

United Malaysian fashion industry can take on Asean, says MITI

'It would be easier for the govt to support and take their products globally if such an alliance is formed'

by NUR HAZIQAH A MALEK

THE fashion industry, in any part of the world, has always been a segment filled with people who are prissy, catty and highly competitive.

The Malaysian chapter looks rather safe from the outside, but if you go through all the status updates and comments on social media, you may chance upon some remarks by local fashion fraternity that rival their international counterparts for being "catty".

This is an indicator of divisions within the industry that has been picked up by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) that want the opposite to happen to bring the local fashion industry out of its shell.

Speaking at the Fashion and Design Conference 2018 in Kuala Lumpur, MITI secretary general Datuk Isham Ishak suggested the local fashion industry, both designers and retail, should get their act together and take on the Asean market.

"I noticed that there are a lot of talents, as well as fashion and design organisations in the country. However, there isn't any combined or unified organisation for all of them.

"It would be easier for the government to support and take their products globally if such an alliance is formed," he said at the conference on Tuesday.

Isham said fashion shows have evolved from mere runways to magnets for designers and buyers to get together for business, market intelligence and inspiration.

"As such, Malaysia is stepping up its efforts to increase the competitiveness of the ecosystem of the textiles and apparel industry.

"We want to focus on key areas



Pic by Muhd Amin Naharul

The textile and apparel industry became the country's 11th largest-export contributor last year, with a staggering amount of RM15.3b

that promote investments, sustain exports and market share of targeted growth areas, and enhance the industry's overall competitiveness," he said.

The textile and apparel industry became the country's 11th largest-export contributor last year, with a staggering amount of RM15.3 billion.

Even so, there are still challenges being faced by local designers due to lack of resources and financial support.

Mimpikita MD and creative director Nurul Afidah Zulkifli said while sales are good, there is a constant outflow of money to resources in order to produce more volume to cater to the

growing customer demand.

"My sisters and I have started this company with a small capital of RM3,000, and with that, we don't have the technology required to keep producing our products.

"Our money is mostly channelled to outsource our products, which means less money being spent. Nevertheless, it is still a constant spending.

"We are always in a dilemma, wondering if it's worth to splurge for once on machines. Therefore, financial support is very important," she said.

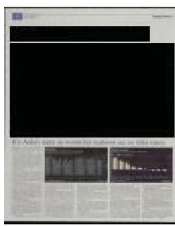
She added that having to deal with the business side of the fashion industry is also one of the main challenges

being faced by designers.

"These creative-oriented people also need basic education on business and guides on what to do when they are facing with difficulties.

"Mimpikita started off with a small team. In fact, most designers have started small, which means they need the diversity of knowledge and resources to move forward," she said, adding that the fashion label made it to the 2016 London Fashion Week, displaying its ready-to-wear spring/summer collections.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Textile and Apparel Centre (MATAC) president Regina Leong said the training centre is working on bridging the academia



and industry players to share the available resources.

"Students can share their ideas, while we are doing our best to link them up with any available organisations that can share or work with the students for their designs. This will push further the works of our young talents," she said.

Leong added that both parties must be able to work hand-in-hand to propel towards the fourth industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0.

"All quarters must get involved and share a similar mindset in order to move forward together. This is why the industry players must work with academia to develop human capital, provide a space to grow and share the things they want to share," she said.

MATAC is currently engaging with Universiti Teknologi Mara, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Monash University, alongside international textile-based industries such as the Taiwan Textile Research Institute and Singapore Textile and Fashion Federation.

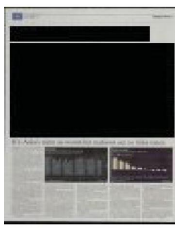
Earlier this month, 19 local designers took on the New York Fashion Week to bring their designs to the world stage.

Association of Bumiputera Women in Business and Profession Malaysia president Datuk Azlin Ahmad Shaharbi said one of the designers would receive an award in Hollywood next month.

"Several designers have been offered to go to Paris, Cannes and Lamborghini's Fashion Show in Italy. That is how far our fashion industry has come," she said.

Azlin also said manufacturers and designers must build a stable ecosystem in the industry, in order for the whole industry to prosper.

"We do not have a stable ecosystem. Some of us are thriving, while some are still struggling due to the lack of resources, training and others. Thus, unifying the existing players is the key for the industry," she added.



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Page 3 of 3

SUMMARIES

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