Shortage of Engineers in Technology Sector

Penang Skills Development Centre (PSDC) CEO Datuk Boonler Somchit revealed that the country does not have sufficient engineers to meet the needs of the technology sector although the country produced over 13,700 first-degree engineering graduates last year. According to Datuk Boonler, this figure is not enough to meet the needs of the 760 companies in the free industrial zone and industrial estates in Penang, of which 20 are multinational corporations involved in designing and development work. He believes this will undermine the country's competitive edge as a destination for foreign direct investments. Datuk Ng Chai Eng, President of the Penang Foundry and Engineering Industries Association (PENFEIA), pointed out that the shortage of engineers in Penang had resulted in their wages rising faster as well as earning more than their counterparts in Kuala Lumpur. He also called on the government to relax its ruling on the entry of foreign engineers into the country to address the problem of shortage of engineers.

(Sourced from The Star)

Higher Capacity Varistors for Better Surge Protection

Dr Shahrom Mahmud, senior lecturer for the NanoOptoelectronic Research (NOR) Laboratory at the School of Physics, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), had invented high performance varistors (HP Varistors) that can withstand 2,000 amperes of power surge. His invention would greatly reduce equipment damage to electrical appliances from power surges due to lightning strikes as the handling power of a commercial varistor of 13mm diameter was only 500 amperes. Dr Shahrom's invention was particularly useful as Malaysia has one of the world's highest lightning occurrences with about 280 lightning days per year. Compared to commercial varistors, HP Varistors are also cheaper because 90% of its raw materials are sourced locally and produced using home-grown technology. Although his invention can withstand 2,000 amperes of power surge, Dr Shahrom is declaring it at only 1,000 amperes. The invention was supported by an incentive grant from USM and is in the process of being patented.

(Sourced from The Star)

Producing Plastics from Renewable Resources

A team of South Korean scientists, from the KAIST University and the Korean chemical company LG Chem, had produced the polymers used for everyday plastics through bioengineering, instead of using fossil fuel based chemicals. The team, led by Prof. Sang Yup Lee, focused their research on polylactic acid (PLA), a bio-based polymer which holds the key to producing plastics through natural and renewable resources. According to Prof. Lee, PLA is considered a good alternative to petroleum based plastics as it is both biodegradable and has a low toxicity to humans. The team had developed a one-stage process which produces polymer and polyester based products through direct microbial fermentation through the use of a metabolically engineered strain of E. coli. This makes the renewable production of PLA and lactate-containing copolymers cheaper and more commercially viable. Lee concluded that the new strategy should be generally useful for developing other engineered organisms capable of producing various unnatural polymers by direct fermentation from renewable resources.

(Sourced from ScienceDaily)

SAAG Awarded RM406m Power Plant Jobs

SAAG Consolidated (M) Bhd had been appointed by Garisan Etika Bangladesh (Pvt) Ltd (GEB) as the engineering, procurement and construction contractor for the design, supply, construction, installation, testing, commissioning and completion of a 6 x 6MW DG Power Plant and the 2 x 34MW combined cycle power plant at the Adamjee Export Processing Zone, Bangladesh. The agreed execution period was 15 months from commencement of the project works, while payment would be made progressively over the project period. SAAG revealed that the projects, which are worth US$120mil (RM406mil), would be funded through bank borrowings, internally generated funds and/or corporate exercises.

(Sourced from The Star)

Sime Darby Granted Rights to Perak Groundwater

The Perak government had granted Sime Darby Water Resources Perak Sdn Bhd, a Sime Darby Bhd subsidiary, the rights to prospect, drill, abstract and treat groundwater sourced from areas approved by the state within the district of Batang Padang. However, Sime Darby Water Resources will need to submit a feasibility study report on the project's sustainability for the state's approval and come up with an implementation programme and business plan in respect of abstracting groundwater for commercial supply. Analysts estimated that the groundwater is expected to be used by the public and industry at the earliest in 2013 as Sime Darby will need time to obtain the necessary approvals from the federal or state governments and agencies. In a report, Citigroup stated that the 500 million litres per day groundwater project would be supplied from 10 wells, each with a capacity of 50 million litres per day. One of the bidders for the project, South Korea's Da Joo Construction, was quoted as saying that the construction cost of each of the groundwater collector well system could range from US$1.7mil to US$1.8mil. The project has received objections from the Federation of Malaysia Consumers Associations as well as some analysts who believe the project is not a necessity as Malaysia has ample rainfall, unlike countries such as South Korea where annual rain is limited.

(Sourced from The Star)