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Wood, bamboo sector shows strong growth

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WOOD and bamboo-based furniture has recorded an encouraging growth trend with increasing export values within the past 10 years, said the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) director-general Datuk Abdul Rashid Mat Amin.

The products recorded a RM2.6 billion worth of export last year compared with RM93.8 million in 1988. During the above said period, the country's export value for major wood-based products also increased to RM14.7 billion compared with RM7.2 billion in 1988.

"We are now trying to encourage more Malaysians to buy local-made furniture which quality is comparable if not better than imports," he said in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

MTIB, together with co-sponsors Mines Exhibition Management Sdn Bhd (Mines) and Trade-Link Exhibition Services Sdn Bhd (TES), are organising a Malaysian Timber Week '98 as an effort to create such awareness among the locals.

When questioned that some Malaysians cannot afford local-made furniture such as those made of bamboo as they are priced too expensively, he said furniture makers have to remain competitive with the other producers.

"Malaysia is not the only country which produces such furniture. We are still at our initial stage in bamboo industry and Malaysian products based on bamboo are still insufficient in the local market, but we are improving," he said, adding that once the problem is solved, the products can be sold at cheaper prices.

On whether Malaysia is insufficient of good designs and finishing touches in furniture, Abdul Rashid said in 1995, Malaysia was ranked at number 15 of the global furniture market.

"Countries which topped the chart included Italy, Germany and the US, Malaysia might be number one in terms of tropical timber country that produced wood-based furniture during that period."

He said furniture industry is divided into three categories - the lower end, medium end and high end.

"Previously we focussed more on the medium end but now we are going for the high end," he said, adding this will be achieved through the setting up the Malaysian Furniture Design Centre which is scheduled to be officiated by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on November 20.

"The centre can help us to manufacture our own brand of designs," Abdul Rashid said.

The Malaysian Timber Week '98 will be officiated by Primary Industry Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and held at the Mines Exhibition Centre, Kuala Lumpur from December 1 to 6. Last year the event was held in Johor Baru.

This year's theme is "Appreciating the Uniqueness and Beauty of Malaysian Timber Products."

A seminar has been lined up which will be attended by architects, engineers, developers and housing planners, construction contractors, interior decorators, quantity surveyors, specifiers and timber product entrepreneurs.

Some 200 companies are expected to take part in the exhibition.

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