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## Malaysia unveils ‘Best Science Communicator’

Sunday Star, Malaysia



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SCIENTIFIC topics and concepts are often complex and difficult to comprehend; thus, to convey one's knowledge and understanding, one must not only work on one's content, but also one's clarity and charisma.

Proving he has these three Cs to carry it through, Daniel Nesan won over the judges at the FameLab Malaysia National Final 2021 held on Sept 11 and was crowned champion – an achievement that earned him an RM3,000 cash prize and a full-board trip to the United Kingdom, where he is free to visit any research institution or university.

Having beaten 10 other science communicators from across the country, the newly-minted winner is slated to represent Malaysia at the FameLab International Final later this year.

At the national final, which was streamed live on YouTube due to Covid-19 restrictions, Daniel delivered his winning talk entitled “Are We Running Out of Dirt?”.

A plant scientist who is passion-

ate about food security and sustainability, as well as the development of environmentally friendly agricultural practices, he cautioned that our planet may be running out of soil.

“Half of the habitable land on Earth used for agriculture now experiences the continuous application of inorganic fertilisers and pesticides, permanently altering the chemical composition of the soil.

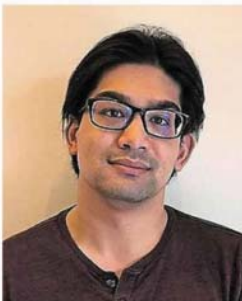
“Every year, we lose millions of hectares, and some parts of the world can no longer support the growth of future crops. But as the population continues to grow, so does our need for food,” he said.

Pointing out the limitations of high-tech solutions and organic farming methods, he described the problem as having “no perfect answer”.

“Socially, we can buy and eat locally, purchase from farmers nearby and understand that we might not get everything throughout the whole year.

“This is a serious problem, and the solutions are not easy. But it's worth looking at if you want to restore the soil that supports both our feet and our lives,” he added.

A competition aimed at finding, developing and mentoring young science and engineering commu-



**Newly-minted champion:**  
Daniel will compete at the FameLab International Final later this year.

nicators, FameLab in Malaysia is delivered by the British Council in collaboration with the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT), and supporting partners the Higher Education Ministry and the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry.

At the competition, participants are required to engage audiences in a three-minute presentation on sci-

entific topics and concepts.

British Council Malaysia director Jazreel Goh commended the performance of the participants.

“We are proud of the Malaysian talents displayed this year, building on the excellent standards Malaysia has become renowned for in recent years. They have proven to be well deserving of the ‘Malaysia's Best Science Communicators’ title!” he said in a press release.

He added that through its work in science communications and FameLab, the British Council taps into international networks to support researchers to use their skills in bridging the gap between science and society, and enhancing equality and diversity in science.

MIGHT president and chief executive officer Datuk Dr Mohd Yusoff Sulaiman highlighted the importance of both FameLab and science communication in inculcating awareness of science, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education among the public.

“All FameLab participants are ambassadors of science because they communicate scientific facts, and indirectly promote science literacy and diplomacy,” he said.

He called on the participants to continue disseminating and sharing

evidence-based research as “it could be the solution for many global challenges”.

Since its inception at the Cheltenham Science Festival in the UK in 2005, FameLab has grown into the world's leading science communication competition.

Its partnership with the British Council since 2007 has seen the competition go global, attracting the participation of more than 10,000 young scientists and engineers to date.

The competition consists of national heats and finals, followed by an international final at the Cheltenham Science Festival.

Prof Dr Abhimanyu Veerakumarasivam was the first Malaysian to win the title of the “World's Best Science Communicator” in 2016, followed by Dr Siti Khayriyyah Mohd Hanafiah in 2018.

This year's competition in Malaysia attracted 67 applicants, with a total of 11 finalists selected from the virtual heats held in June.

The finalists were equipped with science communication skills through a two-day master-class organised by the British Council, delivered by Dallas Campbell, a science television presenter and writer.



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## SUMMARIES

THE LATEST IN STEM SCIENTIFIC topics and concepts are often complex and difficult to comprehend; thus, to convey one's knowledge and understanding, one must not only work on one's content, but also one's clarity and charisma.