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Wahab lights a fire

| BY LEE WEI LIAN |

In a story last year, *netv@lue2.0* wrote that Mimos Bhd CEO Datuk Abdul Wahab Abdullah had a tough job ahead of him to mend Mimos' tarnished reputation. When we met him for the story, he was just fresh on the job. During that meeting, he stated his ambitious goal to get 200 patent disclosures by end-2008. Many felt Wahab was clutching at straws with such a bold target. After all, the culture and work ethics at Motorola — from where he spent a lifetime — and Mimos could not be further apart.

So, fast forward one year and we caught up with Wahab just before a buka puasa event at Petaling Jaya two weeks ago. We reminded him of his stated goal and asked for a progress report. "We have 208 patent disclosures already," he says, adding that the target for 2008 has been raised to 290 patent disclosures. "So, how do you think we've done?" he asks, with a hint of satisfaction in his voice. It seems that Wahab is proving many wrong and has indeed lit a fire below the under-achieving organisation he inherited.

Like a proud father, he also told us that we were the first media to find out that Frost & Sullivan had awarded Mimos the Growth Excellence Award for Industry Innovation & Advancement R&D Organisation of the Year for the application of its micro electro mechanical systems (MEMS) in precision agriculture, though we were unable to run the story as we had already closed for that week's issue. He emphasised that such innovations would help jump-start the local sensor industry.

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“We want to give the platform to our local industries to help them advance while we can collect royalties. We’ve already filed a patent for the system.”

The drive and success in patent disclosures and filings at Mimos under his leadership can be directly attributed to the training he received at Motorola, which stresses the importance of filing patents. Motorola personnel have also been encouraged to come over to Mimos and quite a few have made the move, including several from Motorola’s software development centre in Cyberjaya.

A reward scheme has also been put in place which pays cash for successful disclosures (RM300) and filings (RM3,000). A total of RM59,100 has been paid to date. But, whatever the methods, it seems to be working so far. “We are really developing our organisation,” says Wahab. “We are the first in Malaysia to put in place the people capability maturity model (PCMM) and only the fifth in the world to do so. PCMM gives us world-class processes. We have positioned and focused ourselves in developing platforms for the sensor industry so that they can use our platforms to position themselves globally.” His idea is for Mimos to do all the brain work while the industry focuses on building market applications on the platforms that Mimos has developed.

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Netv@lue2.0: Last year, you mentioned that you wanted 200 patent disclosures by end-2008. How is the progress and are you happy with it?

Wahab: Last year alone, Mimos researchers surpassed the annual patent disclosure target by 100%, with a total of 90 patent disclosures. To date, there are 208 patent disclosures. The revised target is to have 290 patent disclosures by end-2008. I am confident that once again we will be able to exceed this target. The success of the internal IP (intellectual property) reward scheme further demonstrates that Mimos is well positioned to become the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies.

How many patents has Mimos filed in the past one year?

By pioneering innovative information and communication technology (ICT) which generates IPs that can be commercialised, Mimos is contributing to the sustained growth of the knowledge economy. To date, there are 10 patents filed and 28 patents are in the process of being filed (at the drafting stage).

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How much money has been disbursed under the patent reward scheme? A total of RM2 billion has been invested in two wafer fabs by Mimos. What are your plans for the wafer fabs?

To date, a total of RM59,100 has been disbursed under the internal reward scheme. In the latest round (January to July 2007), there were 50 patent disclosures, of which six have been filed and RM42,000 was disbursed to 47 researchers.

In the second round (December 2006), Mimos rewarded 15 researchers RM3,000 for patent disclosures. There were 10 patent disclosures in four applied research areas; namely MEMS, advanced informatics, wireless broadband and knowledge technology. In the first round (November 2006), 11 researchers were rewarded RM14,000 for patent disclosures and patents filed. There were seven patent disclosures of which four have been filed in three applied research areas; namely advanced Informatics, cyberspace security and knowledge technology. In addition, in September 2006, four Mimos researchers won the open source software category in the Malaysian National Computer Confederation ICT Excellence Awards 2006 for their project called The Forensic Investigations & Recovery Systems Live CD 1.2.0.

