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Editorial
T: 03-7784 6688
F: 03-7785 2625
E: *sunbiz@thesundaily.com*

Advertising
T: 03-7784 8888
E: *advertise@thesundaily.com*

Miti launches Witi initiative to empower women entrepreneurs

BY **AIMIE SHAZRIE**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: The Women in Trade and Industry (Witi) programme, an initiative under the Investment, Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti), will ensure that women entrepreneurs are not left behind in Asean's economic progress.

Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz said Witi, a collaboration between the ministry and the Malaysian Women's and Family Affairs Organisation (Hawa Malaysia), aims to enhance the capacity and capabilities of women in the industrial and export sectors.

"This initiative is in line with what the ministry want to do as Asean chairman next year to ensure women's involvement in the economy at the Asean level," he told reporters after Miti and its agencies' monthly assembly and the launch of the Witi Council here yesterday.

The implementation of this programme aligns with the Madani Policy and the National Women's Policy in ensuring that Malaysian women have equal opportunities and capacities to advance in the global economy.

The Witi programme will be implemented nationwide in partnership with Hawa Malaysia, established in March 2023. Through various programmes and initiatives, Hawa Malaysia seeks to address the barriers and challenges faced by women in the economic sector.

The strategic collaboration between Miti and Hawa Malaysia aims to serve as a platform for women entrepreneurs to engage in the trade and industrial sectors, enhancing their knowledge and capacity, to support national economic development.

Miti will conduct the Witi programme by providing training and support to women interested in venturing into trade and industry. The initiative is open to various groups of women, including entrepreneurs, startup owners, small and medium enterprise operators, youth, and the B40 and M40 groups.

Tengku Zafrul said women's empowerment is key to achieving dynamic and inclusive economic growth.

"One of the missions under the New Industrial Master Plan 2030 is to ensure economic security and inclusivity that encompasses women's empowerment. Thus, capacity building for women in the trade and industrial sectors through the Witi programme not only helps women reach their potential but also drives the national economy to greater heights."

The programme will also involve collaboration with lending agencies and grant providers to help women entrepreneurs secure the financial resources they need.

By exposing participants to company formation, financial management, business strategies, and cultivating company culture, the programme aims to equip them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in trade and industry.

Tengku Zafrul said Miti is committed to continuously supporting and empowering Malaysian women in their efforts to contribute to economic sustainability.

Government committed to reducing debt-to-GDP ratio

Treasury Secretary-General says it has already started cutting annual net borrowings

KUALA LUMPUR: In line with the Public Finance and Fiscal Responsibility Act, the government is committed to reducing its borrowings in terms of the debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio to 60% within a five-year timeframe from the current 64% to ensure a stronger and more sustainable fiscal position for the nation, said Treasury Secretary-General Datuk Johan Mahmood Merican.

He said the government has already started reducing the annual net borrowings gradually, from about RM100 billion for both 2021 and 2022 to RM93 billion in 2023, and is targeting RM86 billion in 2024. This is being achieved through fiscal consolidation, reducing the annual fiscal deficit from 5.6% of GDP in 2022 to 5.0% in 2023 and thereafter 4.3% in 2024.

"Among the efforts taken to reduce the annual deficit include retargeting of subsidies, doing away with direct negotiations for government projects in favour of tenders, and exercising greater prudence in expenditure such as in terms of overseas travel," he told Bernama on the sidelines of the launch of the National Tax Conference 2024, here on Monday.

According to Johan, the RM4 billion annual savings from the rationalisation of diesel subsidy, which was implemented on June 10, 2024, will contribute towards reducing the government's annual borrowing requirement.

The Ministry of Finance (MoF) stated in a written reply published on the Parliament website on July 15, 2024, that from January to April 2024, the government debt increased by RM50 billion to RM1.22 trillion as of the end of April 2024, compared to RM1.17 trillion as of the end of 2023.

Johan explained that the absolute value of debt will continue to increase as long as the government incurs a fiscal deficit, and the government continues to incur a deficit given the need to borrow to invest in essential development expenses such as building hospitals, schools, roads, basic infrastructure and public services.

"To achieve a more sustainable government debt level, we will continue to reduce the annual fiscal deficit, to ensure that total government borrowings do not grow faster than our economic growth, towards achieving the debt-to-GDP target of below 60%," he said.

