

A P R E F A C E

The construction industry can be regarded as a barometer of economic trends. One would expect increased activity in times of economic growth and a lull in times of recession. In general, this industry requires a considerable input of raw materials in order to meet its demands. A total dependence on imports of such materials can have a negative influence on economic growth and can adversely affect political and social autonomy. Further to this, exploitation of available indigenous resources can assist in arresting dependence on foreign supplies, contribute to national economic growth, as well as create considerable primary and secondary employment opportunities.

A research by a Ministry of Finance Committee in 1975, on the construction industry, identified the present production of construction materials as a major constraint affecting this industry. It recommended the encouragement of research and development in this area in order to counteract this situation. At present, a concerted effort is being made by the Faculty of Engineering (U.W.I), through its Construction Engineering (post-graduate) program, to focus on such issues.

The writer, in keeping with this trend, has decided to focus on local woods, with particular attention to teak.

Most local woods are found in the natural forests and may be difficult to obtain for commercial utilisation. This statement is made based on the present situation regarding the availability of valid statistical data and inaccessibility of natural forests. Teak and Caribbean Pine, on the other hand are plantation grown and have a better potential for effective commercial utilisation. Pine cultivation, though, is a relatively new project (1956)

but teak has been introduced here since 1913 and is sufficiently mature to provide a significant supply of raw material.

The dependence on foreign imports of wood to meet the needs of the construction, furniture and other wood-related industries is startling. For the period January to June 1983 alone, the Central Statistical Office<sup>2</sup> reported that a total volume of 145,932,017 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>) of wood and articles were imported into this country. At the same time, the total volume of teak lumber produced locally for the period of January 1978 to December 1983, stood at a paltry 18,000 cubic metres (m<sup>3</sup>). In spite of this meagre production figure, sale of teak boards has shown a significant drop relative to the production figure.

It appears to be paradoxical that the available local wood has failed to penetrate the local market, in spite of construction's significant dependence on a foreign supply. The writer therefore felt that it was necessary to investigate this particular situation, with the aim of identifying the reasons associated with this anomaly and consequently make recommendations with the hope of inciting some improvements.

It is also believed that some of the reasons affecting teak's entry into the local market, can have similar bearing on other local woods.