

'Bird of M'sia' takes flight in KLIA

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Stellar structure: The installation celebrates the achievements of Malaysians.

A STUDENT project that began in 2021 came to completion recently with the real-life installation of a structure in Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Named the “Bird of Malaysia”, the installation – which is the resulting effort of a group of architecture and engineering students at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) – is in the shape of a spread wing of a bird in flight.

At its centre, said UPM Faculty of Design and Architecture lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Mohamad Fakri Zaky Ja’afar, is “an egg representing our roots, which houses the main structural anchor, signifying that our roots are important for us to achieve greater heights”.

The Architecture Department head, who was also the project director, added that the bird’s wing, which envelops the egg, symbolises growth and progress, while the portraits on the wing show the national figures who have taken the country to greater heights.

“Hence why the installation was named the Bird of Malaysia. It signifies our thriving nation and highlights the achievements of many Malaysians.

“We hope to inspire more Malaysians to fly higher,” he told StarEdu.

The idea for the installation was first proposed by a team of Master of Architecture students undertaking a course run by Mohamad Fakri Zaky.

As part of the Architecture Exploration and Innovation course, students are required to propose an idea for an installation to a third party in order to secure resources and collaborations.

The students, said Mohamad Fakri Zaky, started pitching their ideas via online platforms, during the enforcement of the movement control order in the wake of Covid-19.

Team Bolehland, he added, was among three teams that received real-life offers from stakeholders but it was the only team that persisted in executing the project at the end of the semester.

For the project to take flight, the team, which included UPM Bachelor of Civil Engineering students under the guidance of Assoc Prof Dr Farah Nora Aznieta Abdul Aziz, had to overcome the challenge of constructing an inverted cone out of timber.

“We realised that we needed a metal base to hold the pieces together, but all the timber types we had explored earlier required tremendous steel support that would ruin the look.

“Eventually, we were introduced to a new timber species, Paulownia revotropix, which is a light yet strong timber that fits the needs of the design,” Mohamad Fakri Zaky said.

Having found sponsors for the project which, among others, gave them access to materials, factory space and machines, the team spent close to a month working on bringing the project to life.

They then approached Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) to whom they pitched the idea of showcasing the installation in KLIA.

“Where else could this concept be fit for display? KLIA is the arrival and departure point for people from all over the world. The concept fits like a glove,” Mohamad Fakri Zaky said, adding that the installation would be displayed in the airport until Aug 31.

Looking back on their achievement, he expressed satisfaction, relief and pride at what his students had accomplished.

“More than that, it reinforces my belief that with the right mentality, cooperation and collaboration, we can achieve great things. These are the recipes for success in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) times,” he said.

Architectural education, he added, had expanded beyond the building industry, hence students would benefit from the mindset of integrating various domains and players in executing a project, combining artistry and technology, business sense and societal altruism.

“These days, the valuable skills are integrating, and creating a big picture approach. Multidisciplinary collaboration is key. Working with others with this kind of mentality is in the DNA of architectural education,” he said.

“It is a field where the approach of design thinking emanates from. It is an approach that has been identified as the best approach to solving real-world issues in current times,” he added.