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Concrete slab collapse calls for concrete preventive steps



Budget-sensitive contractors often reduce health enforcement to the bare minimum.

By **Paivithor Sidhu**

SELANGOR — The collapse of a concrete span at the MRT construction site near Kota Damansara, Selangor that killed three workers two weeks ago has once again raised doubts on the safety regulations practised by our “progressive” nation. While we hope that ongoing investigations will reveal the cause of the accident and propose tangible mitigation measures, Pertubuhan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM) raised three issues that need to be addressed to prevent such disasters from recurring.

PAM’s president Chan Seong Aun told *Real Spaces* that safety in a construction site does not come automatically, especially in Malaysia where there are large numbers of untrained foreign workers.

“Their lack of knowledge about safety

rules and regulations compromises not only their own safety but also their fellow workers and the public who are exposed to the construction dangers surrounding the site, hence leading to indifference towards safety,” he pointed out.

He asserted that this can be thwarted by either only allowing trained workers at the site or strict enforcement of safety regulations by safety officers. For maximum effectiveness, both measures should be put in place.

“To add to the problem, many Malaysian contractors do not cost properly for the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). They see safety and health enforcement as a cost centre for the project and attempt to reduce it to the bare minimum.

“This is often (resolved) either by minimising adequate safety equipment or doing without the required safety officer for the project or both. RISM (Royal Institution of Surveyors Malaysia), some

years back, did try to enter a standard cost item for OSHA into the preliminaries of all contracts as a way to mitigate this problem, but it does not seem to have caught on,” he revealed.

The final decision makers, according to Chan, are still the project owners who must ensure that these are properly cost for and fully enforced. “The hindrance is one of an indifferent attitude from top down which leads to untrained workers with compromised safety and high fatality and accident rates on our construction sites.

The second issue PAM raised is on the shortage of such qualified personnel resulting in a higher salary demand than the average construction supervisors. This further compounds the problem as budget-sensitive contractors willingly compromise this aspect, not realising that the cost of slack safety results in higher final expenses through injured workers and downtime caused by accidents.

Chan said that consequently, this also discourages the more competent hands from working at such sites which they view as 3D – Dirty, Demanding and Dangerous.

The third issue faced is a lack of enforcement. Chan stressed that the enforcement on safety should come from both sides, namely the contractor and the internal safety occupational health officers.

“The contractor is duty-bound to ensure compliance to the regulations. Regular or scheduled internal inspection should be made best practice.

“Similarly, the internal SOP (standard operating procedure) should be reviewed from time to time to minimise human error and also to improve their Work Method Statement,” he added.

PAM stated that in summary, all parties should target to achieve the common objective of ensuring that the project implementation is supported by good safety practices at all levels.