Star Special

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EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: A CELEBRATION OF TRADE SUCCESS

Honouring Malaysian businesses making bold export strides and thriving on the global stage

(Front, from left) Standard Chartered Saadiq Malaysia chief executive officer Bilal Parvaiz, PKT Logistics Group group chief executive and managing director Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio, Star Media Group (SMG) chief content officer Datin Paduka Esther Ng, SMG group chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt, Standard Chartered Malaysia independent non-executive director Tan Sri Shahril Ridzuan, SMG chairman Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng, Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa, Standard Chartered Malaysia chairman Datuk Yvonne Chia, Standard Chartered Malaysia chief executive officer Mak Joon Nien, Matrade Export Promotion and Market Access Division senior director S. Jai Shankar and SMG chief operating officer Lydia Wang posing with the award winners at the Export Excellence Awards 2024 Gala Night.

Toast to Malaysia's trade achievers

Clockwise from bottom left, Matrade export promotion and market access division senior director S. Jai Shankar, PKT Logistics Group group chief executive and managing director Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio, Standard Chartered Malaysia chief executive officer Mak Joon Nien, SMG chairman Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng, Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa, Standard Chartered Malaysia chairman Datuk Yvonne Chia, SMG group chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt, Standard Chartered Malaysia independent non-executive director Tan Sri Shahril Ridzuan and SMG chief operating officer Lydia Wang at the Export Excellence Awards 2024 gala night.— Photos by FAIHAN GHANI, GLENN GUAN, AZMAN GHANI, AZHAR MAHFOF, YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

AS the curtains draw on the fifth edition of the Export Excellence Awards (EEA), the spotlight is firmly on the companies that have not only weathered the ever-shifting dynamics of global trade – but also thrived.

These are Malaysia's export champions: trailblazers who have turned bold ideas into international success, charting new territories while upholding the principles of resilience, sustainability and innovation.

This year's EEA culminated in a prestigious gala night held at the W Hotel Kuala Lumpur, bringing together industry leaders, policymakers and trade enablers to honour 30 outstanding exporters across 14 award categories – from machinery, electrical and electronics, and agriculture, food and beverage to consumer and industrial products, and services.

Organised by Star Media Group (SMG) in partnership with Standard Chartered Malaysia, with PKT Logistics Group as co-sponsor and the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) as patron, the EEA continues to serve as a national platform to recognise high-performing Malaysian exporters – mid to large corporations as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Each year, the awards raise the bar higher, spotlighting not just volume and reach, but values – such as ESG (environmental, social and governance) commitment and community impact.

In his keynote speech, Investment, Trade and Industry Minister (Miti) Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz highlighted the strength of Malaysia's export sector, attributing its momentum to the agility of local businesses.

The Minister emphasised the need for forward-looking strategies amid shifting global dynamics.

"Malaysia's exporters have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience, contributing to the continued strength of our trade sector," he said. His speech was delivered by the ministry's deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa.

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GPRO Global Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Jaeson Cheng celebrating the company's wins at the fifth Export Excellence Awards.

EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024 Winners

Exporter of the Year	
Mid-Tier and Large Companies	**Categories**
Swift PMAS Sdn Bhd	Machinery, Electrical & Electronics
Small and Medium Enterprises	**Categories**
GPRO Global Sdn Bhd	Services
Woman Exporter of the Year	
Sarah Ho, Hovid Bhd	Mid-Tier and Large Companies
Joanne Tay, KJH Wood Industrial Sdn Bhd	Small and Medium Enterprises
Rising Star	
Small and Medium Enterprises	**Categories**
Euro Facade (M) Sdn Bhd	Services

Top Industry Award Winners		
Mid-Tier and Large Companies	**Award**	**Categories**
UMW Aerospace Sdn Bhd	Gold	Industrial Products
Mega Fortris Bhd	Silver	
LH Plus Sdn Bhd	Gold	Consumer Products
Kooka Paper Manufacturing Sdn Bhd	Silver	
Tristar Global Sdn Bhd	Gold	Agriculture, Food & Beverage
Swift PMAS Sdn Bhd	Gold	Machinery, Electrical & Electronics
X-Fab Sarawak Sdn Bhd	Silver	
Small and Medium Enterprises	**Award**	**Categories**
Authentic Timber Resources Sdn Bhd	Gold	Agriculture, Food & Beverage
Bhavani Foods (M) Sdn Bhd	Silver	
NSW Automation Sdn Bhd	Gold	Machinery, Electrical & Electronics
Famax Technology (M) Sdn Bhd	Silver	
Maxvue Vision Sdn Bhd	Gold	Consumer Products
Proguard Safety Manufacturing Sdn Bhd	Silver	
Isotop Corporation Sdn Bhd	Gold	Industrial Products
S K Specialties Sdn Bhd	Silver	
GPRO Global Sdn Bhd	Gold	Services
Gajas Putih Sdn Bhd	Silver	

Most Promising	
Mid-Tier and Large Companies	**Categories**
SB Tape Group Sdn Bhd	Industrial Products
UAC Bhd	
Sandisk Storage Malaysia Sdn Bhd	Machinery, Electrical & Electronics
Small and Medium Enterprises	**Categories**
Cryogenic Specialty Manufacturing Sdn Bhd	Industrial Products
H2O Flow Sdn Bhd	
Furutec Electrical Sdn Bhd	Machinery, Electrical & Electronics
Tenasia Corporation Sdn Bhd	Agriculture, Food & Beverage
Mattroy Logistics (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd	Services

