

'OF SELFLESS ENGINEERS, THEIR SEVERE LACK OF INCOME POWER, AND SELF-INFLICTED DECEPTION.'

By: En. Abas bin Noordin

It would be most enviable if no less than 90 percent of engineers – within the first 15 years of their chosen engineering-based career(s) – manage to enjoy a decent professional and family life unhampered by the distressing lack of money. Yes money – the stuff you use for paying taxes and debts (home loans, car loans, personal loans, OD's), bills (food, utilities, medical) et cetera, et cetera – ad nauseam – for purchasing insurance policies, for making financial investments, and for supporting soul-cleansing charitable causes – materially that is – every now and so often. This 'acute income deficiency syndrome' – as ex-parliamentarian social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye described it when discussing a political issue at a parliamentary sitting – or 'AIDS' – as he creatively suggested for brevity and intended impact – is fast becoming an ignoble characteristic of the engineering profession in our dear Malaysia.

Why is it so you might ask? The answer – simply and callously put: the value of engineering professional services – as the market sees and values it – just isn't high enough to enable well-deserving engineers the privilege of living a decent life i.e., one that is free from 'severe' monetary constraint.

How about the balance 10 percent of the engineers, how come they manage to live a decent life unlike the other unfortunate 90 percent of their brethren? The answer: they most probably earn incomes by providing services that are not 'so engineering' (anymore) – they most probably are the owners and/or the CEO's or top managers of engineering-based organisations; even if they (still) qualify as 'practicing' professional engineers – by virtue of their registration with the Board of Engineers Malaysia – it is doubtful if they are truly playing the definitive professional engineering roles and truly providing the definitive professional engineering services in return for their incomes.

So where is the wisdom of this MTEN's talk of increasing the number of engineers to over 210,000 by the year 2010? About the only way this unrealistic dream may be realised is by way of mass deception: extol – amidst young and gullible minds – the virtues of being exemplary 'selfless' engineers; recount the fantastic stuff these engineers help create for the sake of human progress, civilisation and well-being and diligently ensure – along the way – the protection (in fact even enhancement) of the world's natural resources and its natural environment; but deny them 'the right' (privilege if you so prefer) to know how

diminutive the typical engineer's earning power is or has now become – and where he stands in the unsympathetic market. Yes, 'deception' – that's the perfect word to use to describe the needed approach.

The Malaysian engineering fraternity, if at all it has already and finally existed, had better take a close look at itself; see if it has been actively doing anything substantive – proactively and even reactively – to realise the true worth of the profession; see also if it has been doing so by ingenious design rather than by leaving it to chance. (Incidentally, isn't 'design' a most celebrated and acclaimed characteristic approach synonymous with the engineering profession)?

Perhaps, the true worth of the engineering profession has already been rightly reflected – all along all these years – by the price the 'imperfect' market has been paying in respect of the services rendered by the 90 percent of your brethren; the current unemployment rate within the engineering profession serves only to further accentuate the point.

Stop kidding yourselves – and your kids. Know that even the results of recent IEM-sponsored Engineers Employment Surveys will not be able to 'mask' the stark reality.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Editorial Board recognises that readers may see the above piece as incendiary, an invitation to a free-for-all. It is not our intention to inflame our esteemed readers, and the piece does not represent the views of IEM or the Editorial Board. However, since this is the candid observations of an IEM member, we believe it is indicative of serious issues that deserve to be heard and discussed. We invite readers to respond with their viewpoints. ■