

Of leaders, unity and history

By TAN EE LOO
educate@thestar.com.my

The winners of the Perdana Leadership Foundation essay contest have one thing in common – they share a love for research and writing.

IT WAS his wish of meeting Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad that prompted Amir Fareed Abdul Rahim to put down his ideas for an essay contest. "I read last year that winners of the contest would have a chance to attend a talk session with the Tun Dr Mahathir so I joined," said the Kolej Yayasan UEM student.

His essay on ways to develop a united Malaysian nation won him the first prize in the upper secondary category of Perdana Leadership Foundation's essay contest.

Unfortunately, Dr Mahathir, who is the foundation's honorary president, could not attend the prize-giving ceremony on Wednesday due to health reasons.

Nevertheless, Amir Fareed was seen smiling from ear to ear as he took home a laptop computer and an RM800 worth of MPH book vouchers, RM800 savings certificate as well as a chance to do a one-week of "work shadowing" at an organisation nominated by the foundation.

Themed "Nurturing the Minds of Future Leaders," the contest had three categories – lower secondary, upper secondary and tertiary (up to the age of 25).

Lower secondary students were asked to submit essays on the contribution of one of Malaysia's past prime ministers.

Upper secondary students had to focus on methods to develop a united Malaysian nation.

For undergraduates, essays had to highlight five lessons learnt from Malaysia's history, from Merdeka to the present day.

Participants could submit their essays in English or Bahasa Malaysia.

The schools and institutions of the grand-prize winners of the three categories were also awarded a workstation comprising a desktop computer, scanner and printer.

Attractive prizes

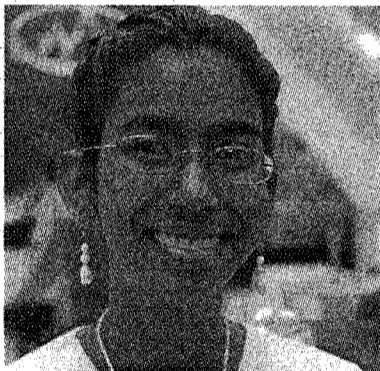
SMK King George V Form Three student Rachel Decruz of Seremban won the grand prize for the lower secondary category and walked away with a Mountain Bike Trek 4900.

"I will use it to stay fit and go outdoors more often," she said with a laugh, adding that she usually spends most of her time reading in her room.

She wrote the essay during the school holidays last year.



Mohd Haizal shaking hands with Azman at the prize-giving ceremony in Putrajaya after he was announced as the grand prize winner for the tertiary category while (left) Perdana Leadership Foundation's executive director Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob and Proton corporate communication manager Yusri Yusuf (second from left) look on.



RACHEL: I love history and reading.

Although it took her nearly an hour to get there, she made the effort to travel to the foundation's library to search for supporting materials for her essay.

"There was a lot of information of which some was new to me because the Form Two syllabus had not covered that," she said, adding that she loved history.

The grand-prize winner of the upper secondary category, Syamsul Azuan Che Hasan, beamed with joy after receiving the mock key to a Modenas scooter from the foundation's board of trustees chairman, Tan Sri Azman Hashim.



AMIR FAREED: I wanted to meet Dr Mahathir.

The MRSM Besei student said he would get a motorcycle licence as soon as possible so that he could go around on his new scooter.

"I liked the topic very much because unity is an important issue," he said of his winning essay.

He added that he went through his father's newspaper collection to look for key incidents that had happened in the country.

Grand-prize winner in the tertiary category Mohd Haizal Zainuddin, who won a Proton Savvy, also made frequent trips to his university's library and the National Archives to do research.

The 22-year-old Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) food science graduate said owning a car would be more convenient for him if he had to go outstation to work.

"It is also an early birthday gift for my mother," he said, noting that her birthday fell on Thursday.

UKM Faculty of Science and Technology dean Prof Dr Aminah Abdullah said she was happy with Mohd Haizal's achievement.

"Science students can also do well in writing if they're giving a chance, time and some polishing," she says.

