

# Skilled labour: types and shortage in malaysia construction



The skilled labour in the construction industry generally refers to those who were being trained within a long period and they have brought some specialized technical industry skills in advancing the construction projects. Normally the works requiring the labour who has high degree of manual skill. The labour can be considered as a skilled labour if they are able to fulfill the requirement.

### **Types of Skilled Labour**

According to the Construction Industry Skill Standards, CIDB (1998), there are many types of skilled labour. The following types are:

- Concretor
- Plasterer
- Bar Bender
- Carpenter
- Tiler
- Bricklayer
- Scalfolder
- Mobile Crane Operator
- Tower Crane Operator
- Earthwork Plant Operator

### **Concretor**

A concretor builds the concrete structures parts such as columns, beams, floors and walls. The concrete can be mixed by hand or in concrete mixer or utilize ready-mixed concrete. The duties shall include the following:

- Identify materials for concrete mixture

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- Pour concrete into formwork
- Mix concrete
- Place and compact concrete
- Perform curing of concrete

## **Plasterer**

The duties of a plasterer at level 1 are to apply one coat of various kinds of plaster to walls as a finishes. The other duties include the following:

- Apply cement plaster to flat wall
- Apply cement render finish coat to flat walls
- Apply cement plaster to internal and external angles
- Apply finish coat to internal and external angles

At level 2, they are necessary to apply a protective and decorative covering of plaster or render to the surfaces of building. The other duties include the following:

- Prepare overhead surfaces of plastering
- Fixing wire mesh to exterior surfaces before plastering
- Install plaster cornice and mouldings
- Plastering to overhead surfaces
- Apply granolithic or textured finish

## **Bar Bender**

After cut and bend the reinforcement bars then bar benders are try to fix them into the forms of concrete. They also have to combine the bars together with wires or fasteners or by welding. After that, place the bars in

forms and fixes them in position of reinforces concrete with wire mesh. The others duties include the following:

- Prepare tools and materials
- Fabrication of steel
- Install steel bars and wire mesh

## **Carpenter**

The works include “ cutting, notching, boring, sinking, pelleting, fitting, trimming, mitreing, halving, morticing, tenoning, dovetailing, scarfing and wedging and for all ends, splayed edges, short lengths and temporary supports. The others duties include the following:

- Prefabricated the forms and fixes them into the right position
- Set out the correct position for fixing the forms
- Prepare any temporary support for the forms
- Dismantle the forms

## **Tiler**

A tiler at level 1 has to place tiles to surface walls and floors according to specified designs which may include the process of applying plaster coat and cement mortar layer. The tiles shall be laid in rows and tapped them into place. Next, align the rows of tiles by using the spirit level. He also requires lying paving stones, bricks, and wood blocks. The others duties include the following:

- Apply finish coat to floor rendering
- Apply screed to receive tile

- Prepare vertical backing surface for wall tiling
- Set out and lay tiles on walls and floors
- Perform rendering and apply backing surface to lay the floor tiles
- Set out and lay paving on base

During level 2, the tasks of a tiler will be more complicated. The tiler has to set more complex mosaic panels on walls, prepare and sets marble blocks, installs and repairs the parquet flooring and applies terrazzo finish to floors. The others duties include the following:

- Set out and lay tiles to soffit
- Set out and lay parquet and polyvinyl chloride tiles
- Set out and lay cast in-situ terrazzo
- Fix tiles to a curved wall
- Spreading and levelling of mortar mix
- Cutting and trimming units
- Perform polishing and grinding

## **Bricklayer**

A bricklayer is responsible to lay bricks and blocks (except stones) by using various kinds of bonds in order to form the walls, partitions, arches and other structures at level 1. The others duties include the following:

- Worksite preparation
- Construct opening of brick wall
- Construct concrete masonry structures
- Construct attached and isolated pier

They also work for more complex decorative structures at level 2 which may include repair to existing brickwork. The others duties include the following:

- Construct brick steps
- Construct glass block panel
- Construct curved wall
- Construct hollow block reinforced wall and column
- Construct complex arch

## **Scaffolder**

A general scaffolder performs his basic skills and techniques for level 1. A scaffolder is to erect and dismantle various types of metal scaffolding such as platforms, upright and horizontal members. The others duties include the following:

- Selection and inspection of equipments
- Erection and dismantling of scaffold
- Maintenance of scaffold

“ A tube and coupler scaffolder at level 2 is to erects and dismantle metal scaffolding which also include the following:

- Cantilevered and spurred scaffolds
- Cantilevered crane loading platforms
- Mast climbers

Additional remarks:

This standard applies to every metal tube scaffolding not exceeding 40 m in height and prefabricated scaffolding not exceeding 15 m in height.

A Professional Engineer's verification is required for the design and construction of scaffolding beyond those heights.

Competency as a general Scaffolder is an additional requirement in order to comply with these standards

## **Mobile Crane Operator**

A mobile crane operator operates a crane mounted on wheels or tracks which can be driven under his own control. The other duties include the following:

- Pre-operational check
- Post operational check
- Maintain the operation and maintenance of crane

## **Tower Crane Operator**

As a tower crane operator needs to operate the crane that consists of a turning metal tower which moves on rails and is equipped at the top with a mobile or fixed jib. Normally the crane is supported by the hoisting equipment. The other duties include the following:

- Pre-operational check
- Post operational check
- Operation and maintenance of the crane

## **Earthwork Plant Operator**

An earthwork plant operator has to carry out the power-driven machine mounted on wheels or crawler tracks equipped with all the movable shovel, grad bucket and etc. This machine is used during the excavation and motion of the earth, rock, and sand. The other duties include the following:

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- Pre-operational check on machinery
- Ensure the operation of the equipment

## **Factors that caused the Labour Shortage Problem**

### **Introduction**

The problem of labour shortage has been existing since the 1970's. According to the Master Builders Association Malaysia (MBAM), with the implementation of the 9th Malaysia Plan (9MP) and the letters of intent has been awarded to get projects under way, Malaysian construction industry has begun to surface problem of labour shortage. We must pay more attention on the serious impacts that caused by these problems and appropriate actions must be taken at once in order to solve this problem effectively.

### **Factors**

There are several factors that influence the poor participation of labour in the construction industry. The strong growth of the economy, poor image, lack of training system, large number of foreign labour were contribute to the shortage of labour in construction industry. Those factors are being listed below and adopted from the MBAM report, previous newspaper and the articles.

### **Working Conditions and environment**

Most of the labours in the construction industry are worked in full time, and sometimes the working hours are more than 40 hours in a week. In 2008, there are about 18% of labour have worked 45 hours or more per week. They have to work until midnight if there are under special condition. They have no rest day in weekends or even public holiday. The construction labour

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usually does not get paid if they are unable to work due to the inclement weather.

There are less people willing to participate in the construction works because of the working environment and the condition. According to MBAM report, the working environment for the skilled labour in the construction industry can be considered as not good enough. For instance, the location of the construction site is unstable and many of the buildings are only use for temporary purpose. So, they have to often move their dwelling place once the construction project has been completed. Therefore, the environment of the site is getting the severe air pollution and it will affect our health. In addition, some of the construction site is located at undeveloped area that lack of basic amenities. Other than that, majority of labour are work direct expose to the sun in the construction site. There are not so many people that capable work under this environment.

### **Poor Welfare in Construction Industry**

Poor welfare is one of the factors that caused problem of labour shortage. This problem will occur when there are irresponsible contractors omitted to take out welfare such as SOCSO or EPF. Basically, welfare shall provide to the labour in accordance with the requirements. For example, contractors should provide comfortable temporary accommodations for the labour who works at outstation, but the contractors never fulfil their obligations and thus provide them a dirty and small place.

Most of the people will take care what are the welfare they can get from the company. Once they can't get any protection from the company, they are not willing to join the construction industry.

