

**KERATAN AKHBAR-AKHBAR TEMPATAN  
TARIKH: 18 NOVEMBER 2014 (SELASA)**

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# Fast-forward with fibre

## Company taps potential of alternative crop

WHEN the Asean Free Trade Area (AFTA) took effect in 2010, domestic tobacco growers, particularly in major growing areas in Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah and Perlis were affected when the Government decided to terminate subsidies on tobacco farming to comply with AFTA and the World Health Organisation regulations.

Additionally, they were less competitive compared with their lower-cost peers in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines.

The government, recognising this, dissolved the Malaysia Tobacco Board and replaced it with Malaysia Kenaf and Tobacco Board or Lembaga Kenaf dan Tembakau Negara (LKTN) with a focus on kenaf becoming an alternative cash crop for tobacco growers.

The fast-growing kenaf (it matures in 100 to 200 days) is a fibrous plant with the scientific name *hibiscus cannabinus*. It has potential to be used as construction material and to be turned automotive components where weight and environmental concerns are an issue.

KPC Manufacturing Sdn Bhd used it to manufacture ceiling and wall panelling.

KPC Manufacturing's co-founder and managing director Zulfairis Zulkifli said he was looking for opportunities in the green industry when he thought of exploring the possibilities with Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi).

"We wanted different products, going beyond solar panels and bio-fuel and found our niche in green construction material," he said.

In 2010, after speaking with the Mardi researchers, he decided to set up a company to specialise in manufacturing ceiling and panel-



ling products from kenaf with five partners.

Kenaf polymer composite or KPC is a combination of kenaf fibre with other materials to create a polymer composite, as opposed to wood-based polymer composite (WPC) which consist of sawdust from sawmills or sometimes rice husk.

Both can be turned into boards and panels for construction and industrial use.

Zulfairis said the kenaf was sourced from LKTN and the final product is stronger, more reliable and environmental friendly.

"It is environmental friendly because it is from sustainable mate-

rial. Kenaf is known to mature fast and also, if there are defects in the final product, we can recycle it and re-manufacture the product," he said.

As a polymer, the material allows for custom shapes and sizes to be produced and fitted in curvy areas in houses and buildings.

To ensure its reliability and safety, he said their products are certified by Sirim and also sent for Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive (RoHS) and formaldehyde testing by TÜV Rheinland in Malaysia, a product-testing company that does work on behalf of the European Union and other localities.



1 Zulfairis showing the flexible kenaf polymer composite (KPC) final product.

2 KPC panels manufacturing plant in Semenyih.

Such collaboration between Mardi and him had brought out the best of Malaysian researchers and entrepreneurs. Mardi retains the intellectual property rights while the company is able to manufacture the products and market them with the brand name 'dayham panels'.

"We are the licensed technology partner where we pay an upfront fee and an annual 3% royalty based on our annual revenue," he said.

Starting with RM2mil capital and subsequently a soft loan of RM3mil from Malaysian Technology Development Corp (MTDC), the manufacturing engineering graduate said the initial capital was spent

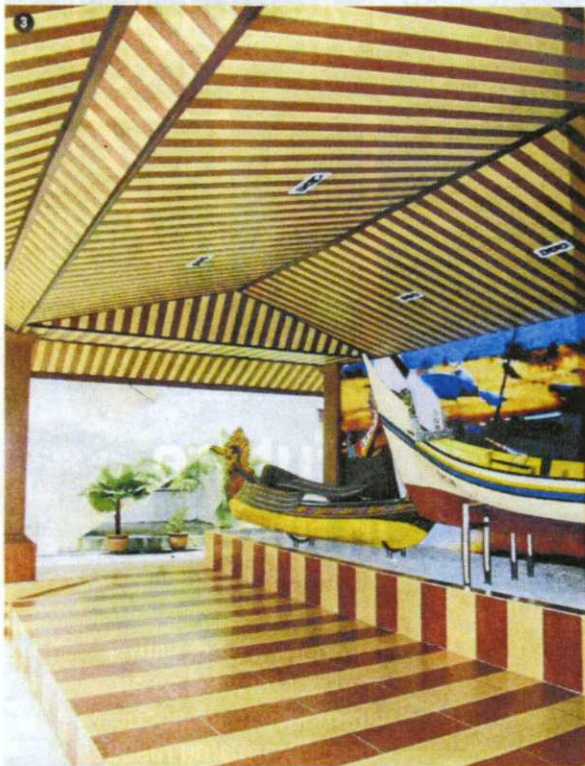
mostly on procuring the manufacturing machines from overseas.