(From left) Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry council member Datuk Dr AP Sivam, BDO advisory executive director Chok Chau On, executive Ooi Wei Ying, director Ong Weng Jin, Standard Chartered Saadiq Malaysia independent non-executive director Zainul Rahim, Standard Chartered Malaysia employee banking and personal banking sales head Andy Chan, Standard Chartered Saadiq Malaysia independent non-executive director Datuk Syed Moheeb Syed Kamarulzaman and Malaysian International Chamber Of Commerce and Industry Jasco Council co-chairman II Sangar Kandasamy sharing a moment during the evening's festivities.

Excited guests making the most of the photowall.

Recognising export excellence

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Among the evening's highlights were several special recognitions celebrating excellence and leadership in export.

These included the Special Awards: Rising Star, presented to Euro Facade (M) Sdn Bhd; Woman Exporter of the Year (SME) to Joanne Tay of KJH Wood Industrial Sdn Bhd; and Woman Exporter of the Year (Mid-tier and Large Companies) to Sarah Ho of Hovid Bhd.

GPRO Global Sdn Bhd and Swift PMAS Sdn Bhd were named Exporters of the Year for the SME and Mid-tier and Large Company categories, respectively.

What makes the winners of EEA 2024 stand out is not just their performance, but their perseverance.

Many have had to pivot strategies in response to pandemic aftershocks, currency fluctuations, rising ESG requirements from global buyers and now, geopolitical uncertainties.

Others have taken bold steps into unfamiliar markets, investing in market intelligence, local partnerships, and long-term branding efforts. SMEs in particular have shown remarkable grit.

As we celebrate this year's winners in this special pullout, it is clear that Malaysia's exporting future is bright – but it must be continually nurtured.

Building competitive advantage in today's trade environment requires more than transactional thinking. It demands investment in people, innovation and purpose. EEA will continue to evolve alongside the businesses it honours.

Because in recognising the best among us, we also shape the aspirations of the next generation of Malaysian exporters.

To every winner and participant, your journey uplifts the nation's trade story.

Congratulations – and thank you for making Malaysia proud.

Mak (left) and Tio in jocular spirits before the awards ceremony.

Star Media Group senior general manager Jamie Ng (second from left) catching up with EEA 2024 judges (from left) Kuala Lumpur Malay Chamber of Commerce deputy president Rizal Abdul Rahman, Standard Chartered Malaysia corporate and SME development head Lam Tuck Kin, independent non-executive directors Mohd Rashid Mohd Yusof and Datuk NK Tong, Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce vice presidents Kevin Siah Teong Chein and Datuk Bong Siak Kee, together with Malaysia Retail Chain Association vice president Dr Afendi Dahlan.

Songstress Evelyn Feroza serenading guests with her alluring vocals and stage presence at the gala night.

Encouraging messages for a global outreach

First of all, my heartfelt congratulations to all the winners tonight. This recognition is a significant milestone but it is by no means the final destination of your journey.

Your achievements have not only brought pride to your businesses but have also helped Malaysia make its mark on the global stage of international trade.

Your dedication, hard work and commitment over the years have played a vital role in shaping Malaysia's export landscape.

As we move forward, I encourage you to continue embracing innovation and to stay committed to excellence.

At the same time, let's strive to be more inclusive, more diversified and more sustainable in our approach.

And let's not forget the importance of digital transformation – this must be a key focus area as we future-proof our position in global trade.

Once again, congratulations and thank you for your unwavering contributions.

Let's continue to drive Malaysia forward, together.

Chan Seng Fatt
Group Chief Executive Officer
Star Media Group

These past five years will go down in history not just for the volatility we've witnessed globally, but also for how Malaysia has emerged from it, stronger than ever.

In the face of global uncertainty and supply chain disruption, Malaysia maintained a 4% GDP CAGR from 2019 to 2024, which speaks volumes about the strength of the country's fundamentals. Our exporters play a significant role in contributing to the GDP and in the context of the Export Excellence Awards, we've seen over 60% of our award winners hailing from high-value sectors such as electronics, industrial goods and digital services.

But this is not just about headlines or accolades. For our winners, this recognition validates their credibility not only to buyers and suppliers, but also to their employees.

With Malaysia as Asean Chair in 2025, the timing couldn't be more fitting as it's a powerful platform to show what we're capable of on the regional and global stage. Because success isn't a solo act; it's a collective, collaborative effort. And that's exactly what Malaysia has demonstrated over the last five years.

Mak Joon Nien
Chief Executive Officer
Standard Chartered Malaysia

Over the years, the Export Excellence Awards have grown from strength to strength. From the very beginning, we've seen tremendous growth in Malaysia's export sector, which in turn is reflected in the calibre of winners. The sophistication and quality of products and services being recognised today mirror where Malaysia's export sector is heading. We must appreciate the export sector's significant contribution to the nation's GDP.

Exporters deserve more recognition than they currently receive, and these awards offer meaningful acknowledgement – not just from the private sector but also from the government. Through this platform, we hope to show our support and appreciation for their efforts.

