

Penang hails unsung 'dirty jobs' heroes
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It is not every day that workers involved in 'difficult, dangerous and dirty' jobs get to be in the limelight.

But on Monday, 47 labourers from the Penang Municipal Council received, for the first time, cash awards plus medals as recognition of their hard work from Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

NONE18 workers - whose daily grind includes entering manholes and monsoon drains, submerging themselves in stinking black waters and clearing them of all kinds of garbage - were awarded RM500 for their efforts while RM200 was awarded to the remaining 29.

Those present at the event were rather shocked to hear that among the debris, a worker may find not only animal bodies but also human corpses.

Many were teary-eyed after witnessing a video presentation on the workers put together by former Malaysiakini citizen journalist Lillian Chan.

Photos of the workers with their feet deep in dirt and slime and interviews on their personal experiences at work touched the hearts of those present.

The event was part of the implementation of the state's recently-launched 'Cleaner, Greener Penang' campaign.

NONEP. Shunmugam, 54, a council worker for about 30 years, was all smiles over the unexpected recognition.

"This is the first time in my working life that I get to receive a reward for my work," he said.

"Not to mention, too, that this is the first time in my life that I get to be so close to the chief minister."

S. Govindasamy, 53, said he had never thought of doing any other work as he was already familiar with his present job.

"I have put my children through school and university by doing this job so why should I think of changing it?"

Human power more effective than machines

Council chairperson Patahiyah Ismail said the workers were so dedicated that they refused to use modern machines to ease their workload.

"It was at their own request that they would rather go to the 'deep end' of a drain or manhole and do the job themselves than use machines which were not effective at all," she said during her speech.

"In fact they do not blame anyone for their situation because this is exactly how they want to do their jobs."

Lim said he was amazed to hear how the workers were willing to jeopardise their safety and health by doing a '3D' job instead of relying on modern technology.

"This work is not simple, indeed this is the kind of work which calls for great sacrifices," he said.

"These are the unsung heroes, without them, Penang will not be as wonderful as we often hear it is."

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