

USM students with their Hebat rocket at the varsity competition in New Mexico, US. PIC COURTESY OF USM



HISTORIC ROCKET LAUNCH

# TAKING 'MALAYSIA BOLEH' TO THE SKIES

**“FIVE, four, three, two one.”**  
My heart stopped beating momentarily before the ignition of the HEBAT rocket rebooted it as I witnessed the rocket zoom through clear skies with a bright orange flame tailing it.

On June 23, a team of Malaysian university students successfully launched our first fuel-propelled, heavier-than-air rocket in the Spaceport America Cup in New Mexico, the United States.

Back in October last year, an invitation thread was shared by my colleague, Dr Norilmi Amilia Ismail, on a students' social media platform and 11 engineering students from three different schools in Universiti Sains Malaysia signed up for the challenge.

Without any knowledge of this competition, I was approached and invited as a co-supervisor to oversee the computational fluid dynamics section of the project.

I stood and still stand by the viewpoint that our students should be encouraged to learn lifelong personal skills outside lecture halls so that they can face the real world.

Hence, I agreed to take up the adviser role. The eight months'

worth of hard work and dedication helped them to grow in character, discipline, knowledge, teamwork and social skills.

The team was constantly under pressure to fulfil the competition requirements and have burned their fair share of midnight oil as a result of their persistent desire to secure a higher rank in the competition.

When mistakes were pointed out, no excuses were made. The team scrambled together to check and make rectifications even when they only had hours before the deadline.

This rare competitive spirit is highly commendable, especially in our nation. We are plagued with the *cincai* or *cukup makan* culture where striving for excellence is deemed as being ungrateful for what we have.

While we should not be constantly fighting and lose this virtue of contentment as part of our identity, we have to build up passion and confidence for us to take bigger steps in the global development race.

It is unthinkable that a coalition of individuals would be without any conflict. Our passionate WAU rocketry team was also vulnerable to this predicament. Each team member is also a university student, a child, a friend, and play various roles all at

the same time, which brought about differences in personality and priorities.

As an adviser, besides guiding them in the technical aspects, I was also helping to resolve conflicts and promoting reconciliation among them. These challenges have not only honed their interpersonal skills, but have exposed them to effective communication and negotiation skills.

We hit the target altitude of 10,000 feet and managed to recover the rocket safely.

Countless congratulatory messages poured into the social media, shouting “Malaysia Boleh” for this historical success of our first rocket launch.

Amid this celebration, I would like to congratulate the shaping of these young Malaysian talents and I hope that this achievement can inspire thousands of subsequent generations to take on difficult challenges in life, even on the international stage.

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