What's truly special about the awards is how they highlight the diversity within our export ecosystem – from young exporters to seasoned manufacturers, and from product-driven businesses to service-based ones. It offers a unique and comprehensive view of Malaysia's export landscape, which stands apart from many other countries.

S. Jai Shankar
Senior Director, Export Promotion and Market Access Division
Matrade

Exporting is no easy feat – mainly because the level of competition is so intense.

With imports, we're catering to the Malaysian market, which we understand well. But when it comes to exports, it's a whole different ball game. It's challenging – but those who succeed truly demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability.

We've always seen Malaysian exporters as our local heroes – and today, we are proud to honour them.

Of course, we recognise that this year has come with its own set of challenges. Many winners will be heading back to the office after this celebration, only to face the ongoing uncertainties of regional tariff tensions.

Our advice to Malaysian businesses is this: we need to ramp up our exports.

The domestic market is familiar and easier to navigate – but exporting is where the real challenge lies. And those who succeed in exports? You're already champions, our unsung heroes.

Congratulations once again to all the winners.

Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio
Group Chief Executive and Managing Director
PKT Logistics Group

EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

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5 YEARS

CONGRATULATIONS

SWIFT PMAS SDN BHD

(1479561-A)

MID-TIER AND LARGE COMPANIES

★ EXPORTER OF THE YEAR ★

EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024

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Engineered for export success

WINNING the Exporter of the Year in the Export Excellence Awards 2024 (Mid-tier and Large Companies) was a strong validation of Swift PMAS Sdn Bhd's direction.

"Our success stems from the specialisation of providing industrial automation and power systems to the oil and gas, oils and grains, and utility industries," said Swift Energy Technology Berhad, the holding company of Swift PMAS, chief executive officer Tan Bin Chee.

"These include Ex-solar PV systems (explosion-resistant photovoltaic systems), power distribution systems and other process automation solutions designed for use in industries such as edible oils, food processing and other sectors where explosion protection is critical."

Tan said the company has successfully deployed its Ex-solar PV systems across multiple offshore projects operating in remote and minimally manned platforms.

"We have established long-term relationships with global engineering, procurement and construction contractors, oil majors and system integrators. This combination of product specialisation, certifications and collaborative partnerships has contributed to the expansion of our export footprint to over 55 countries globally," he added.

Tan explained that his 65,000sq ft (6,038sq m) production and office facility in Shah Alam carries out engineering, design and production activities in-house, while providing logistical advantages for exportation.

Tan: 'Long-term relationships with global contractors, oil majors and system integrators contributed to Swift PMAS' expansion in over 55 countries globally.' — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

"Our team includes 27 system engineers, 10 mechanical and electrical design engineers, and over 50 production personnel equipped with advanced machinery such as CNC turret punching, laser cutting, and copper busbar processing," he said.

"All designs and quality controls for products intended for IECEx and ATEX certification are performed internally by our QA/QC team in accordance with the applicable standards, ensuring consistency across projects and geographies."

When facing upcoming challenges, such as supply chain disruptions and geopolitical uncertainties, the company adopts multi-sourcing strategies to procure key materials and components. It also strengthens vendor relationships and improves inventory management processes to help buffer against supply chain volatility.

"Close coordination with our clients and suppliers enabled us to proactively adjust schedules and minimise project disruptions when challenges arose," said Tan.

"Geopolitically, our diversified client base across Asia and multiple overseas markets reduces exposure to any single market or region, helping us maintain operational stability despite changing global conditions."

Recently Swift PMAS expanded into new export markets that included other nations in South-East Asia and South Africa.

"We established a strong presence in China, Singapore and Thailand, tapping into the increasing demand for engineering solutions in these fast-growing economies," Tan elaborated.

"Our market entry was supported by forging strategic alliances with local agents, distributors and other strategic partners, allowing us to build effective distribution networks and enhance customer reach."

He also explained that the ability to customise products to meet the specific technical needs of each market, combined with optimised supply chain and logistics operations, has further strengthened its competitiveness.

When quizzed on how sustainable the company is, Tan replied that ESG principles are integrated across both the operations and export activities.

"Up to 80% of raw materials, from copper to sheet metal, wires and more used to produce our finished product are recyclable. We embrace sustainable manufacturing practices to minimise environmental impact.

"Our Ex-solar PV business facilitates the oil majors to carry out production of natural gas via sustainable power source offshore by replacing traditional fossil fuel-based generation with renewable solar power, even in hazardous zones," Tan explained.

For Tan, the thing that drives his company are people and digital infrastructure.

"We continually develop our technical workforce and have plans to establish a new dedicated R&D centre to support the development of new products and further enhance existing ones," he said.

Technologically, the company has adopted various digital software such as CAD (AutoCAD, SolidWorks, Eplan), ERP, Microsoft Project, and IoT platforms to improve design precision, project visibility and execution efficiency across multiple concurrent export projects.

"In addition, we have employed automated machinery in our production processes to maintain consistency, improve production quality, and enhance overall operational efficiency."

To succeed, Tan advises those planning to build genuine technical competency to meet international compliance standards, especially when competing in specialised industries.

"Price alone rarely secures long-term export contracts," he cautioned.

"Secondly, establish strong partnerships with credible local agents to navigate regulatory frameworks and cultural nuances. Finally, invest early in internal systems and operational discipline to handle the complexity of cross-border manufacturing, logistics and customer servicing."

