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Observations on patent filings

P Kandiah

The year 2011 saw an increase in the total number of patent filings in Malaysia compared with 2010. As before, the number of patent filings by foreigners increased — a good sign indeed, proving that Malaysia is still recognised as a technology-savvy country. As in past years, the US filed the most number of applications, indicating the innovativeness of the Americans and their investment in Malaysia, either in production of goods in the country or export of products of innovation into the country (see Table 1).

The Malaysian government's call to Malaysians to be creative, I believe, is starting to show results, at least considering the number of patent applications filed in Malaysia by Malaysians.

Regretfully, MyIPO's published statistics do not show in what fields of technology the patent applications are filed. Are they in the biotechnology, electric and electronics, or mechanical and civil engineering fields? A better collection and dissemination of filing statistics would benefit the industry and the planners of economy and the authorities involved in the funding of research programmes. Will MyIPO do it?

The other challenge in the innovation field in Malaysia is the success rate of commercialisation of the patents. No doubt UNIK, under the Prime Minister's Department, is seriously involved in this effort. My experience in this endeavour has been that only if the inventor or patent owner takes the lead and "pushes" the project, is there some progress; otherwise the innovation remains merely an idea with project papers and proposals. The inventor or the patentee has to be in the "driver's seat" of the project team if the innovation is to be commercialised.

With the price of crude palm oil riding high in recent times, we are seeing a number of breakthroughs in the palm oil milling industry. We see technology being created to extract every drop of oil from the oil palm fruit bunches, for efficient production and utilisation of electrical energy in the palm oil mills (no doubt incentivised by the new feed-in tariff) and in the production of biogas from the palm oil mill effluent (POME). The commercialisation of these new technologies would need the assistance, support and involvement of the industry. Individual engineers, inventors, or small companies with small mills would not be able to build a pilot plant or modify existing mills to test out the innovation and to use the pilot mill as a showpiece to other

potential customers.

This is where UNIK or the relevant ministries can assist in the commercialisation by providing funding to companies or mills that are prepared to build pilot plants. It is difficult to commercialise the invention overseas (by way of licensing the technology or building new mills using the new technology) if there is no mill in Malaysia using the new technology. Unless the technology is successful locally, foreigners would not be interested to be "guinea pigs" for the new technology.

It is the Malaysian inventor's wish that the government, through UNIK, plays a more active role in the commercialisation of technology from the private sector.

At least in this way, Malaysia can showcase itself as a leader in palm oil milling technology or, more broadly, in vegetable oil technology to the world or in countries with a significant oil palm industry.

Note: The views expressed in this article are the author's own.

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TABLE 1 MYIPO

Top 10 countries filing in Malaysia in 2011		
RANK	COUNTRY	NO. OF APPLICATIONS
1	The US	1,605
2	Malaysia	1,136
3	Japan	945
4	Germany	508
5	Switzerland	315
6	France	300
7	The UK	291
8	The Netherlands	184
9	South Korea	162
10	China	136

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TABLE 2

MYIPO

Top 20 Malaysian patent filers in 2011

2011 RANK	2010 RANK	APPLICANT	NO. OF APPLICATIONS
1	2	MIMOS Bhd	102
2	3	Universiti Putra Malaysia	74
3	1	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	74
4	7	Universiti Malaysia Pahang	57
5	4	Universiti Malaya	46
6	13	Telekom Malaysia Bhd	42
7	8	Universiti Sains Malaysia	38
8	9	International Islamic University Malaysia	37
9	-	University Teknologi Petronas	23
10	11	Malaysian Palm Oil Board	23
11	5	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	19
12	-	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia	15
13	6	Universiti Teknologi Mara	15
14	-	Petroleum Nasional Bhd (Petronas)	12
15	-	Universiti Malaysia Perlis	12
16	16	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka	9
17	10	Institute of Technology Petronas Sdn Bhd	8
18	-	SIRIM Bhd	8
19	-	Sime Darby Malaysia Bhd	8
20	12	Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM)	7