

WHAT I SAW ON TELLY

LAST month, I was going back to Puchong after catching an IMAX movie at Berjaya Times Square, Kuala Lumpur, and found myself driving through Malaysia's engineering marvel, the SMART tunnel.

It was a slightly rough ride and the tunnel was rather desolate perhaps because it was past midnight. The ride piqued my curiosity about the tunnel.

What if the tunnel were to collapse like in the Stallone movie *Daylight*? Would it flood while people are using it? Are there escape routes? So, I was glad to catch the one-hour documentary about the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (SMART) on the National Geographic Channel.

Finally... I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Hey, this is no dumb, ordinary tunnel. Why, its acronym seems just right!

This informative documentary was the result of a collaboration between National Geographic Channel International, the National Film Development Corporation of Malaysia (FINAS) and the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage.

For once, it felt apt to use the hackneyed phrase *Malaysia Boleh!* The sense of pride which welled up in me as I watched the show was a result of two factors.

One, it felt great to watch an excellently produced documentary which was shot in high definition. Secondly, it was about the world's first storm water tunnel which has a built-in double-decker motorway. And, it is in Malaysia!

Basically, the tunnel, which can store one million cubic metres of water, is a smart solution to the massive floods that wrecked havoc in Kuala Lumpur every time it rains heavily. The 9.7km tunnel redirects flood waters from the city centre to a large holding basin in Kampung Berembang and a storage reservoir in Taman Desa.

The 3km double-decker motorway connects the city centre to the Kuala Lumpur-Seremban highway near Sungei Besi. The motorway also serves to ease the flow of traffic



The SMART tunnel is a man-made wonder!

between Jalan Sungei Besi and the city centre.

In spite of all the techno-babble involved, the show was still attention-grabbing. It was interesting to take note of the technology and sophisticated tunnel boring machines used to build this engineering marvel. I particularly liked the humungous boring machines which could drill through risky Karstic limestone areas to construct the tunnel.

It was fascinating to find out how billions of litres of water could flood this enormous tunnel. Only when there is heavy flooding, will the entire tunnel be filled up with water. When this happens, the two motorways will be closed to traffic and the remaining vehicles are allowed to exit before water fills up the tunnel completely.

There are ventilation shafts which allow the air in the tunnel to be constantly refreshed. The tunnel also has adequate surveillance and escape shafts.

Like the Petronas Twin Towers which put Malaysia on the world map, this SMART tunnel has also made construction history and has even been featured on Discovery Channel's *Extreme Engineering* segment.

Now, excuse me while I watch Stallone's *Daylight* again! — By Naveen Mathew Menon (naveen@nstp.com.my)