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Use local raw materials — Associations

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Lai King Min, Sarawak Furniture Industry Association president

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KUCHING: East Malaysian furniture associations have expressed the need for more hardwood and timber-based materials to complement the furniture manufacturers' requirements for raw materials as opposed to alternative non-timber sources.

President of Sarawak Furniture Industry Association Lai King Min stated, "Presently, the technology (for non-timber materials) is present in Malaysia but the substitutes are more expensive than hard woods.

"Certain products from these alternative sources have been displayed but are not commercially viable. For example, Sarawak does not have a sustainable bamboo

supply while China has the most advanced technology and means for bamboo-based products.

"Furniture makers should look into locally available raw materials and presently, it is not economical for local players to set up large operations and big factories in Sarawak as multi-national companies have benefits such as tax incentives and raw material supply," he said.

Meanwhile, Sabah Furniture Association president Ng Cheong Hoo stated that at present, the furniture makers there were using only the acacia family (such as acacia mangium) as a timber-based raw material source as no other species were available in sustainable amounts.

Nonetheless, acacia had been successfully used for the past 10 years and Sabah was the first state to use it as a source of raw materials for furniture making, according to him.

He pointed out, "Artificial materials are largely being used in China and Vietnam but we have doubts as to whether such materials would be widely accepted here. In terms of export, the industry

has seen declining shipments to the European Union which has been affected by the economic turndown.

"The volume of export to Japan

has also been declining and we have not actively exported to the US since 9/11," he said, adding that the availability of logs for the furniture industry was declining while the cost of manufacturing was rising.

As such, there was a need for more incentives and drivers by relevant bodies to catalyse a revitalisation of the furniture industry, he emphasised.

Currently, alternative materials and their viability as effective substitutes are being researched and developed by bodies such as Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM).

Despite the prospects of these potentially game-changing materials, both association presidents expressed their doubts in the economic viability as the materials would have to be imported into East Malaysia, thus incurring logistic cost and driving up the overall production costs.



APPEAL AND VIABILITY: Photo shows a man looking over furniture made of alternative materials at an industry seminar here lately. Furniture makers should look into locally available raw materials and alternative materials may not be readily accepted by local consumers, according to East Malaysian furniture associations.