### **Government Policy in restricted the number of foreign labour**

Moreover, government policy in restricted the numbers of foreign labour join into construction industry is also one of the factors that caused the labour shortage problem happen. According to the Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said in Star Newspaper on 19 July 2000, the Malaysia planned to reduce the number of foreign labour drastically over the coming next few years.

As a government policy that accordance with Berita Harian government policy on 29 February 2000, Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, it stated that one company not allowed hiring foreign labour which more than one third of their total number of company staff and each labour will not require to work more than eight years in Malaysia.

So far according to The Sun on 1st July 1999, Prof. Datuk Abdul Rahman Abdullah, chief executive of Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), there are not much Malaysian are interested to join in construction industry and almost 75% labours are come from other countries.

Further to this, according to Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on 20th May 2010, Malaysia will raise the levy on foreign workers in 2011, after having deferred the implementation last year.

He said that the quantum of increase would vary based on the specific sectors which employ the foreign workers. After that, the policy is to reduce our dependency on foreign workers and this will be done in stages in the long run.

According to the 2006/2007 Economic Report released on September 2006, Malaysia aims to reduce the number of foreign workers in the country from 1.84 million to 1.5 million by 2010. It is envisaged that by that time, only 200,000 foreign workers will remain in the construction industry. Thus through this government policy, Malaysia's construction industry will have a big problem on this labour shortage.

Sources: Ministry of Home Affairs Malaysia, personal correspondence.

Department of Immigration, Pusat Bandar Damansara, Kota Kinabalu & Kuching & the Department of Labour Sarawak (letter from the department to writer dated 14 Mac 2005)

### **Economy of Malaysia**

The economic that Malaysia has seen for last decade is one of the leading causes of the worker shortage. The economic always play an important role in the need for labour. There are many construction activities will be carried out during the peak period of economy, therefore the need for the labour is relatively become higher.

On the contrary, the problem of labour shortage will occur when the economic downturn because the construction works will be delayed and suspended where the client is not capable to complete the progress payments. The labour cannot get the daily income which fixed by the client.  
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Thus many of them will migrate to the other countries where necessary the construction labour work at their construction industry.

Furthermore, while the economic is recovered, we may also face the problem in recruiting the workforce in construction industry since majority of them are already adapted their new working environment in other countries.

### **Insufficient training system**

In Malaysia, the professional basic training is being deficiency. According to the 2005 Labour Shortage Action Plan, it became evident that the labour shortage problem is multilateral and has consequence from a wide range of interlinking factors. In addition, the learning and the training system that introduced by construction industry are not flexible to meet the changes of the progress of construction works at once. There is no opportunity for the unskilled labour being trained so that only the skilled labours are capable to carry out the more complicated works during construction works.

According to the research information, it reveals that only 45% of construction companies involve learning and development training after all the major decisions have been made or during the final stages of the project. A further 9% do not involve in learning and development training at all. Other 27% of companies involve learning and developments training at the inception planning stages and in a further 19% of are introduced it at the initial implementation stage.

**Young Generations unwilling to take part in construction industry**

The poor image of construction industry can be defined into “3D” syndrome attached to the industry. There are dirty, dangerous and difficult. In respect on this 3D syndrome, local youth would rather be unemployed despite working in the construction industry.

The construction industry was considered dirty and it is unsatisfactory because most of the construction site is located at the undeveloped area and normally lack of basic amenities or public services. Most of the facilities which located at the construction site do not have well practices and also not comply under the requirements of governing construction activities. In Malaysia, there are minor issues those accidents on construction site. It is not only involve labour, but also cause badly injured and even death to the general public. All of this accident has results on poor participation of labour in construction industry.

In certain circumstances, the construction activities can be very complicated due to the differentiation in type of the project as well as the surrounding project environment. Majority of youths are difficult to perform well during construction works. Moreover, it has the difficulties in maintaining the cooperative between the staff and the project team members. The youngsters with high level of educations are prefer to work under a good working condition such as office work rather than to work at site that always exposed to the sun.