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# Bamboo to replace timber

Local firm to set up pilot plant, full-scale production within next five years

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FAST-GROWING and stronger than oak, the bamboo industry in Malaysia is set to give the multi-billion timber industry a run for their money.

Despite bamboos being cheaper to harvest and one of the fastest growing plants, it has always been taken lightly as timber was the preferred building material used for flooring, paneling and construction uses.

According to the Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia, 45% of the country's bamboos are planted in Sarawak, 31% in Peninsular Malaysia and 24% in Sabah — which the government is in an effort to promote bamboo as a potential export earner for the country and a source of income for the rural population.

Locally-based KAR Masterpiece Sdn Bhd, is one of the few companies that deals with

bamboo research and development, production, marketing as well as the distribution of bamboo products.

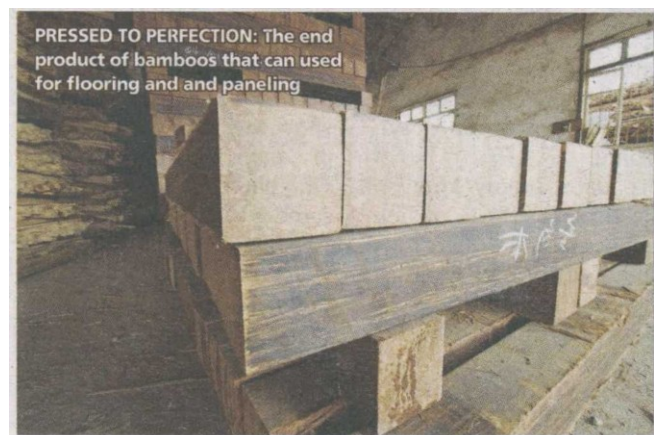
Its managing director Amita Chong said the bamboo industry in Malaysia is currently operating on a small scale — as most agricultural land is being used for palm oil plantation.

Bamboo has always been perceived sub-standard in terms of quality because it is commonly used in the rural industry in the country, he explained, there is a need to change the mindset of Malaysians on the lucrative possibilities of the bamboo industry

“Bamboos can withstand a great deal of use without damage. It's even stronger than oak and is considered to be the most durable hardwood.”

“When laminated, bamboo is nearly as strong as soft steel and does not swell or shrink as hardwoods do, making it ideal for furniture and floors.”

He said it is environmentally friendly to harvest bamboos as the plant renews from three



to five years without any replanting — unlike hardwood trees where it can be cut down only once.

The company is currently working with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, to identify the species and locations suitable for large scale production locally.

“We are looking at potential plantations here and products suitable for our climate.”

Findings showed that the Malaysian Semantan bamboo is extremely suitable for manufacturing purposes, he said,

the company aims to boost the industry and establish a locally based green timber exporter.

The company is looking to set up a pilot plant and a full scale production facility in Malaysia within the next five years, Chong added.

According to a report, the bamboo industry was worth up to US\$10 billion (RM30.6 billion) in 2004 and is expected to reach US\$20 billion (RM61.3 billion) in 2015 — of which China's share is almost half.