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Mega MRT Project Boasts Young Talents

By Fatin Nabihah Marzuki

KUALA LUMPUR (Bernama) -- While her friends comfortably sit in their air-conditioned offices, 24-year-old Izyan Syahirah Hasanuddin has literally been 'holed up' in an underground tunnel for the past 24 months.

The tunnel 30 metres below ground is where she spends 12 hours of her time daily, having to put up with the smell of soil and high temperatures which tested to the extremes physically and mentally this lass from Besut, Terengganu.

For Izyan Syahirah and over 100 local junior engineers working on the mega underground Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) project, this is just another day at work. The project under MMC-Gamuda Sdn Bhd involves seven stations namely KL Sentral, Pasar Seni, Merdeka, Bukit Bintang, Sentral, Pasar Rakyat, Cochrane and Maluri.

Never did she imagined of becoming a junior engineer at the age of 22, or that she would be invited to join the mega project.

"Underground projects are rare in Malaysia, so I thought why let a once in a lifetime opportunity slip away?" she said smiling.

MAKING THE CUT

"During the interview, when the panel told me I will be offered to work on the MRT tunnel project I accepted the offer without thinking twice!" said Izyah Syahirah who is stationed at the Pudu Launch Shaft, which is an alternative tunnel built for emergencies.

After she graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Civil Engineering from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), the petite lass tried her luck applying for vacancies in the lucrative oil and gas industries as well as housing construction.

She said though the tunnel constructions are rather rare, this opportunity provided her a new insight in this highly specialised field dominated by men, most often foreigners.

STEPPING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE

"I admit that multi-tasking is essential when working in the tunnel, for example, when operating the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM)," she said.

As one of the few engineers from the fairer sex there, she said the most physically and mentally taxing moment was during the intervention process which required her to temporarily stop the TBM to look at the underground cavity being dug.

"You cannot imagine how I felt when I faced temperatures of 38 degrees Celcius, the nauseating smell of dirt and the darkness which limited movement in the tunnel," she said laughing.

Her advice to youths especially future engineers from the fairer sex, is to try new things and leave the comfort zone. She added that it is important to scrap the perception that the men have the upper hand in any vocation.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Meanwhile, junior engineer Ismail Bukhari Wan Ibrahim, 25, joined the MRT project when he was 23, right after graduation.

"I was adamant to work under this mega project under MMC-Gamuda Sdn Bhd because it is the only project in Malaysia that uses TBM to create a tunnel," said the Construction Management graduate from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam.

Ismail said it was almost impossible for fresh graduates to land such a post abroad, so when MMC-Gamuda made the offer he could not refuse.

The construction sector, he said, was a unique learning platform and each day gave him a new experience, knowledge and problems to solve in a more critical and analytical manner.

When asked about engineering education, he said educational institutions need to find a way to provide a learning structure involving local material, for example, brick wood is used in the United States of America while concrete is used in Malaysia.

ACHIEVEMENT

Youth involvement in construction is regarded as new, but is an achievement for a country which is lacking young manpower especially among locals.

Not many know that role that local graduates had in making the project a reality.

Tunnel construction works were completed on April 21, 2015 and the underground MRT is expected to start running in July 2017.

This is also another achievement as drilling a tunnel in Kuala Lumpur is no easy feat due to the karstic limestone geology underneath that makes the soil soft.

The Sungai Buloh-Kajang MRT project is among nine Entry Point Projects (EPP) which involves the construction of 51 kilometre of rail system and a 9.5 kilometre underground tunnel.

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