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Dewina on track to become global player



IBRAHIM: We aim to become world-class halal player

DEWINA Holdings Sdn Bhd, which is already one of Malaysia's top food manufacturers, is now extending its reach to become a global player.

Dewina executive chairman Datuk Ibrahim Ahmad Badawi said the company is moving up the value chain to become a fully integrated food manufacturing company to promote ready-to-eat Malaysian cuisine to the world.

"Besides manufacturing and selling food products, Dewina has gone further up the value chain to offer food-related services which include food retail and venture into food and beverage sector.

"We also offer consulting services in food and biotechnology, warehousing, logistics and also want to become a world-class halal player," said Ibrahim.

Bangi-based Dewina which is famous at home for the "Brahim's" (short for Ibrahim) brand is celebrating its 20th anniversary today.

Ibrahim said Dewina started from ground zero and with an initial investment of RM5.3 million, Ibrahim together with Japanese partner T. Abe bought a 1.4ha plot of land in Bangi, Selangor, and related equipment to start the company.

"Life was tough those days because at the time there was no SME Bank or special Bumi biz assistance programme but together with my Japanese partner we managed to commercialise Ibrahim's products in the country, Japan and subsequently introduce Malaysian cuisine to the rest of the world."

Dewina is the first local company to bring into South-East Asia a new and revolutionary food packaging technology called Retort Pouch Process.

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The technology was invented by the American military in 1978 where packed ready-to-eat food is treated under intense heat and pressure to kill harmful bacteria to ensure freshness and long shelf life of two years without the use of preservatives.

This packaging method is an alternative to the heavier canned food which takes nearly double the time to process.

"The Americans invented the technology but it was the Japanese who commercialised it," said the former Kumpulan Fima research and development head (corporate) and a food technology lecturer at University Putra Malaysia.

Today Ibrahim's is one of Malaysia's Bumiputra-owned leading food producers churning one million packets a month with ready-to-eat products such as tomato chicken with carrots, chicken curry with potatoes, beef kurma, beef curry, anchovies sambal, chicken rendang, spicy beef floss and many more, totalling 50 products.

Dewina exports 60 per cent of its products especially to Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Singapore, the US and Japan while the remaining 40 per cent is sold in Malaysia.

The privately held firm which is well known for its halal products is also in the midst of launching its second US\$12 million (RM38.52 million) plant in Jordan with an equity stake of 50:50 with a Jordanian company.

Ibrahim said that to strengthen its presence in the world, the company also delves in contract packing for other firms such as UK-based Sainsbury's which owns 504 supermarkets as well as separate food contracts to other countries.

"To supply to Sainsbury's, Dewina has to be efficient and pass the British Retail Consortium's (BRC) stringent set of standards and they come to Malaysia to inspect our plant every year," said Ibrahim.

Ibrahim also controls the world's biggest halal in-flight caterer via LSG Sky Chefs Ibrahim Sdn Bhd which is a joint venture with Lufthansa's catering arm, LSG. LSG Ibrahim holds 70 per cent and MAS holds the balance 30 per cent.

The firm which employs 1,700 workers serves 35 airlines round the clock with an

average of 38,000 meals a day from KLIA and Penang airport.

Ibrahim added, not many people know that meals on all airlines departing from KLIA and Penang are halal, whether Cathay Pacific, Air India, China Airlines or Japan Airlines to name a few non-Muslim airlines.

"Ours is a big industrial kitchen operation and we have 16 chefs, 78 cooks and 89 assistant cooks to prepare meals of various international cuisines, from Arabian to Sichuan."

Another of Ibrahim's business also involves airports. He has a 51:49 joint-venture with leading Airport F&B operator, Host Marriot.

"We are among the pioneer F&B operators when KLIA opened 10 years ago. More than 100 companies, many international operators, bid for less than 40 outlets. Airport retail is very challenging as it is among the highest cost retail space. Alhamdulillah, our Burger Kings and Asia Cafes are doing OK."

Ibrahim recently acquired control of integrated warehouse logistics provider Tamadam Bonded Warehouse Bhd whose core business is in storage and transport. Tamadam will be playing a major role in global halal logistics.

To reduce its dependence on the in-flight catering business, LSG Ibrahim plans to venture into high-end catering within the next five years.

Dewina was the only listed Bumiputra food manufacturer in 1995 before it was taken private in 2001 due to the regional crisis in 1997. The company has no plans to relist.

Ibrahim said he plans to help Bumiputeras to thrive in the retailing business under the Carrefour Express programme.

"We can assist interested Bumiputera retailers but of course, it is open to everyone, being an international franchise."

Ibrahim was recently awarded the Carrefour Express Master Franchise for Malaysia.

Ibrahim said Dewina is eyeing the world halal market worth trillions of dollars and is confident of penetrating the market due to the already established halal logo of Malaysia.