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# Cross laminated timber the future for Sabah

**Leonard Alaza**

KOTA KINABALU: Research has found that cross laminated timber (CLT) could be the future of the wood and building industry in Sabah; although it appears there is a mountain to climb before proponents see a wooden skyline in the state.

The eight-month joint research between a team of University Malaysia Sabah wood technology and industry final year students and Sapulut Forest Development Sdn Bhd has shown promising results to suggest that tall buildings can be built using timber.

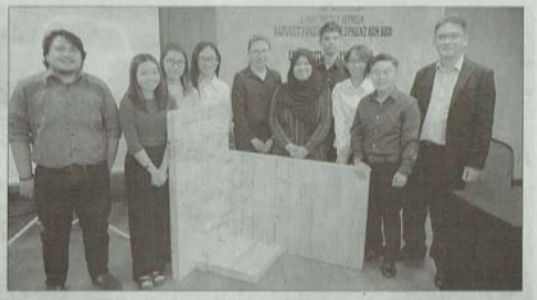
CLT however is not a new concept for it has been used in other countries, most notably in Vancouver, Canada, where the world's tallest building with a timber structure, Brock Commons Tallwood House, is standing at the height of 53 metres.

Closer to home is Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore.

It will be Asia's largest wooden building when completed.

CLT refers to large-scale, prefabricated, solid engineered wood panels - lightweight yet very strong, with superior acoustic, fire, seismic, and thermal performance.

It is also fast and easy to install, generating almost no waste onsite. CLT is also said to offer design flexibility and low environmental impact.



The nine-member UMS research team and Dr Liew (far right), pose with a CLT wall panels display.

The research team, who had experimented with 'laran' and 'batai' plantation timber species, presented their findings to various industry players and agency representatives on Thursday.

"Basically, we were studying strength and durability. Our research covered many areas from looking at the mechanical (aspects), fire resistance and so on.

"As we can see from the results, it's promising. These plantation timber can be used on buildings and apartments," said Dr Liew Kang Chiang, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Science and Natural Resources (Forestry Complex), UMS.

He said the challenge for the academic team is converting their research data into something that can be used by engineers.

"We know it's safe. But we need to convert our data into engineering data so that engineers can use to build buildings with. That's our challenge," he said, admitting however that he could not see the building industry in the state using CLT at the moment due to various roadblocks,and current regulations.

In the meantime, Liew agreed that further research should be conducted to cover more areas, including CLT's contribution to the global commitment in carbon reduction, in order to convince both policy makers and the industry.

Among those who attended the presentation were representatives from Timber Association Sabah, Sabah Forestry Department, Malaysian Timber Industry Board, Forest Research Institute Malaysia and Malaysia Investment Development Authority.

Meanwhile, Sapulut Forest Development Sdn Bhd managing director Norman Wong said it was assuring to learn about the research findings considering the business of the forest plantation company.

"What led us to be part of the research was because we wanted to validate our conviction that CLT could offer the highest value for our planted timber. It was partly to reassure us that we were on the right track.

"Otherwise, we would be planting species which would only be sold for low value like veneer. What we want is a material that is low in weight and high in strength. And we think CLT can give us this," he said.

But he stressed that if the local industry would fully embrace CLT in the near future, it is important that the supply of raw materials always remain constant.

In the meantime, he acknowledged that the challenge is to promote CLT to industry and policy makers due to some misconceptions and lack of awareness about the material.

On the other hand, Wong noted that the world has changed in terms of usage of building materials since CLT was invented in Europe 20 years ago.

It has become a widely used construction material and has started to attract global attention. It has been reported that in Europe, CLT successfully competes with steel, brick and concrete in selected market segments, such as multi-family buildings.