



The PlatCOM team behind Innovating Malaysia Conference 2015. In the centre is Viraj.

# When properly directed and supported ...

## IN PERSPECTIVE

LEE YEW MENG



TWO weeks ago I attended the launch of the Innovating Malaysia Conference 2015 (IMC), held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. The theme was Transforming Ideas Into Reality.

It was organised by PlatCOM Ventures (PV), a wholly owned subsidiary of AIM (Agensi Inovasi Malaysia), and formed in collaboration with SME Corp Malaysia under one of its six High Impact Programmes (HIPs) in the SME Master Plan 2012-2020.

Datuk Mah Siew Keong, the minister in the Prime Minister's Department assigned to look after AIM, launched IMC 2015.

I was told this two-day event would be an eye-opener.

### The event

There were 39 speakers and moderators representing stakeholders, i.e. universities, public research institutes, industry, investors, government and the organisers, from 10 countries.

The session topics were about the various dimensions on technology and innovations, and collaborations between academia and industry for commercialisation.

Tan Sri Tony Fernandes, Group CEO of AirAsia, was the crowd darling with his session, Chamber of Secrets. He had the audience in rapt attention with his travails in building Asia's first "no frills" airline. His interspersed snide remarks, even though low-keyed, on the idiocies and deliberate obstructions, were not lost on the crowd.

The key message of his presentation was To dare to dream (and even to fail)! The persistency of AIM's Abdullah Arshad secured Fernandes' presence.

The other draw of IMC 2015 was the PlatCOM Mega Innoseed exhibition incorporating the Gladiator's Pitch. Stakeholders are provided an avenue to evaluate intellectual property rights (IPRs) that could strengthen competitive advantage, and to source potential licensing and commercialisation opportunities. Inventors get to interact directly with potential licensees and investors.

Gladiator's Pitch is a fast-paced pitching event where entrepreneurs (gladiators) have to pitch "for their lives" to a group of accredited investors. The entrepreneurs were selected from PV's Cradle and Coach & Grow Programme.

Each had four minutes to pitch their business and four minutes for a Q&A at an investor table. Once the eight minutes are up, the entrepreneur moves to the next investor table.

In just three hours, there were 1,100 meetings between 22 entrepreneurs and 50 investors!

I was impressed with the two-day programme content design and the execution.

I wanted to know who was the "contract organiser". My host, AIM CEO Mark Rozario, directed me to speak with PV's CEO/ED.

### Dr Viraj Perera — man on a mission

Viraj is a handsome 39-year old Sri Lankan born. He graduated from University of Bangalore, India, in 1998 with a BSc (1st Class) in Microbiology, Chemistry and Zoology.

After his first year of Masters study in Australia he won the federal government's PhD scholarship. He completed his PhD — Molecular Biology and Biotechnology in the Royal Melbourne Institute

of Technology (RMIT) University in the period 2000 to 2003.

While in his doctoral studies, he was conscious he must give something of value back to society (being funded by tax payers), and being stuck in a laboratory with research work just won't do. Then he learned that there is a mechanism called technology transfer and commercialisation of IPs to create value and impact society.

Upon learning of his interest, his PhD supervisor encouraged him to compete in the RMIT University business plan competition. Viraj's immediate thought was to find out the pain points experienced by the market he was targeting. He brought six ideas to discuss with his supervisor and after a very careful elimination process they finalised on the idea to bring forward to the competition. Their team comprised his supervisor and him.

This life science student simply had no idea about writing business plans, conducting market research and IPRs — where there was much to learn. With adrenaline pumping, he went to seminars, listened to successful entrepreneurs, spoke and asked of all who cared to share, and read lots and lots. He devoted a good six months in 2002. Finally he came up with what he believes a decent business plan with his supervisor. They went through three rounds of selection and the last was to present and defend their case in front of 10 industry panellists. It was his first pitch. They won the first prize!

From 2003-07, Viraj was the CEO/co-founder of a company which developed superior diagnostic instruments and kits to diagnose human infectious diseases.

From 2007-09, he was an Innovation Intermediary, assisting clients with their innovation strategies and financial structuring.

After 10 years in Australia, he moved to the UK accepting the appointment as Business Development Manager for Warwick

Ventures, University of Warwick.

He was involved in the whole gamut of technology transfer project management, which entailed managing relationships with academic researchers with the end game of promoting commercialisation. Viraj was there from 2009-10.

ISIS Innovation Ltd, a wholly owned technology transfer company of the University of Oxford, got wind of Viraj's prowess and offered him to join as a senior consultant. His responsibilities and tasks are now magnified several folds and so was the access of the network of technology providers and seekers, including ISIS Innovations treasure trove of 1,000 plus active projects. He also delivered projects/assignments/training to across the globe, including Malaysia.

In one of his assignments with SME Corp here, he was propositioned to relocate to Malaysia. Rozario thought Viraj's expertise ideal for AIM's Innovation Business Opportunities (IBO) project.

Within three months (August 2013), Viraj with wife, Inoko, and daughter, Lana, in tow became Cyberjaya residents. By December 2013, PV was constituted to turn innovations into successful products and services.

By the way, the "contract organiser" for IMC 2015 was Viraj's team.

### Postscript

According to our intellectual property office record, foreigners registered 90 per cent of patents. In contrast, South Korea has 75 per cent patented by locals.

Surely unacceptable!

Global statistics show that 95 per cent of university IPs is not taken up by industry. Looks like trillions meant for society good became researchers' "feel good", instead.

PV's mission is in complete consonance with good governance, when properly directed and supported.