

21/11/1998

Lim: RM5m grant needed for kick-start

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THE newly launched Malaysian Furniture Design Centre (MFDC) needs a RM5 million grant to kick-start its programmes to promote and develop Malaysian original and "national" furniture designs.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the grant is important in order to expose Malaysian furniture designers to international standards.

"At least an initial sum of RM5 million is needed to start the courses over the two-year period.

"The MFDC has already submitted a proposal to the Government ... I will also bring up the matter at the next Cabinet meeting," he told newsmen after the launching of the MFDC in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad launched the RM2 million centre.

In his speech, Dr Lim said the grant will benefit all quarters and promote originality in furniture design in the country.

"We need some contribution to kick-start the design courses and when these designs have been accepted, we will try to get revenue through royalties.

"We may also impose certain fee so that the design courses will be self-sustaining rather than hoping for financial assistance from the Government," he said.

The MFDC is a joint effort between the Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) and the Malaysian Furniture Industry Council (MFIC). The centre's activities will be managed by Semangat Kurnia Sdn Bhd, a joint venture between MTC and MFIC.

With the full support and cooperation of the Government and furniture manufacturers, Dr Lim said, the MFDC is set to assist the furniture industry to achieve greater heights.

"I am very confident that through MFDC, we can push our furniture industry exports to RM7 billion by the year 2005," he added.

In fact, Dr Lim said, the furniture industry has done quite well in the last 10 years, registering 17 per cent growth annually.

"Barring unforeseen circumstances, we hope to achieve an export target of RM4 billion this year," he said.

Dr Lim urged local designers to go not only for the low-price market, but also the medium-price and high-price segments.

"To get into the medium- and high-price markets, you must have originality in design. That is why the grant is important to us to buy equipment and hire professionals to assist us in conducting courses," he said.

Dr Lim also said Malaysia can no longer rely on contracts on manufacturing under an Original Equipment Manufacturer arrangement.

Therefore, he said, bold and proactive strategies must be adopted to ensure that Malaysian furniture continues to be a major player in the world market. In this regard, the MFDC will be working on the mechanics and the legal framework to register designs both of local and foreign origin.

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