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Steady rise for Malaysia's timber industry

KUALALUMPUR: The Malaysian timber industry has managed to sustain itself fairly well despite the Covid-19 pandemonium and its associated economic fallout.

Demand for Malaysian timber-based products, especially furniture grew in early 2020 as many people around the world began working from home, leading to a rise in home construction, repairs, and remodelling.

Products such as plywood, sawntimber, Builders Joinery and Carpentry (BJC) also heavily contributed to the gains chalked up by the industry last year.

Malaysia's exports of timber products recorded a growth of 3.1 per cent from RM22.02 billion in 2020 to RM22.7 billion in 2021.

In terms of percentage of export value growth year-on-year, plywood tops the rank together with wooden furniture, sawntimber and BJC contributing to more than half in total exports.

"There was a surge in demand for Malaysian plywood in Japan and the United States in 2021," said MTC chairman Madam Hajah Norrida Yusoff, adding that the liquidation of a top plywood manufacturer in Japan led to the increase in demand.

"The recovery of the construction industry in both Japan and United States, especially in the latter resulted in double-digit growth for Malaysia's plywood industry," she said.

Malaysia's export of wooden furniture to the US, which is the largest export market, remains moderate while Singapore and

India contributed to Malaysia's double-digit growth as the economies in these two countries head towards their pre-pandemic days.

Hajah Norrida said the Malaysian timber industry is not entirely out of the woods as there are still some laggards in terms of rising sea freight charges, availability of containers, manpower shortages and lack of raw material.

"MTC introduced many programmes since 2020 to help the industry overcome the more pressing challenges, especially by providing incentives which also include catering to technological advancements that help increase the use of resources efficiently in all aspects apart from defraying sea freight charges," she said.

Throughout the pandemic MTC has been helping industry members through its programmes to stabilise their operations as well as find business opportunities as they build their resilience in navigating the aftershocks of COVID-19.

"This year, the Council's seven Must-Wins centre on reviving businesses with several new programmes that underpin circular economy and sustainability through development programmes for Oil Palm Trunk products, product design collaboration with the Forest Research Institute Malaysia and establishing the Environmental, Governance and Social guidelines for the timber industry," said MTC CEO Mr Muhtar Suhaili. — Bernama