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The Malaysian Construction Industry

By: Ir. Chin Mee Poon, Chief Editor

Ever since its independence in 1957, our country has undergone tremendous changes in practically all fields, especially in upgrading the infrastructures such as the road network, railway lines, airports, and telecommunications.

The implementation of the multifarious development projects over the years has led to the evolvement of tens of thousands of construction companies of all sizes, some of which have acquired the latest construction technologies and have accumulated so much experience and technical and financial prowess that they now have the confidence to venture overseas to explore and tap opportunities in not just developing countries but developed ones as well.

Our construction industry certainly has come a long way from the early days of having to rely on foreign international contractors to help us implement mega and complex projects, to becoming an exporter of construction technologies and know-how today.

However, the achievements of a few captains of the industry do not generate enough heat and light to brighten the outlook for the other players who are plagued with a multitude of problems.

Although our national economy continues to show positive growth of between 4 and 5%, the construction sector, which supports more than a hundred other businesses, has actually registered a decline for the past couple of years. Many construction companies simply do not have enough projects in hand for self-sustenance. The practice of dishing out mega projects to selected contractors should be discontinued immediately. Instead, big projects should be broken down into packages suitable for not just Class A contractors but Class B contractors as well, and contracts should be awarded through transparent open tenders. Healthy competitions will bring about improvements and make the contractors stronger.

Another major problem faced by the construction industry is the escalating cost of materials. Gradual increase in costs in line with the general inflation in the country is normal and acceptable, but when the price of a material shoots up substantially with a very short period of time, it is abnormal and will catch the industry players off guard and impose a great deal of difficulties on them. This is precisely what happens currently with regards to cement. The cement manufacturers in the country seem to have reached some form of understanding among them. The relevant authorities should do something about this unhealthy practice. While dumping of cheap materials in our country by foreign manufacturers may not be good for us in the long run, any form of cartel by local manufacturers will have its damaging effects felt by consumers immediately.

It is the governmentís responsibility to remove all unnecessary control and encourage fair competitions in order to stimulate a healthy development of the construction industry. ■