Powering exports through smart solutions

WINNER of the EEA 2024 Exporter of the Year (SME), GPRO Global Sdn Bhd chief executive officer, Jaeson Cheng, was inspired to expand his market globally when the company noticed how digital transformation was reshaping manufacturing, especially in the apparel and textile industry, which it specialises in.

"Malaysia's domestic market was a valuable foundation, but limited in scale," said Cheng.

"The real growth opportunity was clearly in international markets where global brands, large garment groups, and supply chain stakeholders were increasingly seeking data-driven solutions to improve productivity, traceability and compliance."

He explained that the company's export journey began with his Malaysian clients with overseas factories encouraging him to implement its manufacturing execution system (MES) solutions abroad.

"This gave us a natural entry point into Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Indonesia – key hubs for global apparel manufacturing.

"From there, we expanded our direct sales, formed strategic partnerships with global players such as Brother in Japan, Avery Dennison in the United States and Datatex in Italy.

"We also invested in building a world-class solution that addresses the complex needs of global supply chains," Cheng said.

Through exporting he discovered the importance of local adaptability.

"Every country operates differently. Initially, we presumed that a strong technical product alone would win clients, but soon realised that understanding local operational pain points and customising our solution accordingly was key," he offered.

"We also learnt that relationships and trust take longer to build in international markets."

Beyond product demonstrations he explained having to earn the confidence of factory owners, production managers and even brand auditors.

"Investing time in face-to-face engagement, training and after-sales support made a significant difference in long-term customer retention."

He also pointed out that Matrade, MDEC and SME Corp Malaysia provided valuable market intelligence, facilitated participation in overseas trade missions and connected the company with global networks.

"The government's strong emphasis on Industry 4.0 adoption has also created a supportive environment for companies like us to innovate. The MDXG grant from MDEC has been a great help to support our initiative to enhance our product innovation.

"We also benefited from valuable mentorship and guidance from experienced industry leaders."

For an SME, Cheng said that resource allocation is a balancing act.

Cheng (second from left) being presented his award by Miti deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa as Mak (right) and Chan look on. —AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star.

"We adopt a highly focused approach – carefully selecting key markets where we can build strong reference sites and generate the highest impact.

"Instead of spreading ourselves too thin, we work deeply with selected customers and partners, ensuring successful implementations that serve as case studies for future prospects."

Cheng said his company also invested in developing local champions, by training customer teams and establishing regional support networks to reduce the burden on the central team, while maintaining high service levels. He added that innovation is at the core of the company's success.

"GPRO MES goes beyond traditional production monitoring – we integrate IoT, RFID, AI-powered analytics, real-time traceability, and sustainability data capture to meet the evolving demands of global brands."

This allows the company to help factories achieve productivity gains and ESG standards compliance, as well as brand traceability requirements and circular economy initiatives.

"Our GTRACE.io platform, for example, allows brands to connect directly with their factories, view live production data and verify compliance across their global supply chain.

"These innovations have become significant differentiators, helping us win the trust of global customers who value transparency, traceability and operational excellence."

When asked about looking towards the future, Cheng said the EEA recognition motivates the company to accelerate its global expansion further.

"We plan to strengthen our presence in key markets like Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Middle East, opening new markets in Turkiye, Tunisia, Morocco and Central America."

It also plans to invest in research and development to build advanced AI modules into its MES platform, empowering factories to make predictive and intelligent decisions.

He plans to expand into new verticals such as food processing, where the MES solutions have already shown strong potential and position the company as a global leader in MES and traceability solutions for manufacturing industries.

"Winning the EEA Award is a validation of our global journey. This award is a milestone for GPRO and a proud moment for our team," said Cheng.

"It demonstrates that a homegrown Malaysian technology company can develop a globally competitive solution, serve top-tier clients across more than 15 countries, and contribute meaningfully to Malaysia's positioning as a digital exporter."

EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS

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5 YEARS

EXPORTER OF THE YEAR
(SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES)

GPRO GLOBAL SDN BHD

CONGRATULATIONS

GPRO GLOBAL SDN BHD

(987502-V)

SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

★ EXPORTER OF THE YEAR ★

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Malaysian tissue products go global

Kooka has spent the last 25 years refining and evolving its business strategies to expand and secure a place in the global market.

FROM local manufacturing roots to global impact, Kooka Papers Manufacturing Sdn Bhd (Kooka) has redefined tissue exports with strategy, simplicity and resilience.

Kooka's marked a significant milestone in history 25 years ago when it sealed and shipped its first export container of tissue paper products to the port.

At that time, the company took its first step beyond Malaysia, even if it was only on an ad hoc basis. However, exporting tissue products has always been a challenging endeavour.

Despite these obstacles, Kooka has spent the last 25 years refining and evolving its business strategies to expand and secure a place in the global market.

This progress is largely thanks to the strategic vision of its chairman, who emphasised two key principles, in-depth development and simplification.

Today, Kooka exports approximately 10 containers every day, surpassing 3,500 containers annually, thanks to its team of dedicated employees – and poised to exceed 6,000 containers in the near future.

Its primary market is North America, followed by Australia and New Zealand. The products also have a strong presence in Japan, South Korea and Middle Eastern nations. The company is also looking at expanding its presence in Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.

