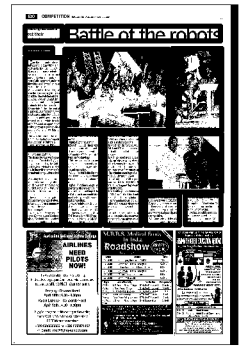


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Battle of the robots

Undergraduates test their technological skills.

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CAMERAS are in place, lights are flashing, and students cheer and clap with their plastic sticks. In the middle of the hall, teams of tertiary students are busy positioning their robots on the game court, which has pots of "cheese balls" around it, and three yellow blocks of "butter" on raised bowls in the centre.

At the sound of the whistle, everyone in the two opposing teams snap into action. One switches on the robots, one gives orders and the other grabs a controller and guides his robot to fetch the cheese balls.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the game court, robots from opposing sides are aiming for the butter at the tallest pole! Spectators start cheering them on, while the robot controllers stand on opposite ends frantically trying to position their robots to grab the butter. Finally one succeeds!

This was the scene at the recent national-level Robocon Competition 2008 (Robocon) at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in Bangi, Selangor. Although it was far from a football match, the excitement was unmistakable.

The theme for this year's contest is "Govinda - Touch the Sky", based on myths surrounding the Dahl Handi Festival celebrated in North India, in line with the theme of the international competition to be held in India.

According to the myth, prince Krishna, who was fondly called Govinda, was a mischievous boy who tried to steal milk, butter and cheese from the pots carried by maidens.

They would take their pots home and place them on high shelves, but Krishna would form a human-pyramid to get the pots.

In the competition, robots from participating teams were required to grab all three butter blocks to achieve "Govinda". If they failed to do that, they could collect points by picking up cheese balls and placing

them in baskets, all within three minutes.

Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Idris Haron who launched the competition said that such events were in line with the government's efforts to emphasise science and technology.

"This competition is to create awareness among students on the development and progress of science and technology.

"We will be left behind in the world, if we do not use technology, but instead depend on labour," he said.

Higher Education Management Department director-general Prof Datuk Dr Hassan Said hoped that the Malaysian team would take home the top prize at the international competition.

It was certainly a battle of wits and technology as the Robocon semi-finals saw favourite UTMA from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) beaten by MMU1 from Multimedia University (MMU) Malacca. In the other semis match, UPMB from Universiti

Putra Malaysia was beaten by UTeM3 from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia, Malacca (UTeM).

In the finals, the fight between MMU1 and UTeM3 boiled down to which of them had better strategies and speed.

MMU1 collected more butter blocks and cheese balls and was declared winner, beating 63 other teams from 31 institutions, while team Utem3 was first runner-up.

The winning team bagged a RM10,000 cheque, an Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) special award worth US\$1,000 (RM3,192) and the Best Engineering Award worth RM2,500.

MMU will represent Malaysia in the ABU Asia Pacific Robot Contest 2008 in August in Pune, India.

Team member Ryan Tan, 23, attributed his team's victory to the use of new technology in their robots.

Team leader Kendrick Saw Tin Hoe, 24, revealed that teamwork among the four members was a key factor behind their success.

UTeM3 walked away with a

RM5,000 cheque, and the Best Design Award worth RM2,500.

Team members were ecstatic over their second-place victory, considering this was only the second time they had participated in the competition.

"We came only with the advantage of our strategies because we did not have the technology that

other teams had," said team member Mohd Zaim Zulkifli, 23.

Group leader Mohd Adam Sepee, 23, said that preparing for the competition was stressful.

"We had to build our robots within six weeks with limited equipment and resources. We also had to sleep overnight in the lab!" he said.



MMU Malacca students are all smiles after being declared winners of the Robocon Competition.



A robot by Team Utem3 grabs a block of 'butter' from a bowl.

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Idris (left) and Dr Hassan after launching the competition.