



6 July 2014

@THE EDITOR

Star Publications (M)Sdn Bhd,
Menara Star,
15 Jalan 16/11,
46350 Petaling Jaya

Dear Editor,

**Klang Valley MRT Project Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line
Response to "Danger from above and below"**

I refer to the comment by your Executive Editor, Mr Brian Martin, and would like to offer my views on the issue of safety at construction sites.

Firstly, let me offer my apologies to Mr Brian Martin and the general public for the discomfort and concern when travelling beside the MRT Project worksites and under our structures which are being constructed.

I understand the concerns everyone have. Unfortunately, the fact that mishaps have occurred on the MRT Project and other projects do not help with instilling confidence. My own site visits apart, I also travel daily along roads where the MRT construction is on-going when I travel between my home and the office, and can see for myself what the public has to go past.

As the Chief Executive Officer of the company that is developing what is currently the biggest infrastructure project in the country, I take full and ultimate responsibility of the incidents that have occurred at MRT sites. Safety at my worksites is something I have to ensure all the time, for both the public and my workers as well.

Coming from a conglomerate background, it was second nature for me to ensure that a comprehensive standard operating procedure (SOP) and regulations for safety, health and environment (SHE) be drawn up. The same is also imposed on all activities related to the MRT Project. SHE elements were built into the contracts and became part of the contractors' KPIs.

MMC Gamuda KVMRT (PDP) Sdn Bhd, the MRT Project Delivery Partner, played a major role in this and they continue to play the role of ensuring that the SHE SOPs and regulations are followed. At the start of this project, they had set up a SHE display which demonstrates the best practices at a construction worksite. All contractors had to visit the display as part of the induction process, and the site was extensively used to train the workers.



However, I very quickly realised that despite SOPs and regulations, what was practised at the worksite is not necessarily aligned to the SOPs. I am not going to win many friends here, but in general, standards with regards to safety sit between unsatisfactory to outright appalling. And problem areas ranged from the most major, such as lifting heavy weights by crane over live traffic, to the simplest of things such getting workers to wear a hard hat when on site.

Needless to say, the situation was the same for activities which were off-site but related to the project, such as when transporting equipment and construction material. And standards deteriorate further when contractors rush to meet progress milestones.

I must concede that things have changed slightly for the better. I am less likely to see workers not wearing safety helmets or harnesses today compared to about two years ago. Small as it may seem, I look at it as a move in the right direction.

The situation I explained above is largely blamed on the fact that the construction industry relies on "instant workers" from overseas. Training is minimal and the understanding of safety practices in construction is non-existent.

However, I also detect a general lackadaisical attitude towards SHE best practices in the industry. This results in supervisors not enforcing the SOPs, and bosses not making enough of a fuss or taking remedial action when safety practices are not followed.

Without a culture of safety ingrained into everyone on site, adherence to SHE SOPs becomes viewed like a chore which is followed only when the eyes of independent supervisors are present. Dangerous practices and safety breaches continue.

Call me naïve but since I started helming the MRT Project, I have made it my mission to change this for the better. We all know what a gargantuan task it is to change attitudes and introduce a new culture but I believe that at the very least, this change can start with the MRT Project.

I mentioned above that SOPs and regulations on safety were introduced for all activities related to the MRT Project, both on and away from the worksite. We have introduced the Contractor Performance Assessment System or CONPAS where SHE is one of the KPIs measured when assessing the performance of our contractors.

Rules will just remain as rules if there is no enforcement and MRT Corp has made it a point to ensure sufficient supervision and checks on all sites. I have also made weekly unannounced site visits a practice where the contractor is not informed where I am going.



I also make it a point to ensure swift investigations are carried out when safety incidents occur. If negligence was found to be the reason for a safety breach, the contractor is immediately terminated.

There is now a blacklist for contractors which are not allowed to be appointed for any future MRT related work. The blacklist now has four companies. Simply failing to secure loads on a lorry will earn a company a place on the blacklist.

Besides the blacklist, 14 personnel have been removed and final warnings have been given to 21 personnel. While this may reflect negatively on the project, it is also the right thing to do. If MRT Corp intends to set new standards, then I will have to bite the bullet and remove the slackers from the system.

I have sought out organisations and professional bodies in the construction industry with the hope of getting support to effectively improve safety standards in the construction industry. This has borne some results as MRT Corp now has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) where the latter works with MRT Corp to enable the MRT Project to become the benchmark in the construction industry in terms of safety.

On the same note, I am encouraged to hear that bodies such as the Institute of Engineers and the Master Builders Association of Malaysia are interested in working towards improving safety standards in the construction industry. I am more than willing to meet with these organisations to find ways to achieve our common goal.

Even before the latest incident came to light, we had started discussions with global organisations to initiate an independent audit of our SHE practices on site. The aim of this eventual audit is to identify the weak points and strengthen them, while improving on the good systems already in place.

For the MRT Line 2, we will be imposing a higher standard for SHE to further mitigate the risks.

I am painfully aware that what I am trying to impose on the MRT Project contractors is just a drop in the ocean, and my attempt to introduce new attitudes and the culture of safety may be akin to moving mountains.

However, I will not be discouraged. I know it is not an impossible task because such high standards have been successfully implemented in other sectors, such as the oil and gas industry. Without concerted effort from all parties, I am afraid incidents such as construction material falling onto cars will continue to appear in our newspapers.



As for MRT Corp, I would like to assure the public that we continue to be vigilant about SHE standards at our sites. The process may take time, but we are already on it. I hope that in the end, both the project and the industry will be all the better for it.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

DATUK WIRA AZHAR ABDUL HAMID
Chief Executive Officer