Kooka is targeting high double-digit growth year over year. Fuelled by this growth, the company aspires to become the largest tissue product manufacturer in Malaysia, while continuing to build a reputation for excellence and being a reliable tissue supplier for napkins, towels, toilet tissues and facial tissues in the global market.

Growing achievements from the ground up

SK Specialties Sdn Bhd is Malaysia's first producer of controlled release fertiliser (CRF), a cutting-edge enhanced efficiency fertiliser (EEF) designed to support sustainable agriculture.

Since beginning production in August 2009, its flagship product, SK Cote, has set new standards in nutrient delivery and environmental stewardship.

Its commitment to quality and innovation has earned the company national recognition.

According to SK Specialties managing director Adrian Wong Ling Yung, the company was granted Malaysia's Pioneer Status in 2012, certified with ISO 9001:2015 in 2017, and implemented the 5S workplace system in 2019 to enhance productivity and organisation.

"While EEFs are traditionally reserved for high-value crops due to cost, our mission is to make high-quality CRF more accessible and affordable worldwide.

"We were driven by the belief that feeding the world efficiently and sustainably is not just a goal – it's a responsibility."

Wong said the company began exporting in 2011, marking a milestone in becoming a globally competitive company. Moving into overseas markets was driven by its commitment to deliver high-quality, sustainable fertiliser solutions to a broader audience.

"We recognised a growing global demand for environmentally responsible agricultural products, and with our innovative SK Cote controlled release fertiliser, we saw an opportunity to contribute to more efficient and sustainable farming practices beyond Malaysia."

Exporting also aligned with its vision of supporting global food security while strengthening its position as a pioneer in the industry.

Early in its export journey, the company encountered significant challenges that tested its resilience and adaptability.

Wong said gaining market acceptance for its product was one such hurdle.

"As a new player introducing CRF, a relatively advanced and unfamiliar technology in many regions, we faced scepticism from potential customers who were accustomed to conventional fertilisers," he said.

Convincing them of the long-term benefits, cost-effectiveness and environmental advantages required substantial effort, including demonstrations, field trials and building strong, trust-based relationships with local partners.

Another major challenge was the lack of in-depth knowledge about different markets. Each country had its own set of regulatory frameworks, agricultural practices, climatic conditions and customer expectations.

Navigating these differences demanded extensive market research, adaptability and collaboration with local experts.

It had to learn quickly, adjust marketing strategies and even fine-tune its formulations to meet specific regional needs.

Despite these obstacles, the company remained committed, as its team invested time and resources into education and awareness campaigns, conducted extensive product trials and actively participated in trade exhibitions to showcase its solutions.

"Through our persistence, continuous learning and a customer-centric approach, we built credibility and established a growing presence in overseas markets," Wong added.

These early challenges strengthened its foundation and shaped the way it operates globally today – agile, informed and focused on delivering quality and value across borders.

The company's international growth has been driven by a combination of key factors that continue to set it apart in a competitive global market.

Its commitment to product quality that ensures consistent performance and environmental safety has helped build trust with customers around the world and positioned it as a reliable partner.

Wong: 'We saw an opportunity to contribute to more efficient and sustainable farming practices beyond Malaysia.'

The product offers significant cost advantages that make it accessible to a wider range of customers and its flexibility in customisation to meet local requirements.

Also the company's willingness to collaborate with local partners played a vital role in its success as working closely with distributors, agronomists and government agencies allow it to adapt its approach, provide localised support and gain deeper insights into market dynamics.

"Winning the Silver Award in the Industrial Products category for two years in a row is a powerful validation of our commitment, resilience and collective effort," said Wong.

"It acknowledges the strides we have made to produce high-quality, innovative products and highlights our ability to remain competitive and sustainable in the international export market.

"Looking ahead, we are exploring opportunities to expand into new and emerging markets, particularly in regions where sustainable agriculture is becoming a national priority.

"South Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America are high on our radar due to their large agricultural sectors, increasing focus on food security and growing demand for efficient fertiliser solutions," he explained.

The company looks to expand into markets where the need for sustainable, high-performance fertilisers intersects with its ability to deliver real, long-term value.

For more, visit https://www.skspecialties.com.my/.

Breaking barriers in pharma exports

WHEN Sarah Ho of Hovid Berhad was announced Woman Exporter of the Year (Mid-tier and Large Companies), she acknowledged that the award is not just a recognition of individual effort, "but a reflection of the incredible journey my team and I have taken together to grow Hovid's international footprint."

The sales and marketing head said as a woman in a traditionally male-dominated industry like pharmaceuticals – especially in exports – the award represented more than personal achievement, but also for progress, resilience and the value of diverse leadership.

"Leadership has never been about going it alone. I wouldn't be here without the incredible support of my team – from the International Business Division and the leaders in our international subsidiaries, to every department that plays a role in our export success," said Ho.

She said Hovid operates in many markets internationally, and it has always been the goal and ambition to continue to expand in exports.

"Being out in the market internationally helps us innovate and become better. Many [Hovid] employees grow locally but eventually serve internationally and we are glad to be able to contribute to their development in this manner."

However, Ho brought up the unspoken expectation for women to "do it all" – balancing personal responsibilities with professional ambitions, which can be overwhelming.

