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Varsity bags a gold for bringing WiFi to villages

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JOHOR BARU: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has come up with an award-winning solution to provide Internet access in remote places.

Termed Portable Broadband Wireless Access (PBWA), the technology converts 3G and General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) signals to Wireless Fidelity or "WiFi", so that an entire village can enjoy Internet access instead of one signal to one user.

A prototype of the PBWA bagged UTM a gold award at the Geneva International Exhibition which was held in Geneva, Switzerland from April 2 to 6.

Speaking at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Wireless Communication Centre director Prof Dr Tharek Abd Rahman said it took a team of researchers three years to come up with the PBWA.

"The PBWA can be used by event organisers who want to have an Internet connection in rural areas or transportation companies which can install the device in trains and buses.

"The device allows all passengers to surf the Net while on the road," he said.

He said the PBWA was battery-operated, prepaid and was able to use solar cells for power in remote locations.

Tharek said the product also uses a flat antenna, which he claimed has better reception than a parabolic antenna.

As for the cost of the product, Tharek said the university's commercial arm would work out the pricing.

It is expected to hit the market by the end of the year.



(From left) Dr Razali Ngah, Prof Dr Tharek Abd Rahman, Mohammed Khomeini Abu and Abdul Ghani Che Wahab showing the awards, the Portable Broadband Wireless Access solution and the Wireless System for Broadband Internet Access device.

Tharek said the product required further fine-tuning before it was marketed.

Currently, the product weighs about 1kg and the research team is working on giving the device a slimmer design and reduce the weight to about 500g.

UTM also secured three silver awards and three bronze in the Geneva convention.

At the same function, Tharek al-

so unveiled the Wireless System for Broadband Internet Access (WSBIA), which won a silver award.

Tharek said Universiti Utara Malaysia and Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia were currently in talks with UTM to install the WSBIA at their universities.

More than 100 units of the WSBIA have already been installed within the UTM campus to give undergraduates access to the In-

ternet in their dormitories.

The device is also being used at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and the Multimedia Academy (MTDC).

Tharek said the WSBIA was supplied to the UKM, UPM and MTDC at a promotional price of RM3,000 each, excluding installation, as the UTM was still conducting tests on the product.