Each grand-prize winner also took home RM1,000 worth of MPH book vouchers, an RM1,000 savings certificate and a chance to do a two-week "work shadowing" at an organisation nominated by the foundation.

A total of 337 entries were submitted to the foundation, of which 75 were from the tertiary category, 108 from upper secondary category and 154 from lower secondary category.

The essays were judged on the quality of research, analysis and style. The panel of judges included historian Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Khoo Kay Kim from Universiti Malaya, Berita Publishing Sdn Bhd editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin and former *Business Times* editor Hardev Kaur.

The love for history

For 14-year-old Tarvinder Kaur, there is never a dull moment during history lessons.

"It's like a story of your own country. If you are born here, you should be proud about learning what had happened in the past," said the Form Two student of SMK Gunung Rapat, Ipoh.

Tarvinder Kaur said the decision to enter the contest was a smart one, as winning the fourth prize of the lower secondary category had increased her confidence in essay writing.

"I will be sitting for Revision

Quotes from winners

To many he is Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj or 'the Tunku'. To all Malaysians he is 'Bapa Kemerdekaan'. The late Tan Sri Khir Johari referred to him as 'the man of the hour'. This was a man whose character, depth and compassion for the people of his country mirrored that of a father. 'Abah', an affectionate term used for the word father is the closest you can get in truly expressing his legacy. He was ultimately a dream maker, a man who dared to turn our dreams of nationhood into reality.

...The Tunku's singular greatest contribution was to give every citizen a sense of nationhood and belonging regardless of race or region. With a steely resolve and unflinching determination that belied his happy-go-lucky person he forged a nation out of the diverse races and put the doom-sayers to shame...The Tunku had always promoted racial unity. However, on May 13 everything came crashing down... In hindsight with almost 50 years of nationhood behind us it is clear that the fault was never the Tunku's. It was the people's lack of wisdom in sharing his values of compassion and understanding that broke faith with him and caused us to choose the path of anger and arrogance in those fateful days. We broke his heart.

Excerpt from Rachel Decruz's essay "Abah"

Forty nine years of independence, 13 kings, five prime ministers, three economic recessions and still Malaysia is a strong nation... They are three major ways in developing a united Malaysian nation in the long run which are the implementation of Malaysianisation policy, revamping of the national education system and fine tuning of the national economy...Tan Sri Murad Mohammed Noor of the Murad Report said in an interview recently, "As a teacher who imparts knowledge, teach them how to contribute towards the nation and how to respect the multi-racial aspect of our country." Teachers must promote the idea that a united Malaysian nation benefits everyone if it is materialised... If Malaysia is superficially united but in reality divided, it will not be fit enough to stand up against the currents of globalisation.

Excerpt from Amir Fareed Abdul Rahim's essay on ways to develop a united Malaysian nation.

The importance of history is in its capacity to help us draw conclusions from the past events as it sheds the light of the past upon the present. This essay will discuss the five most important lessons we can learn from the history of Malaysia... In conclusion, it can be seen from all the five lessons above that the central theme is multiracial unity. Malaysians must always retain the spirit of consensus and cooperation which had become the pillar of strength since independence.

Excerpt from Loh Kwong Fei's essay on five lessons we can learn from the history of

The Winners

	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Tertiary
Grand Prize	Rachel Decruz SMK King George V	Syamsul Azuan Che Hasan MRSM Besei	Mohd Haizal Zainuddin Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
First Prize	Nurashikin Md Deris SMK Darul Ehsan, Selayang Baru	Amir Fareed Abdul Rahim Kolej Yayasan UEM	Loh Kwong Fei Universiti Putra Malaysia
Second Prize	Afnan Aqif Mohd Pidaus Kolej Yayasan Saad	Ammira Zunnurainn Mazlan SMK Simpang Rengam	Rina Cheah Soo Gim Inti International College Penang
Third Prize		Gan Chee Meng SM St Xavier	Zahid Zainal Universiti Putra Malaysia