"One of the challenges I faced was juggling the many roles I assume: a leader, a mother, a daughter and a professional representing Malaysia on the global stage.

"There were moments when my capabilities were underestimated, but I have learnt that consistency, preparation and delivering results speak louder than presumptions."

Ho: 'I have learnt that resilience is key – staying grounded and focused even when things don't go as planned. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

A believer of leading by example, Ho created space for honest conversations and guidance through open-door discussions.

"I advocate for internal promotions and skill development, and leadership opportunities, ensuring women are seen and considered for strategic roles. I also actively champion policies that support work-life balance, especially for working mothers."

The pharmaceuticals industry is challenging and tightly regulated, which makes having a clear vision and agility to adapt important, she pointed out.

"I've learnt that resilience is key – staying grounded and focused even when things don't go as planned. I believe in making data-driven decisions, but also listening to the market, to our customers and to my team.

"By closely monitoring performance through KPIs, tracking market trends and refining our strategies, we stay competitive and cost-efficient."

Every market is unique, she explained, shaped by its culture, regulations and healthcare needs so the one-size-fits-all approach does not work in export.

"For highly regulated markets, we focus heavily on compliance, dossier submissions and meeting stringent quality benchmarks," she explained.

"In emerging markets, while maintaining high-quality pharmaceuticals as our key differentiator, we adapt our product positioning and pricing strategies. Sometimes we even design our packaging to suit local preferences.

"We also work closely with local partners who understand the ground realities, helping us localise our strategies while staying true to Hovid's standards."

In the years ahead, Ho sees the company evolving to fully embrace digital transformation, including automation and AI across its operations.

"Technology is only one side of the equation – empowering human talent to work alongside these tools will be equally important.

"I aim to build a culture where our teams are continuously upskilled to use technology effectively, while continuing to lead with purpose, empathy and innovation."

She said Hovid is committed to continuing to showcase the strength and potential of Malaysian-made healthcare solutions on the global stage.

"I truly hope this recognition inspires more women to step into leadership roles and to pursue bold ambitions in international trade," Ho said.

"If my journey encourages even one more woman to believe in herself and lead with confidence, then this award means even more."

Uplifting Malaysia, one pallet at a time

AFTER 20 years of hard work, winning Woman Exporter of the Year (SME) at the Export Excellence Awards 2024 means a lot to KJH Wood Industrial Sdn Bhd executive director Joanne Tay.

"I started with no experience in the timber industry, coming from a banking background. It wasn't an easy journey – many sleepless nights and ups and downs along the way," she said.

Her inspiration to take Malaysian goods abroad, she mentioned, stemmed from her love for travel.

"My passion grew when I unexpectedly spotted our pallets being used in a hypermarket abroad. It was a proud moment.

"While many may see pallets as low-value items, I see them as important tools that carry goods – and our country's reputation – across the world with strength and reliability."

Circumventing barriers

When asked if she faced obstacles as a woman entrepreneur entering foreign markets, she replied that she was fortunate to have a strong business partner who excels in building relationships with foreign clients.

"A successful business is never built by one person alone," she reminded, then went on to explain that her business partner would focus on creating opportunities and bridging the gap with foreign partners, while she focuses on using the company's local strengths to deliver value.

"For me, exporting isn't just about selling products abroad, it's about building trust, nurturing relationships and turning those connections into lasting business.

On staying resilient

Tay also pointed out the business environment is constantly changing, so to stay resilient means being flexible and ready to adapt. She keeps her organisation structure flat and agile, which helps it respond to new challenges and market shifts quickly.

"I also stay informed by following global economists and industry trends, which guide my decision-making," she said.

"Ups and downs are a natural part of any business – not just international, but local too. I believe that even during downturns, there are hidden opportunities waiting to be explored."

Building alliances

Tay considers being in the pallet industry a privilege, as it connects closely with both the timber and logistics industries.

When it comes to support systems that help her grow as a woman-led SME exporter, she said the Malaysian Timber Council has been instrumental in helping the industry grow, while Matrade has opened up access to global markets.

"A major breakthrough was our partnership with Pan Pac Forest Products Ltd from New Zealand, a subsidiary of Japan's Oji Group.

"Being appointed as their Malaysian representative, with an annual output of 530,000 cubic metres, reinforced our credibility and capacity."

When it comes to incorporating local authenticity with global marketability in her product or service, Tay believes businesses should always be driven by market needs.

"As global awareness of sustainability grows, we've aligned our products with international standards without losing our local strengths.

"Since 2017, we've been importing FSC-certified timber and processing it locally, ensuring our pallets meet both environmental and quality expectations.

"Each pallet is stamped with the ISPM 15 mark and our unique identifier, making it easy to trace globally.

"This combination of local production and global compliance not only strengthens our credibility abroad but also reflects our commitment to responsible sourcing, traceability and delivering value to international partners."

Tay: 'Exporting isn't just about selling products abroad, it's about building trust, nurturing relationships and turning those connections into lasting business.' — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

Moving forward

Despite winning Woman Exporter of the Year, Tay said she has much more to plan for.

"Our next big move is expanding vertically by partnering with China's leading electric vehicle (EV) group, Skyworth, as their exclusive dealer in Malaysia.

"By offering eco-friendly EV forklift and trucking solutions, we aim to provide a complete, sustainable logistics package."

