

Taking charge

Stanchart looks for majority control, ideally 100 per cent, when making acquisitions, says group executive director Kai Nargolwala. PAGE H19

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Eco-friendly products becoming big business in Asia

S'pore hopes to capture slice of market with first green-merchandise fair

By ERICA TAY

BUILDING bricks made from marine sludge and food packaging created from palm husks may sound a tad fantastical, but they are some real-life ideas that have already been commercialised by Singaporean firms.

These items are part of the eco-products market which is fast becoming big business in Asia.

This billion-dollar "green" market is also one which Singapore hopes to capture, by staging the first Eco-Products International Fair here next week.

From next Tuesday to Thursday, innovations by home-grown companies such as New Earth, Grenidea and Morelastic will be among about 100 products to be showcased at the fair.

From glass coatings that cut out glare to save on air-conditioning costs, to plastic bags recycled from drink bottles, the products of 20 local firms will be on show, together with hybrid and fuel-cell cars by Toyota and Daimler-Chrysler, as well as lifestyle products by Matsushita and Hitachi.

The fair will be held at Suntec Singapore as part of the annual Global Entrepreneurship @ Singapore networking event.

Co-organised this year by Spring Singapore, the government agency that promotes small and medium sized enterprises, the eco-product fair has traditionally been held in Japan each year by the Asian Productivity Organisation.

"There is great potential for Singapore's environmental services industry in the region, be it in water treatment, waste management, alternative energy or clean air technologies," said Mr Victor Tay, Spring's director of transport, logistics and environmental engineering services.

"The South-east Asian market for eco-products and services alone is predicted to reach US\$50 billion by 2010," he added. The amount is about S\$79 billion.

Last year, the local environmental sector contributed 0.6 per cent of Singapore's economic output. This is set to hit 1.5 per cent by 2015.

While environmentally-friendly practices such as the use of solar energy are very much a part of life in Europe and Japan, Asia is only starting to become aware of green issues.

Rampant development and rapid population growth have given rise to mounting environmental problems across developing Asia.

"Singapore is nestled among countries with growing needs in waste and water treatment and anti-pollution know-how, and our companies have the technology to tackle these problems," said Mr Tay.

One local exhibitor hoping for more exposure from the fair is Globamatrix, which sells V-Kool - a car-window film coating which blocks out heat while letting in light.

V-Kool will promote a glass coating for building windows, called iQue, which managing director Wee Hian Woon said will block out 60 to 70 per cent of the heat from sunlight, thereby saving on air-conditioning costs.

He said of the regional market: "Consumers in Europe, Japan and the



GOING GREEN

In addition to hybrid cars from international firms like Toyota and lifestyle products by Matsushita and Hitachi, innovations by home-grown firms such as New Earth, Grenidea and Morelastic will also be showcased at the fair

United States are more conscious of energy conservation.

"Those in the neighbouring region are starting to become more environmentally aware too, and Singapore is more developed in this aspect."

SIF Technologies, another local exhibitor which specialises in waste water recycling, is making a name for itself in treating water for aquaculture farms.

The company, started in 2003, has recycled more than 100 million litres of water for its customers over the past year, said managing director Matthew Tan.

Pointing out that water pollution has led to more bacteria in sewage and thus more demand for his firm's services, he said: "Our sales have multiplied every year, and we have customers from South-east Asia to Germany."

Besides the eco-fair, Global Entrepreneurship @ Singapore will feature over 50 conferences from next Monday to Thursday. Prominent speakers include Dr James Canton, who heads the Institute for Global Futures, and Mr Jack Ma, founder of Alibaba.com.

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» MOST EXPENSIVE U.S. STOCK

Berkshire shares close at high of US\$100,000

OMAHA (NEBRASKA)

SHARES of billionaire Warren Buffett's investment company, Berkshire Hathaway, closed at US\$100,000 (S\$158,200) on Monday, setting a new record for the most expensive US stock.

The Class A shares of the Omaha-based company crossed that threshold for the first time during the trading day on Oct 5 but pulled back below the level by the close - a feat it repeated three times since only to come up short.

On Monday, the stock held on, closing right at US\$100,000.

When Mr Buffett's investment partnership began buying stock in Berkshire in 1962, the shares sold for between US\$7 and US\$8 apiece. At that time, Berkshire was a New England textile firm. After 1969, Berkshire became Mr Buffett's investment vehicle.

Mr Buffett, 76, built Berkshire into a holding company with total assets of US\$198.3 billion at the end of last year.

Berkshire owns a diverse mix of more than 60 companies, including insurance, furniture, carpet, jewelry, restaurants and utility businesses. And it has major investments in such companies as H&R Block, Anheuser-Busch and Coca-Cola.

Class A shares of Berkshire stock climbed as high as US\$100,250 during the day on Monday to set a new 52-week high on the New York Stock Exchange before falling to close at US\$100,000, up US\$100.

Class B shares, which were created in the mid-1990s to help less affluent people invest in the company, gained US\$5 on Monday to close at US\$3,333. One Class A share can be converted into 30 Class B shares.

Berkshire's core insurance business is expected to do well in the third quarter and for the year, as catastrophe losses due to hurricanes in the United States have been far below expectations this year.

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