

Dampener to new inventions

Academician: Our environment is such that prototypes cannot get to the market fast

Ingenius: Norhayati and her team members (from second left) Prof Dr Nazlina Shaari, Noorhaslina Senin and Nuraini Mahmud looking at the wearable sleeping bag prototype in Kuching yesterday.



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KUCHING: Despite the stunning win, a wearable sleeping bag is unlikely to be on the shelves of retailers anytime soon.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) vice-

chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Khairuddin Abdul Hamid says it was a "weakness" of the Malaysian research and development segment of failing to get innovations and inventions from lab to marketplace.

Speaking on the university's Diamond Award winning wearable sleeping bag at the British

Invention Award recently, he said the higher education sector was partly to be blamed.

"In Malaysia, we still lack an environment whereby prototypes can get to the market faster. In developed countries, they have a better established research and environment: Things are invented, picked up and produced in a much shorter time," Khairuddin said.

"In Malaysia presently, we seem unable to get innovations into the marketplace. We don't know how to make it into business. We don't mind if we can get this invention (the wearable sleeping bag) into the international market (before Malaysia). We would like that opportunity if presented to us."

On the role of universities in helping commercialise research, he replied that, "yes, it is our job to find out a mechanism". "We have to come up with one (mechanism). 'Is it possible,' they (investors) often ask us, 'to get our inventions onto the market immediately?' Do we sell it (the idea)? If yes, sell the idea at what price? We just don't have (the mechanism) yet."

Asked specifically about when the winning entry might be on the market, Khairuddin said Unimas was exploring all possible avenues. Malaysia Design Council chairman Prof Datuk Dr Ahmad Zainuddin agreed with the vice-chancellor's assessment. Ahmad said the career

prospects for many young Malaysian innovators, designers and inventors were often dim.

"Very little stuff that our young talents have been picked up (for commercialisation)," Ahmad told the press conference.

"We have, what? About 4,000 people who graduate into the market every year? They are from varied disciplines, from fashion designers to industrial engineers, but the problem is — are there any takers? Yes, we produce new designs, where are the takers?"

Ahmad said the problem was "sad" and that Malaysia had "a long way to go" on improvements. "I'm also worried about people who *curi* (steal) our good ideas. The market is so open these days."

"Despite the spending on research and development, the success rate of bringing research and development findings to the marketplace has been low," Deputy Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Fadillah Yusof in a statement. The deputy minister was unable to be present at the Unimas event.

"Design and innovation are incomplete if such R&D findings remain locked up in the researchers' labs. It is also not enough to just get them published in journals and talks about at conferences. The linkages between researchers and the industry leaves much to be desired."