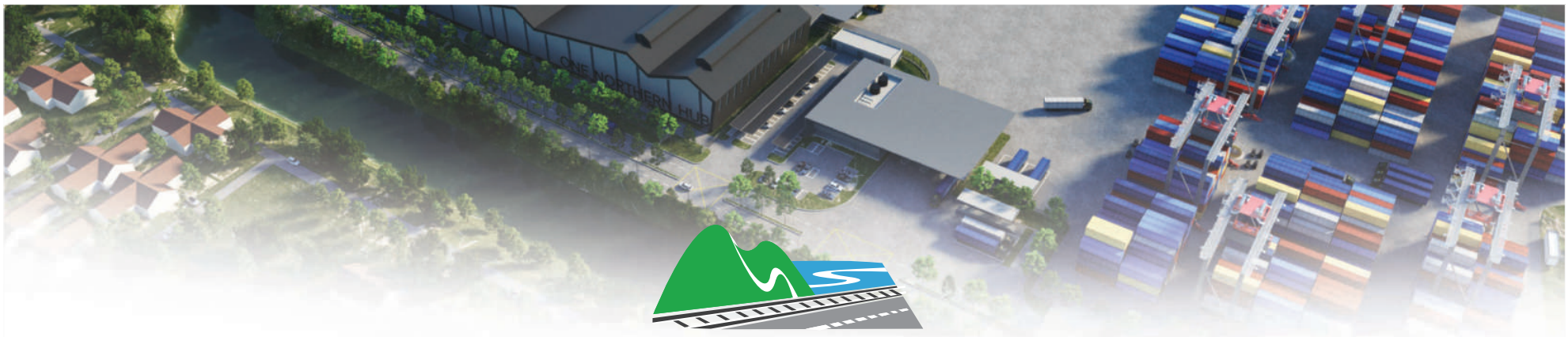
Tay explains that KHJ's goal is to establish a strong presence in Malaysia and use it as a base to grow across neighbouring Asian markets.

"We hope to develop a Malaysian-owned CKD (completely knocked down) assembly model for regional expansion."

Tay claims people have previously doubted her choice to enter a "sunset industry".

"But I'm proud to show that my business is still growing today. As a woman, balancing work and family is never easy.

"Staying close to my children means everything to me. When I can, I bring them along – not just to spend time together, but to show them the value of hard work and what it means to grow as a family," she said.



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Redefining sustainability in logistics

Automated assembly sets a new benchmark in pallet production, ensuring uniformity.

KJH offers clients access to cutting-edge electric forklifts.

(From left) Skywell New Energy Vehicles Group executive vice-chaiman Dong Zhaozhi, KJH group CEO Chang Yoon Kent and Yao Jin Trade Co appointed China representative, Chen Tao.

KJH Wood Industrial Sdn Bhd is rapidly establishing itself as one of Malaysia's most dynamic and forward-thinking players in the logistics and supply chain sector.

An expert in pallet manufacturing, the company forms global partnerships and has embarked on its green energy journey, with the mission of redefining sustainability and efficiency in logistics.

Under the leadership of executive director Joanne Tay, who was recently named Woman Exporter of the Year (SME), KJH is not only growing its export footprint but also aligning its operations with global ESG standards and next-generation logistics solutions.

KJH's pallet business

At its core, KJH's primary business is in the design, production, and supply of high-quality pallets for local and international markets. Over the years, the company has built a solid reputation for offering standardised, durable and cost-effective pallets tailored to the evolving needs of industries including petrochemical, electronics, FMCG and e-commerce.

KJH's advantage lies in its commitment to product standardisation, which has allowed it to create economies of scale that reduce overall costs while maintaining strict quality standards.

This approach ensures clients benefit from faster production lead times, lower wastage and logistical efficiency, making it a trusted partner in time-sensitive export operations.

Beyond standard wood pallets, KJH has invested in automation technology since 2023 to enhance its pallet assembly process, significantly reducing reliance on manual, labour-intensive nailing.

It also aligns with the company's broader commitment to building a renewable, reusable and recyclable logistics ecosystem through continuous innovation and operational excellence.

To support international shipping compliance, KJH is recognised by Malaysia's Department of Agriculture (DOA) as an official ISPM 15 phytosanitary service provider.

The company offers in-house heat treatment services for all export pallets, ensuring that its customers meet international wood packaging standards with ease.

Leading ESG commitments

KJH is at the forefront of corporate sustainability in Malaysia's industrial sector. Last year, it became the first pallet maker in the nation to be certified under Sirim Malaysia's Lean Management Standard 12:2023, demonstrating its dedication to operational excellence, waste reduction and continuous improvement.

Next month, it will also become Malaysia's first company to obtain the FSC chain-of-custody certification for both pallet and wood pellet production, reinforcing its commitment to responsible forestry, product traceability and environmental stewardship.

These certifications align with the company's vision of being "Your Sustainable Partner in the Supply Chain" – offering reliable, certified and ethical solutions that help clients meet their own ESG and compliance goals.

Landmark timber partnerships

One of KJH's most significant milestones is its exclusive partnership with New Zealand-based top-tier sawmill operator Pan Pac Forest Products Ltd. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Oji Group, one of Japan's largest public-listed pulp and paper manufacturers.

