

Lack of talented designers in sector also a concern

KUCHING: It would take a lot of new talents to build Sarawak's furniture sector, says director of Design and Innovation Institute at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Dr Khairul Aidil Azlin Abdul Rahman.

Aidil, who holds a PhD in Design Management from Chiba University, Japan, lamented that of the 400 furniture makers registered with state agencies, none had designers in their permanent employment.

"My own feeling is that even for small-scale furniture makers, if you are going to be successful, you should have at least three in-house designers," Aidil told reporters here yesterday, speaking at a press conference to promote an upcoming seminar on furniture making.

The academic said all aspects of the furniture industry depended on good designs, and so because furniture companies in Sarawak were not employing designers, the state was losing talent too.

Of the 40 to 60 furniture design graduates from Unimas every year, almost all head to Peninsular Malaysia, he said.

"There's too much migration now. They don't find opportunities here," said Aidil, adding that Sarawakian furniture makers were producing relatively basic products.

"The consumer market is very complex. Furniture is like fashion items.

"Taste changes every two to three years with people's changing lifestyles," he said.

"If manufacturers in Sarawak want to add value, they must move in



Getting their points across: (From left) Hashim, Abdul Hamid and Aidil. The trio spoke at a press conference in Kuching yesterday to promote an upcoming furniture making seminar.

tandem with the rest of society. Basically, they need to employ designers who are more aware of what can sell for more."

Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) deputy general manager Hashim Bojet said the local industry was currently only supplying the local markets.

Hashim said local manufacturers would also have to use more raw materials that were more accepted worldly as environment-friendly in order to export.

Hashim cited Ikea as an example, saying that the Scandinavian manufacturer of modern furniture used a lot of rubber wood.

"Rubber wood is already estab-

lished. It's sourced from internationally certified sources. Industries in peninsula (Malaysia) have benefited from this. They are replanting rubber trees."

In Sarawak, replanted forests mostly comprised acacia trees, Hashim said. "And of course, we do need better designs to start off with."