

Local firms urged to explore EU potential

Malaysia has the capability to be a regional hub just as successfully as Singapore has been, given its land, infrastructure, and human and natural resources

By ALFEAN HARDY

THE EU-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EU-MCCI) is encouraging local firms to go beyond traditional European markets as well as calling for more proactive measures by the government to promote Malaysia as a gateway to the Asean region, its chairman David Jones said.

Officially formed in 2003, the EU-MCCI is a non-profit private sector organisation that promotes, supports and develops European Union (EU) business interests locally as well as facilitates trade, commerce and investments between Europe and Malaysia.

Speaking to *The Malaysian Reserve* recently, Jones said that local firms, when going into Europe, tended to go into prime EU countries like the UK, France, Germany and Italy. "Very seldom do they go into the Nordic countries or into the former Eastern Bloc countries," he said.

"Yet, many of these countries have very good technologies, products and services and would be ab-



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solutely delighted to actually look at the Asian markets and to see Malaysia as their gateway into Asia. I would want local firms to look at some of the smaller of the 27 member states of the European Union," he added.

Jones said there was a lot of untapped potential in countries like the Czech Republic and Poland for aerospace engineering and shipbuilding respectively.

"The reason why the Czech Republic was not so well known previously was because they were doing a lot of work for the former Soviet

Union," he said.

"They have got technologies, good skill sets, good experience and so on but are not very good at marketing themselves outside of the European context.

"There are other countries as well like Poland, Slovenia and more have very good skills. When Malaysia is looking for new technologies and so on, this is one area that they should focus in," he added.

Jones said Malaysia has the capability to be a regional hub just as successfully as Singapore has been, given its land, infrastructure, and

human and natural resources. However, he said there was a need to attract smaller, less well known European multinationals (MNCs) to come in and not just the larger firms.

"By encouraging such firms to come in, you're encouraging trade and so on. Eventually you'll have a huge cluster of MNCs that creates a cluster of human resources expertise and supporting industries. Singapore has been very successful in doing this in the past and Malaysia must look at this in a similar light," he said, adding that such clusters

have a tendency of attracting more MNCs to come in.

Jones also said, while there were many positives in investing in Malaysia, one of its shortcomings was its relatively small domestic market of about 27 million people. "But within Asean you have 550 million people and the sooner Malaysia sets itself up as a gateway into the region the better chance its got," he said.

"While this will involve more free trade agreements within Asean and the lowering of barriers and tariffs non-tariffs, it's the only way forward for Malaysia. If it can, then there's real opportunities to encourage more FDI into the country," he added.

Jones said Malaysia had already started to take tentative steps in this direction, but more is needed to be done. He praised the recent liberalisation in the financial services sector as well as in 27 other sectors recently as a step in the right direction as it would promote competition, which would spur Malaysia's attractiveness to investors.

"You need competition to raise your game and, when you've got complacency, it won't raise the game. And, if Malaysia is interested in being a contender going forward, there are also too many countries in the region that are equally hungry for success. If Malaysia can demonstrate that it can compete, then it can only grow," he added.

Europa 2009 to reward EU-Malaysia trade/investment

THE EU-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (EU-MCCI) is set to host its second Europa Awards this Friday (May 15, 2009) after a one-year hiatus as it sought to fine tune an event that it hoped will become an annual affair in the non-profit organisation's calendar, its chairman David Jones said.

First hosted in November 2007, the awards celebrate European Union (EU) and Malaysian trade and investment relations. Three awards are awarded, highest excellence trade/investment into the European Union (EU) by a Malaysian investor, trade/investment into Malaysia by a European investor and long term excellence in EU-Malaysia trade/investment.

The first award is given to a Malaysian member company that is either headquartered or originated locally that is investing/trading in

the EU. The second rewards a EU member company investing/trading in Malaysia that has shown exemplary business excellence.

The third awards an EU-MCCI member company that has shown exemplary business excellence over the past three years.

The Europa Awards 2009 will be held at the Sheraton Imperial, Kuala Lumpur.

Speaking to *The Malaysian Reserve* in Kuala Lumpur recently, EU-MCCI chairman David Jones said the hiatus between the inaugural and the award this year, given that the Europa Awards are designed to be held annually, was brought about by lessons learnt from the first event.

"We had our very first one at the back end of 2007 and, I'll be honest with you, we learnt a lot from it. There were things that went well and there were things that did not

go well," he said.

The planning period for an event to be held earlier in the year also meant that there was no time for a Europa 2008.

