

# Female engineers take pride in breaking the glass ceiling

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**PETALING JAYA:** A sense of pride washes over Rusnida Talib every time she sees people using the colourful bridge opposite the Sogo department store and Pertama Complex in Kuala Lumpur.

This is because the 52-year-old civil engineer was part of the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) team that oversaw the project from start to finish – an initiative which has helped improve traffic flow in the area.

Under the project completed in 2015, a short bridge was built for vehicles to cross over Sungai Klang so that motorists could head north or south.

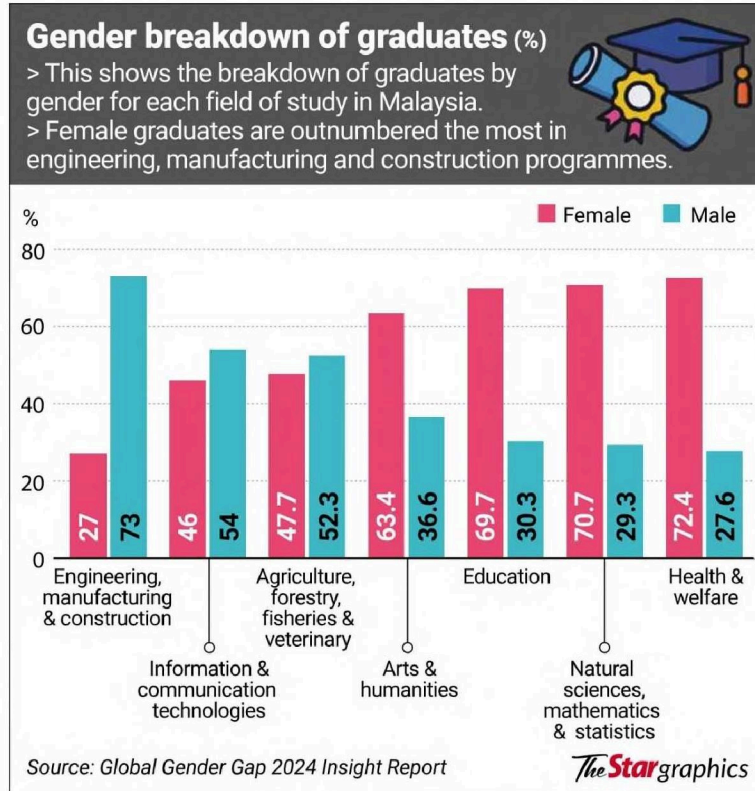
A covered pedestrian bridge was also built to provide a shady and safe pathway for people to walk around the area, and connected the two shopping malls.

“When I see the public using amenities that I’ve helped bring to reality, it is a proud moment for me,” said the DBKL permit utility unit deputy director in an interview.

Currently, her job includes overseeing the approval of drawings and plans submitted to DBKL to ensure compliance with regulations and guidelines.

Rusnida is one example of how female engineers in Malaysia are excelling in their careers despite the large number of men in the field.

In 2022, women engineers



made up 20% of members in the Institution of Engineers Malaysia (IEM) but this has increased to 25% as of March.

Meanwhile, another female engineer has done the country proud – Assoc Prof Dr Syuhaida Ismail, 44, became the first Malaysian recipient of the engineering award from the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO), organised in partnership with Gree

Electric Appliances.

Syuhaida, who is the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (Mima) research director, was given the honour which recognises women engineers, across the world, who demonstrated outstanding achievements in engineering practice, academia, or leadership in business.

“There is a need to have both men and women in engineering as we complement each other.

“In general, women engineers tend to be more meticulous while men are more risk-takers.

“We need both of these qualities to provide more balance and grow the industry.”

On the rising number of female engineers, Syuhaida said it was partly due to the positive trend of husbands being more supportive of their wives, enabling them to pursue careers in engineering with more work-life balance.

To encourage more young women to pursue engineering, there should be more female mentors to guide them, said Dr Angelia Liew San Chui, an adviser on climate change, energy and sustainable development at the Sarawak Premier’s Department.

“Girls may find it difficult to envision themselves as engineers because they don’t have support from roles like mentors,” said Liew, 44.

As a civil engineer and former lecturer, she volunteers for programmes at schools like career talks so that she can reach out to students – both girls and boys – to inspire them to join the field.

“For young women in engineering, they need to be bolder, and voice out their intentions to try leadership posts or ask for opportunities for growth,” Liew said.

She said one of her proudest achievements was becoming the current IEM Sarawak chairman, as it was an honour to be among the few women engineers to lead a branch in the organisation.

Former IEM president Prof Dr Norlida Buniyamin, who was the first female to head the organisation, said holding the post is a significant milestone for women.

“Because other organisations saw me as a woman, they also invited me to hold talks and be part of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiatives to reach out to other women,” she said.

On the gender disparity in the industry, Norlida said the gap is more obvious at senior-level positions.

“In the first few years of engineering, most women still find it manageable.

“But when they reach a stage where they have to be project directors responsible to look after certain sites, it becomes tougher.

“By then, some may have started families and may have to juggle their traditional duties at home,” she said, adding that such a situation may cause women to leave their jobs at this stage.

Fortunately for the women engineers, cases of gender discrimination in the field were rare, she said.

“I was fortunate to never have that challenge.

“In fact, men treated us as equal, with some being more protective and gentle to us since we are women,” Norlida added.

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