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Penang lad talks his way to become champ

A 17-year-old earns the top prize by impressing the judges with his wit, style and substance.

THEVESH Thevananthan has vowed to keep "talking" for as long as he lives simply because he has the gift of the gab.

This 17-year-old public speaker from SMK Bukit Jambul, Penang won over the judges' hearts with his wit and charm, emerging as champion in *The Star-English Speaking Union (ESU) Malaysia-PKT Logistics Public Speaking Competition 2013*.

There was stiff competition among the 12 talented speakers from across Malaysia, half of whom were from Penang.

"We exposed him to public speaking from a young age. I'm a toastmaster so I allowed him to follow me and attend my meetings," said Asha Suresh Chand who is Thevesh's mother.

Asha also encouraged her son to take part in school competitions so that he would have the poise and confidence on stage.

Thevesh who is in Form Five, said he even recalled being part of the audience in this competition when he was 12.

"I take none of the credit for winning this competition. I give 100% credit to my parents and teachers," he said.

He also attributed his success to the coaching and encouragement he received from his parents. Thevesh prepared for the competition by rewriting his speech many times.

He said that he tried to come out with appropriate words to go with his gestures and emotions.

"But at the end, it's about having fun on stage," he added.

He spoke on how people can solve problems not just through ideas, but by having the courage to act on them.

Thevesh will represent Malaysia at the ESU International Public Speaking Competition in London from May 13 to 17.



All smiles: Tunku Dara (second from right) presents the mock cheque to Thevesh while Jalilah (left) and Goh look on.

Besides competing with the *crème de la crème* of young public speakers from around the world in London, Thevesh will also receive training from public speaking experts, visit some interesting places in London including Dartmouth House (the home of ESU) and become an alumnus of one of the oldest and most prestigious organisations in the world.

Each of the 12 finalists presented a five-minute speech on the theme "Ideas Are Our Greatest Weapons." Chief judge and ESU Malaysia chairman Tunku Dara Tunku Tan Sri Naquiah Tuanku Ja'afar said the contestants had made great strides and improvements each year at the competition.

"We were able to point out those who stood out last year, however all of the finalists this year were out-

standing," she said.

She said the tabulation of the scores went smoothly although there was stiff competition.

"Each contestant is judged on the substance of their speech, style and technique, general effectiveness and ability to answer questions posed to them.

"Like the judges in London, we also take note of the essential elements of a good speaker such as body language, facial expression and self-confidence on stage," she said.

Tunku Dara thanked *The Star* for organising the competition for the last 11 years and PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd for their sponsorship this year.

Malaysian contestant Marina Tan Hsien Wei who made history last year when she emerged champion in the ESU International Public Speaking Competition in



Happy host: Marina who was last year's champion sharing her experiences with the audience.

London, hosted the grand finals and shared her experiences.

Even before the results were announced, fellow Penangite and first runner-up Caryl Teh En-Ai from Methodist Girls School was already in a great mood.

"I care more about the experience than the results," she said, adding that the competition is a platform to meet good speakers from around the country. Caryl, 16, received RM1,000.

The youngest finalist in the competition said her parents convinced her to join. Her older sister Charin Teh En-Yin was a finalist last year.

Second runner-up Jeffrey Johan Adlan Disney, also had a sibling who participated in an earlier competition.

Yasmin Olivia Adlan Disney was the champion in the competition in 2010, and went on to represent Malaysia with runner-up Arveent Srirangan Kathirchelvan in London.

"She is fantastic at public speaking and great at writing speeches," said Jeffrey who received RM500. He is currently focusing on his

A-Levels examinations and will continue with public speaking in the future.

The rest of the finalists received RM100. They also received a certificate of achievement.

One of the finalists, Mahdev Singh Sachdev said the competition had helped him hone his public speaking skills.

"I didn't make it past the first round when I took part previously in the competition, but this year I am a finalist.

"With every competition, you challenge yourself and improve," said the 17-year old from St John's Institution, Kuala Lumpur.

The judges in this year's panel included Gail Featherstone who is wife of the British High Commissioner and ESU Malaysia advisor, PKT Logistics Group chairman Datuk Jalilah Baba, writer and actor Kee Thuan Chye, Roopvanti M. Lakhiani, Jagdish Bain and Datin Shalini Ganendra from ESU Malaysia.

British High Commissioner to Malaysia Simon Featherstone and *The Star's* deputy group chief editor (II) Leanne Goh were also present.

The public speaking competition, held in partnership with PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd, tests the verbal prowess of students, and aims to promote the use of English among secondary and tertiary level students, and nurture their confidence in public speaking.

The ESU is an independent, non-political, educational charity with members throughout the UK, United States and branches in 50 countries worldwide.

Its purpose is to promote international understanding and human achievement through the widening use of the English Language.

The Malaysian segment of the Public Speaking Competition 2013 is jointly organised by *The Star* and ESU Malaysia, with PKT Logistics Group Sdn Bhd as co-organiser.

Winners all: From left: Caryl, Thevesh and Jeffrey after the competition.



Work in progress: A girl records the event while others listen attentively to the debate.

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