

7.0 AUTOMATED TIMBER COMPLEXES

In the mid-seventies, serious efforts were made by the sawmill industry to increase productivity and profitability. Modern, fully-automated timber complexes were set up taking into account the latest developments in relevant machinery and techniques. Among other equipment, mechanized log decks, high speed bandsaws with double cutting blades, fully automatic carriages, pony rigs, line bar resaws with merry-go-round systems, multiple saw edgers, trimmers, powered conveyors, green chains and sorting tables were introduced and combined in modern hardwood mills. The floor levels of such sawmills were raised to facilitate the installation of under-slung conveyors for the removal of waste material and sawdust. Line bar resaws equipped with power feed and automatic setting device, and highly productive, precision cutting gang edgers were used to replace the commonly used small Malaysian bandsaw.

Unfortunately, most, if not all, such projects have failed. Today in Peninsular Malaysia there do not appear to be any line bar resaws or gang edgers still in operation. Both machines have been replaced by the multiple-use, more productive and flexible Malaysian band resaw. In Sabah, despite the technical assistance of Japanese, US, and Philippine companies, none of the three highly modern, mechanized sawmills run as joint ventures by the Sabah Foundation have been able to reach break-even.

As far as can be ascertained, no fully mechanized sawmill complex anywhere in Malaysia has so far proven to be more profitable than the typical Peninsular sawmill consisting of a semi-mechanized headrig combined with 8 to 8 independent band resaws. Indications are that the future development of Malaysia's sawmill industry will tend towards improving and perfecting the unique local sawmill process rather than following the general trend of fully mechanized operations.

8.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRY

In Peninsular Malaysia, the primary processing industry has established processing capacity in excess of present log output. Hence the Government has stopped approving the erection of new primary processing mills or the expansion of existing mills. However modernization and machine replacement are encouraged. All future developments will focus on mill efficiency improvements and technology in the area of downstream processing. In the longer term the industry is also encouraged to examine technology for processing small-diameter tropical logs from rubber and oil palm plantations.

On the other hand, there is still room for expansion of the primary processing industry for Sabah and Sarawak since only approximately 20% of the total annual log production is consumed domestically. The State Governments of both Sabah and Sarawak have adopted a prudent stance in optimising the establishment of