

Cover Story

CHALLENGES CONQUERED

Driven to Excel, Dato' Wahid Defies the Odds and Stays Focused

By Shukri Rahman



By his own admission, Dato' Prof. Ir. Dr. Wahid Omar, Deputy Director General I of Public Works Department (JKR) is surprised that he has made it this far. But he says with conviction, "It is God's will."

Judging from the sheer family and environmental constraints which had put him in enormous disadvantage, compared with most of his friends at primary

and secondary schools, he could not have gone far. Resigned to the "fact", Dato' Wahid himself initially could not care less.

The turning point came when he was in Primary 6. He recalls, "One day my Natural Study teacher asked me a question which I could not answer. He reacted angrily by cursing at me. Later I found out the meaning of one of the words he used. S-W-I-N-E. I felt terrible but deep inside, I told myself to take it as a challenge to prove that I could be number one."

Thanks to the teacher, it had changed Dato' Wahid forever. He began to like reading and read he would passionately. The effect was dramatic. At the very minimum, he scored 98% in most subjects. He also learned his first philosophy-cum-motivation lesson from the episode. Dato' Wahid believes that there are certain turning points in one's life cycle. People who are able to do well after reaching their turning points will be driven by these events.

His next turning point came when he was at Kuala Lumpur Technical College. He says, "I felt very small when I compared myself with the big guys who came from boarding schools. Indeed comparing myself with the non-Malay students was worst." However once again, Dato' Wahid took the challenge well, persevered

and went on to prove that he could also do wonders at the Technical College.

He is also influenced by his unwavering interest in structure. He did his MSc in Structural Engineering at North Carolina State University, USA, which has an excellent reputation for the course. Since the programme put great emphasis on computing, Dato' Wahid took the challenge by building up his computer skills from scratch. At the end of the programme, he managed to develop his own software, which until today, can still be used to check, analyze and design whole buildings.

A workaholic, Dato' Wahid does not believe in the separation of work from Islam. He says, "My role model is Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Since my work is based on Islam, ultimately I have to be answerable to Allah." He believes that if Muslims fully comprehend the meaning of Al-Fatihah (The Opening) which they recite 17 times a day in their daily prayers, they will do everything properly. Dato' Wahid always relates his research with God's power as he observes various signs of God's Mercy. He adds, "Had God changed certain (natural) properties, whole things could collapse, putting mankind in extreme difficulties."

The more knowledgeable he is and the higher he goes up the JKR hierarchy, the closer he becomes to God, who has been very kind to him. As a consistent person, whenever he faces difficulty, he will always go to God.

According to Dato' Wahid, his biggest achievement to date is getting his PhD in Structural Engineering at UK's University of Nottigham. He says, "At one stage, the test which I was doing did not work out. I became very frustrated and wanted to go back as I did not want to waste my time further. However, God showed me the way. I was also lucky to have a very good supervisor, a wise old man, who kept on encouraging me with his ideas and feedback until I finally made it."



In May 1992, Dato' Wahid received the coveted Henry Adams Award from The Institution of Structural Engineers, United Kingdom.

Dato' Wahid is clearly contented and adequate. Yet he continuously learn how to keep abreast with technological advancement and update himself with current management thinking and practices.

Ask him about any aspect of management, he will surely have the answer with complete details in his database. He has also been sharing it with people in

JKR and certain institutes of higher learning. Says he, "Whatever knowledge one knows about, he should try to practise it as much as he can. Otherwise, there is no point. Rightly, knowledge should be distributed." Engineering field aside, Dato' Wahid also used to attend Harvard Business School's Senior Management Program as well as Private Sector Training and Attachment Programme for Senior Malaysian Public Sector Executive conducted by Stanford University and Bechtel Corporation.

He is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineers Malaysia, Member of Road Engineering Association Malaysia and Member of Malaysian Structural Steel Association. Asked about his retirement plan, Dato' Wahid says he leaves it up to Allah SWT. **SR**

THE COMPLETE PROFESSIONAL

By Shukri Rahman

Dato' Prof. Ir. Dr Wahid Omar, Public Works Department (JKR)'s Deputy Director General I, is one of the brains behind the rapid adoption of IT in the agency, Malaysia's biggest technical department. A model to other departments, JKR was awarded The Asean Outstanding Engineering Achievement Award in 1997. In his usual no-nonsense straight talking approach, Dato' Wahid talked to *Suara Roadcare* on a wide range of issues from Federal Road Maintenance to the future of JKR. Excerpts...

On the FRM mandate...

Considering there were inadequate staff, equipment and budget as well as rising ageing road network, the government agreed to the proposal for the privatization of the Federal Road.

It officially started on February 16, 2001.

With this exercise, routine and scheduled maintenance works which were previously carried out by Class F contractors or by department, are now handed over to the concession company to implement.

The implementation of road maintenance works by right should be better managed, more organized and integrated under the concession. By giving the jobs to small contractors, concession companies could help them in terms of work quality, especially in technical matters and management.

On the performance of concession companies...

Overall the performance of concession companies in maintaining Federal Road is satisfactory. Having said that, we still receive complaints from the public on the quality of work done.

Nevertheless, I believe the concessionaires can raise their quality of services further if they are determined, responsible and sincere.

On government expectations and suggestions for improvement...

The government expects the privatization exercise will improve the quality of Federal Road network. Concession