Johan also said the government will not reduce the annual fiscal deficit too sharply given the need to support national development, the infrastructure needs for the rakyat and support the momentum of economic growth. – Bernama

Southern Cable eyes RM50m overseas sales in FY24

BY **JOHN GILBERT**
sunbiz@thesundaily.com

KUALA LUMPUR: Cables and wires manufacturer Southern Cable Group Bhd (SCG) is targeting RM50 million in overseas sales in FY24, with most of the sales coming from the United States.

Managing director Tung Eng Hai (*pic*) said since 2022, SCG has been building a strong delivery track record with a prominent distributor in the US.

He said this opportunity arose amid the US-China trade tensions that began in 2018, prompting US cable and wire distributors to shift their supply chains away from China.

Since 2023, the company has seen demand for cable and wires improving in the US, led by increasing construction activities.

While remaining focused on the domestic market, overseas sales only made up 1.4%, or RM4.2 million, in the first quarter (Q1) of 2024.

The 69.5% decrease in Q1 from a year ago was mainly due to reduced orders from the US, which has had no significant impact on the company.

Tung said SCG's long-term plan to improve overseas sales includes actively participating in international exhibitions to promote products and expand its client base.

"We also aim to acquire certifications for product compliance with international standards to enhance acceptance in various countries and industries.

"Furthermore, we are also seeking opportunities to collaborate with international distributors to penetrate new markets," Tung told *SunBiz*.

Touching on the domestic market, Tung said since 2023, Malaysia's cable and wire market has been running at full steam, driven by the government's efforts to enhance infrastructure and the recent increase in foreign direct investments in data centres and the manufacturing sector.

Tung said SCB has invested in new machinery and enhancements to expand cable and wire production capacity to meet the growing demand for power cables and wires.

"We now command 41,980 km/year in capacity, increasing by 35% from 31,080 km/year since our listing in 2020.

"Next, we target to reach 46,980 km/year by the end of 2024.

"Our Lot 38 production building, with a planned capacity of 5,000 km/year, has started commissioning in phases from the second quarter (Q2) of 2024 onwards while still undergoing machinery installations," Tung said.

Further, by expanding market share, offering competitive pricing, and providing a wide product range, SCG leveraged in-house facilities, including furnaces, to produce copper and aluminium rods used as conductors in its cables and wires.

"Additionally, we have two subsidiaries – Nextol Polymer Sdn Bhd, which produces plastic compounds for insulating our cables and wires, and Daya Forwarding Sdn Bhd, which manufactures wooden cable drums for packaging.

"These in-house supporting activities are much more cost-efficient than outsourcing the processes, allowing us to reduce costs, price our products competitively, and maintain quality standards while ensuring timely delivery," Tung said.

SCG's cables and wires are used for power distribution, transmission, communications, control, and instrumentation applications.

The key supporting activities for the cable and wire manufacturing operations include furnace and casting operations, as well as the manufacturing of plastic compounds and wooden cable drums.

Through its existing factories in Kuala Ketil and Sungai Petani, Kedah, SCG has an annual production capacity of 20,400 tonnes and 18,000 tonnes of aluminium and copper rods, respectively, 41,980km of cables and wires, and 7,800 tonnes of plastic compounds.

Remaining focused on the growing orders coming from the US, SCG recently acquired a 7.9-acre industrial land with an existing building adjacent to its current facilities in Kuala Ketil for RM14 million.

The newly acquired property will enable the company to scale production and meet the increasing domestic and US demand.

"The 7.9-acre industrial land in Kuala Ketil is part of our long-term plan to expand our product range and increase capacity allocation to the US market.

"Design plans for the new facility are underway, and we aim to commence construction in 2025," Tung said.

He said SCG operates on a volume-driven business model and by sustaining robust production levels, the company capitalise on economies of scale to enhance profitability.

"As of July 2024, out of the total orders in hand exceeding RM1 billion, approximately 38% consist of short-term supply contracts, typically fulfilled within three months.

"With our current orders in hand, maintaining a utilisation rate above 80% positions us to steadily improve profit margins," Tung said.

For the first quarter (Q1) ended March 31, 2024 (FY24), SCG posted a net profit of RM14.1 million, more than doubling the RM5.1 million recorded in the same quarter last year, marking its eighth consecutive quarter of earnings growth.

Revenue for the quarter stood at RM312.02 million from RM240.93 million posted in Q1 FY23.

SCG is the registered supplier of cables and wires to Tenaga Nasional Bhd, Telekom Malaysia Bhd, Sabah Electricity Sdn Bhd, and Petroliam Nasional Bhd, and supplies to Sarawak Energy Bhd.