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Mimos is now steering our wafer fabrication towards new frontier technologies, such as microfluidics and complementary meta-oxide-semiconductor sensing technologies for developing MEMS-based applications and solutions.

Has Mimos reached the tipping point where enough people in the organisation are fol-

One consideration in research is the development of networked in-situ water and soil monitoring systems to increase the yield and quality of agriculture produce as well as instrument miniaturisation for chemical analysis. Mimos' applied research in MEMS is one of its eight applied research areas of focus. MEMS today is already revolutionising every product category by combining the best of semiconductors, microbiology, optics, and high frequency wireless communications. There is future potential, both locally and globally, for agricultural productivity and health care. Our work here has received a boost, being awarded the Frost and Sullivan Growth Excellence Award for Industry Innovation & Advancement (precision agriculture) R&D Organisation of the Year, through its application of MEMS in the field. The award is a first for Mimos and I am proud that Mimos is the only Malaysian recipient of this prestigious award.

What plans does Mimos have for its PC subsidiary Mimos Smart Computing Sdn Bhd?

Divestment plans for all Mimos subsidiaries and associate companies are on-going in line with Mimos' vision of moving towards a premier applied research centre in frontier technologies. I believe that when the time is right, we will make the announcements.

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lowing your vision for the entire organisation to change? If not, then how far are you from reaching the tipping point?

Mimos has completed a corporate restructuring exercise which involved people and technology development.

People development focused on capability building and a shift in mindset. Towards this end, Mimos put in place its strategic advanced technology roadmap for innovative applications (Satria) leadership core values, and adopted the people capability maturity model (PCMM) and capability maturity model integration (CMMI). We recently achieved the CMMI level 3 and PCMM level 2.

Our capability-building exercise also included positioning new and existing personnel with vast industry experience in strategic positions; realigning Mimos staff to the right skill sets and technology areas; developing them into 'mental warriors' and putting in place a strategic framework, stringent documentation and best-in-class process controls and methodologies, such as Six Sigma to ensure organisational excellence for Mimos.

Technological developments included the realignment of Mimos applied research areas in line with the government's mandate: to support the national agenda by supporting technological development within the industry while serving the nation and preparing Mimos to be a global player.

Mimos will continue to undertake world-class applied research in disciplines which are from the cutting-edge of ICT and science conducted by world-class research teams made up of an international mix in line with our vision of becoming the premier applied research centre in frontier technologies.

The culture now at the newly transformed Mimos is one that encourages innovation, nurtures creativity and rewards resourcefulness.

How many employees have obtained their PhDs so far under the M*STAR Programme?

We put in place the Mimos strategic training, advancement & recognition (M*STAR) programme in line with our objective of increasing post-graduate researchers. The M*STAR programme, designed to enable employees to further develop their knowledge and expertise, will enable them to translate their existing work into coveted qualifications such as Master's, PhD, professional engineering qualifications...

Mimos currently has 34 PhD holders and 10 enrolments for PhD programmes under the M*STAR programme.

Mimos received RM167 million last year. How much did it receive under Budget 2008? What is your plan for Mimos in the coming year?

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It is not appropriate for me to disclose the allocation per se, but what I can tell you is that under Budget 2008, research institutions were allocated RM546 million.

It is heartening to note the government's intensified efforts to facilitate innovation and promote commercialisation through the increase in royalty payment to researchers under Budget 2008, and one that will ensure Malaysia moves up the value chain.

A country's performance in the knowledge-driven economy is not simply measured by outputs in science and technology, but must also be judged in relation to increasing its overall competitiveness.

It is research and technological advancement, together with the availability of domain experts, that are the key factors for innovation and competitiveness. They will play a crucial role in the transformation of Malaysia into an innovative and market-driven R&D nation. **E**



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