

6 Let's hear it

Education



Let's Hear It, c/o Education Editor, Menara Star, No. 15 Jalan 16/11, Section 16, 46350 Petaling Jaya. e-mail: educate@thestar.com.my

Letters must carry the sender's full name, address, telephone number and signature. A pseudonym may be included.

SUNDAY 24 July 2005

Global benchmark

PUBLISHING in peer-reviewed journals is the globally accepted means by which academics demonstrate their productivity and account for the funding they receive. New findings that are disseminated through publication allow other researchers to verify and build upon what has been discovered.

In the letter "Quality research to improve rankings" (*StarEducation*, July 17) the writer laments the dearth of publications by Malaysian academics in leading scholarly journals.

He observes that local academics hardly publish in mainstream international journals. They present their work at conferences where their papers are not subjected to rigorous vetting.

There is nothing wrong with presenting papers at conferences. It is at these international meetings that many of the newest research findings are announced. However, the idea is for the author to follow up the early announcement with a full paper submitted for peer-review.

The considerable effort required to publish a paper in a ranking journal may be one reason why many Malaysian academics shy away. The more important underlying explanation is that academics know journal publication makes little difference to their career advancement.

Invention and innovation fairs have emerged as preferred venues to showcase research achievement. While I'm not opposed to participation in such competitions, they do have their limitations.

Take the example of the Asian Innovation Awards instituted by the *Far Eastern Economic*

Review a while back. In 1998, an award went to a laboratory in a neighbouring country for advancement in oil palm breeding.

The award citation read: "One of their main achievements is combining the best of male and female fruits... The trick lies in crossbreeding the two (*dura* and *pisifera* varieties) so that the resulting fruit has a thin kernel and rich fruit content. That's the hybrid, *tenera*."

It is correct that the *tenera* hybrid is superior. Unfortunately, no one told the judges that the science behind the *tenera* hybrid was discovered in the late 1930s.

Far from being a new discovery, practically all oil palms under commercial cultivation were already a *tenera* hybrid.

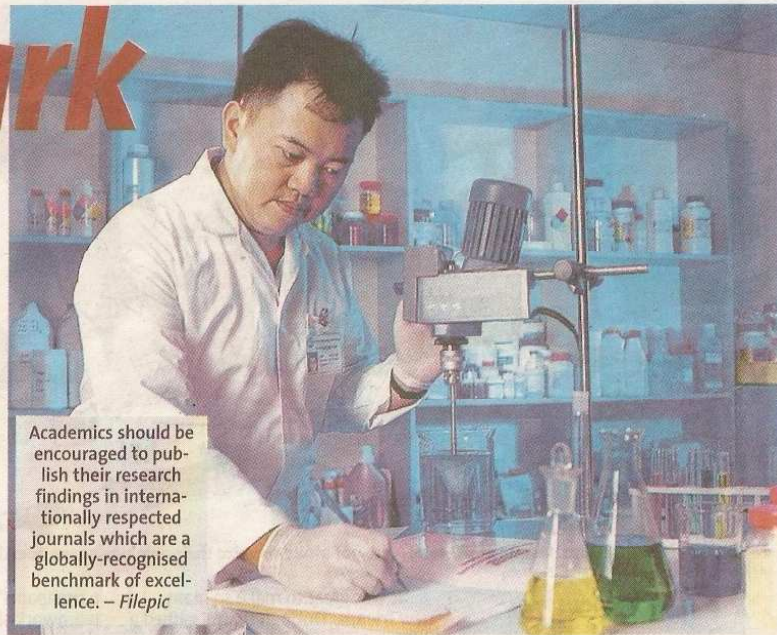
While judges of invention competitions may be well meaning, they do not always have the background to judge technical inventions competently. Academics should keep in mind that success in such competitions cannot substitute publishing in reputable journals.

Journal publication is the global benchmark for research excellence and Malaysian academics should not expect to be exempted from this measure. Malaysian academics should aim to publish their papers in prestigious journals such as *Nature* and *Science*.

Malaysian academics are not publishing in international mainstream journals basically because they don't have to.

I hope research administrators will carefully consider if this state of affairs should be allowed to continue.

YY
Kuala Lumpur



Academics should be encouraged to publish their research findings in internationally respected journals which are a globally-recognised benchmark of excellence. — *Filepic*