Talking their way to the top

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THE host of the fourth Ministry of Education Cup (MoEC) — Malaysia Inter-Varsity Debate Tournament 2014 has emerged as champions of the annual national level competition. Team UM 1 from Universiti Malaya (UM) comprising Lim Wei Jiet, Sarah Choong Ee Mei and Deborah Woong Song Ying took home trophies and a cash prize of RM2,000.

The grand finals saw team UM 1 (as the opposition) going up against the Universiti Teknologi Mara team, UiTM 1 (as the government), in a heated Asian-style debate on whether developing countries should sacrifice civil politics for economic development.

With plenty to argue on within the allotted seven minutes, both sides rebutted almost every point-of-information question from their opponent.

The Education Ministry's Higher Education Department student affairs chief assistant director Enson Din said they hoped to use the competition as a common platform for undergraduates to interact and sharpen their debate skills.

"Such interactions prove to be very effective in enhancing communication and interaction skills among future graduates," she said at the closing ceremony.

"It is stimulating to see these young minds actively taking part in debates and competing for their respective universities."

The winning team members are quite new to the world of debating and only began debating after entering university. They attributed their success to their debate coach Assoc Prof Dr Chandran Somasundram, whom they affectionately call "Boss", and the assistant coaches Dr Zuliana Razali and Dr Rebecca Ow Phui San.

Deborah said Dr Chandran was a tough but excellent coach.

At a three-day debate camp, he told them, "I will break you but after I break you, you will be unbreakable".

Sarah said the most memorable part of the whole competition was during the semi-finals when the "government" unexpectedly changed the set-up of the motion from "Businesses should be allowed to self-regulate" to "Hypermarkets should not use middle-men".

"We were stunned and although we could try and switch things back to the original topic, they did not engage with us so we had to debate both cases to show that we were engaging with the other team," said Sarah.

Dr Chandran, who is also chief adjudicator, advised debaters to keep abreast with current issues if they want to succeed.

The competition saw 22 teams from 16 public and private universities taking part.
All smiles: (from left) Wei Jiet, Deborah and Sarah celebrating after finding out they won the debate.