One positive gleamed from that inaugural event, Jones said, was the positive turnout, with some 200 plus guests showing up for the event in spite of two other major events being held that same night. One negative, he said, was that one of the winners, based in Penang, was a no-show.

"One thing I believe we got right was the decision from the start to limit winners to only three categories. You'll find umpteen amounts of awards being awarded at most awards shows events here and we didn't want that. We wanted to keep ours short, sharp and sweet," he said.

"We also wanted the Awards to

have value and we wanted people attending to have an enjoyable experience as well as do some informal networking," he added.

Jones said another lesson learnt from the first Europa Awards was that the original selection criteria to choose the winners was a tad strict.

"We had wanted it to be completely transparent, so none of our board of directors, none of our executive committee members and their member companies, and none of our sponsors and so on, could be entitled for an award. We've changed it a bit this year," he said.

Another change, he said, was that now no one, except independent auditor Horwath and an independent selection committee that selects the winners, knew who the winners for Europa Awards 2009 are. "I believe there are ten nominees for the three

categories and even I don't know who has actually won this year," he added.

The decision to shift the Europa Awards to earlier in the year was brought about by several technical problems, which included the plethora of year-end festive holidays that limited the time when the event could be held, said Jones.

"In the end, we decided to time the awards to be closer to Europe Day, which is May 9. Europe Day is an important annual point on the calendar and, while we would like to have held the event on that day itself, all the hotels are booked on the day itself.

"Still, May 15 is actually quite close enough and it allows us to celebrate Europe Day with the EU ambassador and then have our own event a week later," he added.

— By Alfean Hardy

Coming Events

► MAY 11

- Malaysian International Cocoa Conference 2009's opening address at Berjaya Times Square Hotel & Convention Center, KL, at 8:30am.
- Euromobil Sdn Bhd launches all-new Audi Q5 at Glenmarie Golf & Country Club, 3, Jln Usahawan U1/8, Shah Alam, at 10am.
- Biotechcorp announces 2008 financial results at Level 4, Room 405, KLCC, KL, at 10am.
- LOFSA 2008 annual report's press conference at Conference Room, 16th Floor, Block A, Bank Negara Malaysia, KL, at 3:30pm.
- Malaysian International Cocoa Dinner 2009 at Manhattan Ballroom, Berjaya Times Square Hotel & Convention Center, KL, at 7:45pm.

► MAY 12

- Malaysia Airports launches hotline for flight information at AV Room, VIP Lounge, Main Terminal Building, KLIA, Sepang, at 9am.
- The Malaysian Industrial Development Authority and the Small and Medium Industries Development Corp's "Northern Region Investment and Trade Dialogue and Seminar on the Manufacturing and Services Sectors" at Holiday Villa Hotel, Alor Setar, at 9:30am.
- Malaysia Deposit Insurance Corp's media briefing on Deposit Insurance and its Public Awareness Campaign at The Grand Salon, Level 8, Le Meridien Hotel, 2, Jln Stesen Sentral, KL, at 9:30am.

- Eurocopter's media briefing at Mutiara Room, Saujana Resort, Jln Lapangan Terbang SAAS, Shah Alam, at 9:30am.
- Oracle's media roundtable - "Application Grid: Oracle's Vision for Next-Generation Application Servers and Foundation Infrastructure" at Tioman Room, Oracle Corp Malaysia office, Level 38, Menara Citibank, 165, Jln Ampang, KL, at 10am.
- Malaysia Airlines' ticket office opens at Skypark Subang Terminal, Lapangan Terbang Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah, Subang, at 10am.
- Dutch Lady Malaysia launches TT-RatioAdvance - a new formulation for Dutch Lady 123 and 456 Growing Up Milk at Mega Kidz, 3rd Floor, Mid Valley Megamall, KL, at 10:30am.

- F&N Coca-Cola (M) Sdn Bhd launches the freestyle street dance competition at Bangsar Telawi Street Bistro, Jln Telawi 3, Bangsar, KL, at 10:30am.
- Maxis FastTap Media Showcase and Media Conference at Meeting Room 302 - 303, Level 3, KL Convention Centre, KL, at 12noon.
- Accenture's media briefing at Accenture Boardroom, Level 66, Tower 2, Petronas Twin Towers, Jln Ampang, KL, at 2pm.
- KFC Holdings (M) Bhd launches 'Sudut Ayamas' at Ground Floor Maju Junction Mall, 1001, Jln Sultan Ismail, KL, at 10am.
- GE Healthcare's press conference at Accord Room, 6th Floor, Hilton KL, KL Sentral, KL, at 2pm.