

EMPLOYMENT

Employment: A possible 1985 Situation

Further estimates of the employment situation have been made known since we commented on the unemployment picture in our last issue. Sri Lanka's labour force is expected to reach 6,329,000 by 1985. While the labour force in 1980 has been estimated at 5,688,000; over the next five years an additional 641,000 were expected to be added to the labour force, based on an annual increase of 2.4 percent. Official estimates published in May this year, however, expect the rate of unemployment to fall from 15 percent to 10.8 percent.

Significant changes are expected to take place in the character of the labour force over the next five years. For instance, of the nearly 5.7 million in today's labour force about 65 percent are males. During the next decade, however, it is expected that the expansion of education opportunities for females, a rise in the age of marriage, low birth rates and greater urbanization will encourage more females to join the labour force.

Another feature of the present employment picture is that the labour force is predominantly young, male, relatively well educated and rural based. Those in the age group of 14-25 make up 38 percent; with more than 55 percent having primary and secondary education, and 51 percent obtaining their livelihood from the land. The expansion of education facilities will mean that in the near future an even higher proportion of new entrants to the labour force will have secondary education. Thus Sri Lanka is facing the familiar employment syndrome of having to absorb increasing numbers of a young and educated labour force into productive and remunerative employment.

Recent surveys have shown that in the case of the overall employment situation of the country, the unemployed are mostly young (75 percent below the age group of 25) and educated (about 75 per cent in secondary schooling). Most of them (85 percent) were supported by parents and were looking for their first jobs. It was found that the unemployment among females was higher than among males (26 percent females as against 10 percent males) and that unemployment in the rural sector (15 percent) was lower than in the urban sector (21 percent).

A greater part of the burden of the problem of employment, however, will be finding placement for the educated unemployed. The number coming out from the educational institutions between 1980 and 1985 is expected to be in the region of 1,414,000 young persons. About 37 percent of them will have primary schooling, another 37 percent will have some secondary schooling, 19 percent are expected to have a GCE Ordinary Level education, and 7 percent are expected to have GCE Advance Level or Degree qualifications. The authorities anticipate that about 60 percent of the 1.4 million young persons will enter the labour force. Many of those entering the labour force will not be able to find employment directly; they will require some kind of additional technical or vocational training before they could be productively employed.

The Public Investment Programme 1981-85, anticipates that in 5 major sectors about 300,000 openings could be found over this five-year period in the following areas:

1. Estate Labour — 50,000
2. Settlement Schemes under the Mahaveli Project — 40,000
3. Construction activities in the Mahaveli area, Investment Promotion Zone, Housing and Water Supply sectors — 68,000
4. Manufacturing sector — 50,000.

Estimates of the growth rate of employment, according to the Investment Programme, average 2.6 percent. The highest growth is expected in the Construction sector where it is estimated to increase by 5 percent annually and the Mining and Quarrying sector where an annual growth rate of 4 percent is anticipated. The lowest growth rate is expected in the Agriculture sector where employment is estimated to increase by only 2.4 percent per annum over the period 1980-85. Productivity is also estimated to grow proportionately in each of these major sectors with the annual growth rates for construction placed at 7.0 percent, Mining and Quarrying 5.2 percent and Agriculture 2.0 percent. While during the five years 1980-85 there is expected to be an annual growth rate of 2.2 percent in the labour force, the growth rate in employment is estimated at — 1.3 percent per annum.