A lot was spent on promoting the brand, especially via overseas exhibition, which he said the company had participated over 20 exhibitions, both local and foreign.

Operating with 12 staff in a rented 18,000 sq ft manufacturing plant in Semenyih, the company focused on producing ceiling and wall panel for the first three years before diversifying to outdoor decking and flooring products early this year, with a total of four product lines and four colour choices.

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## Four product lines and counting

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Although a polymer, it comes in a wood-based colour that gives it a wood-like appearance with no additional repainting needed.

Manufacturing the product is one phase of the business, and as the saying goes what you make you must sell. To address that aspect of the business, Zulfairis incorporated another company, DS Decor Sdn Bhd, to deal directly with retail clients.

DS Decor does design, supply,

and installation of the product. Zulfairis says clients these days like to see the finished product installed in their dream home before deciding on what to purchase.

"We have 3D designs which we are able to show our clients to help them make an informed decision," he said.

They also supply directly to architecture firms and contractors. He said these transactions occur often at the early stage where they play a major role in educating the public about the potential of using KPC

over wood.

"We would then guide them on how they could install the products in their clients' home," he said.

To date, the products had been used in over 500 individual houses

and including government buildings such as the National Museum to resorts, with each contract value from RM2,000 for retail customers to over RM700,000 for developer-based projects.

- 3 A sample of kenaf polymer composite (KPC) used as ceiling panels.
- 4 A staff mixing the materials to make KPC panels.
- 5 A worker inspecting the quality of the KPC panel. They can easily be sent for recycling should the product failed to meet the required standards.



## **Komitmen Pelaburan Bernilai RM3.57 Bilion Bakal Diterima ECER**

KUALA LUMPUR, 17 Nov (Bernama) -- Komitmen pelaburan bernilai RM3.57 bilion bakal diterima Wilayah Ekonomi Pantai Timur (ECER) pada suku keempat tahun ini.

Pelaburan berkenaan dijanjikan 16 syarikat, termasuk lapan penerima manfaat inisiatif Unit Peneraju Agenda Bumiputera (Teraju), demikian umum Majlis Pembangunan Wilayah Ekonomi Pantai Timur (ECERDC) pada Isnin.

"Setakat ini, 29 syarikat di ECER dengan nilai pelaburan keseluruhan sebanyak RM646.5 juta telah mendapat manfaat daripada dana fasilitasi Teraju bernilai RM84.1 juta manakala 65 syarikat telah dikenal pasti sebagai syarikat Bumiputera berprestasi tinggi (Teras)," katanya dalam pengumuman sempena mesyuarat suku keempat ECER 2014 di sini pada Isnin.

Perdana Menteri Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif Maybank Datuk Abdul Farid Alias dan Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif ECERDC Datuk Jebasingam Issace John, turut hadir pada majlis berkenaan.

Najib, yang juga Pengerusi ECERDC, menyaksikan pertukaran dokumen antara Maybank dan ECERDC untuk menubuhkan Usahawan ECER-Maybank yang akan memberikan bantuan kewangan kepada usahawan tempatan di ECER.

Sebagai permulaan, Maybank dan Maybank Islamic akan memperuntukkan RM100 juta untuk pembiayaan perniagaan manakala ECERDC akan memperuntukkan RM10 juta bagi menampung faedah atau bayaran kadar keuntungan.

Menurut ECERDC, langkah itu dijangka memberi manfaat kepada 2,000 usahawan mikro serta kecil dan sederhana di Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang dan Mersing, Johor pada akhir tahun 2015.

Ia berkata kerjasama itu akan diteruskan di bawah Rancangan Malaysia ke-11, yang bermula tahun depan, bagi faedah 6,000 usahawan dalam ECER menjelang 2020.

ECERDC berkata skim itu akan dilaksanakan bulan ini, yang menawarkan empat jenis bantuan kewangan, iaitu Portfolio Jaminan-i PKS, Perniagaan Hartanah PKS Pembiayaan-i, Pembiayaan Micro PKS dan Pembiayaan Mikro Runcit.

Ia berkata Skim Mikro Pembiayaan Runcit ditawarkan secara eksklusif untuk usahawan wanita dengan jumlah pinjaman maksimum RM10,000 manakala skim lain yang ditawarkan jumlah pembiayaan yang berbeza dari RM20,000 hingga RM50,000.

