

Celebrating the Khan family's wealth of engineering talent at Damen Shipyards

In the bustling heart of Damen Shipyards Cape Town (DSCT), a tale of familial wealth unfolds. Zakeer Khan, a seasoned mechanical engineer, embarked on his journey at DSCT 15 years ago, little knowing that he would one day lay claim to being the richest man in the company. Yet, Zakeer's riches are not measured in currency, but in the bonds of family.



Today, Khan, the project manager for services and repairs at DSCT, shares his workspace with his two sons, Zuhair (26) and Azhar (24). Both engineers, they work alongside their father, contributing to the construction of world-class vessels for the South African navy.

"I am the wealthiest man at Damen," Khan declares. "I have had the privilege of watching my sons mature and evolve in their roles. I've seen them forge relationships with their colleagues, and our bond as a family strengthens with each passing day."



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The father and sons engineering trio have been instrumental in DSCT's delivery of two of the three multi-mission inshore patrol vessels (MMIPVs) commissioned by the South African Navy as part of Project Biro.

Zuhair, a five-year veteran at DSCT, is a key member of the mechanical fitting team. His responsibilities include the installation of engines, pumps, power supply units, propeller shafts, and the alignment of engines and gearboxes. His contribution, like that of his father and brother, is a testament to the wealth of talent within the Khan family.

'Why wait for your ship to come in?'

"As a youngster my friends and I always talked about our dreams and aspirations. I always joked that one day when my ship comes in, I will achieve all that I desired. I thought to myself, Zuhair, why wait for your ship to come in when you could go to a company and build one yourself," he says.

Fitter and turner apprentice Azhar says his father had a key role in him in studying engineering and joining DSCT.

"Seeing him build the calibre of vessels that DSCT builds and being exposed to the engineering was enough to get me motivated," explains the youngest Khan. "I wanted to pursue a career in horticulture, but once I got a taste for the shipbuilding game there was no going back. Now I'm almost qualified and ready to grow into the artisan I'm meant to be."

In October the Navy revealed the name of the second MMIPV delivered by DSCT. The SAS King Shaka Zulu was built entirely in South Africa as part of Project Biro.

To date the project has contributed significantly to job creation and throughout its duration, it is estimated to have generated more than one million man-hours of work, supported over 1,000 direct jobs at DSCT, and engaged nearly 4,000 individuals indirectly.

Love for cycling

Outside the confines of shipyards and workshops, the Khan family shares a penchant for cycling. Recently, Zakeer completed the Old Mutual Wealth Double Century, a 202-kilometer cycle race.

Yet, the Khan family isn't just about work and cycling. They thrive on learning from each other, and cherishing moments spent together. Their story is not just one of professional success but a testament to the strength of familial bonds.

"I could not be prouder," says Khan. "Coming to work with them every day and seeing their dedication, hearing positive feedback from their colleagues and watching them receive rewards for their work really does make me feel like the wealthiest man in the world."

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