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Diperdana retains focus on container haulage

Jimmy Yeow

WHENEVER there is a change in the majority shareholder of this company or a corporate restructuring exercise, it undergoes a name change.

While a name change to reflect new owners or corporate identity is nothing new, Diperdana Holdings Bhd, the haulage and related services company, has undergone four name changes in its seven years on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

But this time, the reversion of its name to "Diperdana" reflects the desire of the new majority shareholder to go back to its roots - the container haulage and related services business.

The company, founded by Datuk Shahrani Abdullah, made its debut on the KLSE as Shapadu Kontena Bhd on January 10 1992. In 1994, it was known as Diperdana Corp Bhd after Datuk Danny Tan Chee Sing took over the company.

Its name was changed to PNSL Holdings Bhd in 1997 under a much-publicised proposed restructuring exercise with Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd (KPB) which has been aborted due to the meltdown of share prices on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

The deal, had it gone through, would have transformed PNSL Holdings into the shipping arm of the Konsortium Group while its haulage business will be hived off to KPB.

Under the exercise announced on July 16 1996, KPB had proposed to dispose of the entire issued and paid-up capital of Pacific Bulk Basin Shipping Ltd to PNSL Holdings for RM575 million to be satisfied by the issue of 38.33 million new PNSL Holdings shares at RM15 each.

It had also proposed to dispose of the entire shipping business undertakings of PNSL Bhd to PNSL Holdings for a consideration of RM400 million to be satisfied by the issue of 26.67 million new PNSL Holdings shares at RM15 per share.

The proposed deal also called for the acquisition of Diperdana Kontena Sdn Bhd from PNSL Holdings for RM69.5 million to be satisfied by the issue of 12.1 million new KPB shares at RM14 per share.

Under the restructuring, there is also a non-renounceable restricted offer for sale of the rights to allotment of 12.1 million KPB shares at RM14 each per share on the basis of one KPB share for every three existing PNSL Holdings shares held.

KPB also had to make a mandatory general offer for the remaining PNSL Holdings shares it did not hold after the completion of the restructuring scheme.

After the aborted restructuring exercise, a group, led by former civil servant-turned-businessman Datuk Badri Masri, quietly gained control of the company.

Badri said by reverting its name to Diperdana, it is keeping in line with the container haulage and other related business which is the core activity of the company.

"We have to re-focus and look at other things related to the container haulage industry," he said.

At the AGM, Badri declined to identify the group with a 32 per cent controlling interest in Diperdana Holdings, adding that an announcement on the takeover will be made this month.

On May 15, PNSL announced the resignation of Encik Mirzan Mahathir and Mr Loo Hooi Keat as directors of the company.

Except for Syed Hussin Shaikh Aljunid, the current board of PNSL, which

comprises Badri, Encik Mohd Taib Abdul Wahab and Mr Philip Goh Teck Siang, are new faces.

While Badri did not disclose the identities of the new controlling shareholders, it is understood that they used a private company to buy up the shares from some majority shareholders and possibility from the open market.

In the PNSL Holdings' 1997 annual report, its 10 largest shareholders listed as at May 15 1998 are RHB Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd with 12.57 per cent, Cimsec Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd, 11.04 per cent; Multi-Purpose Bank Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd, 8.57 per cent; RHB Merchant Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd, 7.63 per cent and the Employees Provident Fund Board, 7.61 per cent.

The other five are Multi-Purpose Bank Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd, 7.14 per cent; Chase Malaysia Nominees (Asing) Sdn Bhd, 3.23 per cent; Perbadanan Nasional Bhd, 1.70 per cent; Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd, 1.53 per cent and Amsec Nominees (Tempatan) Sdn Bhd, 1.32 per cent.

While it is still too early to say what the new majority shareholder have in mind on the future of the company, its immediate plans is to focus on what it knows best - container haulage and related services.

Shipping analysts are in the dark over the future prospects and plans of the Diperdana Holdings - the fourth largest container haulier in the country with a fleet of 287 units of prime movers and market share just under 20 per cent as of end last year.

The other hauliers are Kontena Nasional, MISC Haulage, Konsortium Perkapalan Bhd and Multimodal Freight.

As the logistics business is related to the country's economy and trade, all hauliers are expecting a drop in business largely due to the fall in imports this year.

As haulage is a trade-related industry, every haulier, Badri says, can expect a drop in business in the current trade contraction climate.

"But by how much we would not know. If things remain the same, there will be a slight drop but if it gets worse, I would not know," he said to a question on revenue forecast.

In light of the current economic situation, the company is unlikely to embark on any ambitious plans but consolidate its operations as logistics is a capital-intensive business.

Badri said the company is taking several measures including selling off some of its assets such as land and niches to improve its liquidity.

While Diperdana's profitability may take a dip in the current financial year, it looks set to pick up when the economy bounces back.