementary school education to university degree will enter the labour market annually, totalling to more than 120,000 by the end of the 11FYP, it is no less than a daunting task for the government.

You would also have heard time and again that unemployment problem in Bhutan is now is not because there are no jobs, but it is mainly because of the mismatch of skills and more so because of the mismatch of the aspirations of the job seekers for desk jobs and availability of non-desk jobs in the labour market. You have also been told many times that there is no dearth of jobs mainly in farming back at the home in the rural areas.

Knowing your dreams and aspirations to get away from the difficult rural life and to make a decent living in the towns either as civil servants, well paid corporate employees or successful business men or women, and having had the same dream and aspiration for myself, I am not going to suggest that you go back to the rural areas to become educated farmers. I will leave it to others to make such suggestions for, although I have an empty land that has almost become a forest, I cannot gather enough courage to tell my two children to go and become gentlemen or lady farmers. But what I would like to advise you is to pick up any work while you are waiting for the one that you dream of, for no work is small work. If it is worth emulating I would like to tell you that I did all kinds of work ranging from looking after the school Piggery, tilling the school farm, cleaning the school water tanks to babysitting the junior students during the 12 years I spent in Sherubtse.

Every winter vacation I worked as an orange trader buying oranges from Khengkhar Jurmay and selling them in S/jongkhar. Each Trip lasted for more than a week on foot. Then I worked as a labourer for Nu.4 a day after class 12 and graduation. Even now I do my own Plumbing, masonry and carpentry. Many of my friends think I am stingy and do not hire workers to do these jobs. I tell them that as Labour Secretary I have to promote dignity of Labour and one of the best ways to do it is 'to practice what I preach'.

Why am I telling you all these. If you have read yesterday's and today's Kuensel, you would have learned that many employers have complained of not finding enough workers. A farmhouse restaurant owner floated 10 vacancies but saw only 2 applicants during the interview. She was shocked at the lukewarm response from the job seekers. I know why this happened. I can think of two reasons; first they were non-desk jobs, and second they were in the private sector. On the other hand if a government agency announced a telephone operator or dispatcher's job thousands including graduates will apply and show up for interview.

It's high time that our job seekers understood the realities of the labour market. There are not many jobs in the government or the public sector. The Government feels that our civil service is too bloated with one civil servant to 30 Bhutanese. This is the highest ratio in the world. The Government and the RCSC are now carrying out OD exercises in all government agencies, most probably to downsize the civil service. Therefore, other than the number of vacancies announced by the RCSC for the BCSE, it looks like there will be no additional vacancies. The job seekers must therefore, look beyond the government for employment opportunities.

I understand that private sector jobs are not secured. For that matter no jobs in any sector are secured. Though it may be more difficult to throw out civil servants, they do get thrown out if they do not perform. During the 18 years of service in the RCSC I saw 28 red scarf officers and countless other civil servants losing their jobs. Therefore, do not think that civil service jobs are secured for life. It all depends on the performance and conduct no matter where you are working. "Jobs in private sector are now insecure" is a myth. In fact if you do well, employers will not easily permit you to leave. With the Labour and employment Act in place since 2007, it is now easy for employers to throw out their employees as they like. The Act gives employees in the private and corporate sectors as much protection as civil servants by the civil service Act.

These Mechanisms have been put in place to make the private sector employment conducive and attractive as the private sector now must employ more Bhutanese than the government. The non-governmental Organizations are also working very hard to address the unemployment in the country. The CSOs play a vital role in not just addressing the social issues but also in creating employment opportunities for our youth. As there are over 30 registered CSOs the government is hopeful of their support in tackling their unemployment problem in the country.

Therefore I urge you and all job seekers to seize any opportunity that is available especially at the beginning of your work life and I want to reiterate that no job is a small job. Life will be much more meaningful if you are doing something productive, than doing nothing and being dependent on your parents or relatives. A person who is doing nothing and wasting his or her life has no standing in the society. On the other hand nobody will laugh at a person doing something productive and contributing in their small ways to the society and to the nation. If you continue to persevere I am sure in the next 40-50 years of your working life, you will one day find your dream job.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the YDF once again for the useful training imparted to the 22 participants and congratulate the participants for the taking part in the training program. I am sure what you have learnt in this program will prove to be very useful in your search for gainful employment as well as in your day to day life.

I wish you all the best.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!!!