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Malaysia In Top Eight Among World's Furniture Exporter

 By **Hazlinda Hamzah**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 3 (Bernama) -- Hundreds of pieces of furniture will be on display at the 18th edition of the five-day Malaysian International Furniture Fair, beginning here on March 6.

Close to 500 local and foreign furniture manufacturers and exporters are participating in the exposition, organised by MIFF Sdn Bhd.

The fair, where the manufacturers will get a chance to show their latest designs, will be held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) and Matrade Exhibition and Convention Centre (MECC).

Certainly, the Malaysian furniture industry is not at its "sunset" and the MIFF has proven this for the past 17 years.

"There are many Japanese and German purchasers already eyeing this year's fair. They will be in Kuala Lumpur between March 6 and 10 to choose new creations that our furniture makers are offering this year," said Datuk Dr Tan Chin Huat, managing director of MIFF Sdn Bhd.

PRICE

The prices of Malaysian-made furniture are expected to be cheaper when compared to products made in developed countries, but certainly of better quality than others produced in Indo-China.

"Our prices are quite competitive. We have good quality rubberwood. That is why our products are sometimes given a new brand name by the foreign purchasers, especially our high-value products. That is our purchasers' prerogative. They are mostly Europeans.

"Only 20 manufacturers at most have established their brand and in the world furniture market. Their prices are fixed wherever you buy them," Tan said.

Currently the most notable furniture brands in the Western world include Baker, Century, Henredon, Henkel Harris, Stickley and Kravet, just to name a few.

However, furniture produced by Hup Chong Furniture, according to Chua Chun Chai, managing director of the Klang-based home furniture company, has been very well received in the United States and Canada.

"In 2001, we entered the market in these countries. We started with simple sets at first. We then learned from the other companies and we improved on our bedroom sets, especially on colours and finishing. More business was generated in the year after that. Our products are promoted better," Chua said.

Hup Chong furniture is also now available in Australia, United Kingdom and the Middle East.

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"We have to admit that the United States is the best market for our products, and we target the country for the marketing of Hup Chong manufactured furniture," Chua told Bernama.

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CHANGING RAPIDLY

The world is seen to be changing rapidly in the eyes of many furniture Manufacturers, and this is especially true in Asia, observes Tan.

"Houses in Asia, including Hong Kong and Malaysia, are bigger in size now. Even the Japanese are showing more interest, buying larger-sized furniture today," he said.

Bedroom furniture is undergoing a lot of changes to fill the needs of today's product innovation. Furniture for the office and home is seen to be more functional as people's needs and habits are increasingly changing in tandem with product designs.

"Space is a concern for most furniture users today, so we apply that into bedroom design," said Chua, whose furniture buyers include Marks & Spencer and J. C. Penney Company.

PLAYER

Another prominent player in the industry is DPS Industries Sdn Bhd, a publicly listed company that started out in the wood industry 30 years ago.

"We operated a sawmill first, then we went into logging and then we bought a Taiwanese company in 1985. Our first participation in the MIFF was in 1998 and we are still participating.

"I still find the MIFF relevant and important, contributing greatly to the future of Malaysian manufacturers in the furniture industry.

"This industry is most definitely an evergreen industry. Although many may regard it as high-risk, the challenges are worth facing. It brings economic gains through tourism as well, when visitors spend and buy our products," said Datuk Peter Sow Chin Chuan, Executive Chairman of Melaka-based DPS Industries.

OFFICE FURNITURE

Another local manufacturer active in furniture exhibitions is Benithem Sdn. Bhd, which started out more than 12 years ago.

It all started when the company participated at an exhibition in Germany in 2004.

This motivated them to go further into the world of manufacturing and designing office furniture at their factory in Pontian, Johor.

Ben Teo, managing director of Benithem Sdn Bhd, portrays the company as the "Let our quality do the talking" player on the local furniture industry front.

Benithem's products are sought after today by purchasers in Europe, Middle East, Africa and Australia.

"We developed our R&D department to ensure that our products, especially our office chairs, are multifunctional. We also ensure they get accepted into the world market by passing the stringent tests they are put through overseas, as in Holland.

"The Dutch are much taller than us, so they need office chairs of at least 170 cm in height for their ladies and 190 cm for their men. We try to conform accordingly as best we can," Teo told Bernama.

The MIFF 2012 expects to see export turnover in furniture of almost US\$780 million. or RM2.2 billion.

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