Through this strategic partnership, KJH is appointed the official representative and warehouse hub for Pan Pac in Malaysia, ensuring that local manufacturers enjoy a reliable and sustainable supply of sawn timber for pallet and packaging needs.

BBQ-flavoured wood pellets with imported European formula set to ignite Asia's biomass market.

In addition, KJH also forged ties with Sweden's largest forestry cooperative Södra, representing over 52,000 forest owners for its commitment to sustainable forest management and its supply of certified timber products.

"These partnerships bring assurance to our clients that their raw material supply is not only consistent in quality, but also responsibly and ethically sourced," said Tay.

"It enhances our ability to serve time-sensitive industries while further reinforcing our ESG credentials and commitment to a sustainable supply chain."

Embarking into green economy

In a bold move aligned with its environmental commitment, KJH has expanded into the electric mobility sector through a strategic collaboration with one of China's most respected technology and electric vehicle brands, the Skyworth Group.

The company is now the exclusive authorised dealer for Skyworth's electric vehicles (EV) logistics in Malaysia, offering clients access to cutting-edge electric forklifts and warehouse handling equipment solutions – a key step towards supporting businesses in their carbon-neutral transitions.

Skyworth, listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKEX), is a global powerhouse with a diversified portfolio. Through its automotive division under Skywell Group, the company manufactures a comprehensive range of electric vehicles. It brings world-class EV technology into its integrated green logistics offerings.

Looking ahead, KJH's mission is to establish a CKD (Completely Knocked Down) model of EV forklift production in Malaysia. It aims to follow Skyworth's example, by developing its own automotive wing in the country.

The move will serve Malaysian clients more efficiently and also position Malaysian-assembled CKD EV forklifts for wider export into the Asean and broader Asian markets.

"By integrating electric mobility into our portfolio, we can now offer clients not just pallets – but a fully green logistics solution that includes sustainable transport and energy systems – proudly made in Malaysia," said Tay.

Green energy from waste

In addition to its core wood and mobility businesses, KJH is expanding into the biomass energy market with a new wood pellet division focused on producing BBQ pellets.

By importing proven formulation technology from a reputable European company, Green Pro, with existing market presence in Korea, Japan and Australia, KJH is planning to manufacture high-quality pellets locally in Malaysia.

Leveraging Malaysia's strategic location and lower production costs, KJH aims to deliver a more cost-effective product to Green Pro's established markets, offering both economic and environmental value.

This strategic expansion allows KJH to transform by-products into renewable energy solutions and cater to the rising demand for cleaner energy across Asia – all while reducing internal waste and boosting profitability.

Responsible growth

KJH is more than just a pallet maker – it is a diversified, sustainability-driven logistics company that offers comprehensive, eco-conscious solutions for modern supply chains.

From certified timber and standardised pallets, to export-compliant treatments, EV forklifts and renewable biomass energy, KJH's integrated model is setting new standards for Malaysian industrial enterprises.

"Growth must come with responsibility in today world," said Tay. "Our goal is to help our clients move goods in a smarter, greener and more cost-effective way – and we're proud to lead that change in Malaysia."

Making a mark in exports

Star Media Group (SMG) chief operating officer Lydia Wang (fifth from right) and Matrade export promotion and market access division senior director S. Jai Shankar (fifth from left) together with the Export Excellence Awards 2024 Most Promising Award winners. Photos by AZHAR MAHFOF, YAP CHEE HONG and FAIHAN GHANI.

Miti deputy secretary-general (trade) Mastura Ahmad Mustafa presenting the award to Euro Facade (M) Sdn Bhd project control manager Eliyce Lok as (from left) SMG group chief executive officer Chan Seng Fatt, Standard Chartered Malaysia independent non-executive director Tan Sri Shahril Ridzuan, SMG chairman Tan Sri Wong Foon Meng, Standard Chartered Malaysia chairman Datuk Yvonne Chia, Standard Chartered Malaysia chief executive officer Mak Joon Nien and Jai Shankar look on.

The teams from Standard Chartered Malaysia and Star Media Group celebrating the solid partnership in making the Export Excellence Awards a success.

PKT Logistics Group group chief executive and managing director Datuk Seri Dr Michael Tio (holding frame) and his team with a token of appreciation, in recognition of the company's role as co-sponsor of the Awards.

Chan (third from left) and Wang with (from left) Malaysia Retail Chain Association vice president Datuk Vincent Choo, vice president Valerie Choo, vice president Datuk Winnie Lim and deputy president Datuk Liew Bin.

Mastura presenting the silver award in Industrial Products category to SK Specialties managing director Adrian Wong Ling Yung, as Mak (right) and Chan look on.

Proguard Safety Manufacturing Sdn Bhd chairman Datuk Lee Ngai Mun and group executive vice chairman Datin Cindy Choh (both centre) celebrating their win with the team.

Carlsberg was the beverage sponsor for the fifth Export Excellence Awards.

Mastura presenting the award to Kooka marketing director Lee Nian Joe as Mak and Chan look on.

The Matrade team, led by export academy and market development section director Naim Abdul Rahman (centre) and Jai Shankar (fourth from left) pose for a group photo with Wang (fourth from right), Star Media Group senior general manager Sharon Lee (third from right) and general manager Juniza Yasmin (right). Matrade is the patron of the Awards.