

Mount Santubong incident source of inspiration for creative team

KUCHING: The winning design British Invention Show exhibit, a wearable sleeping bag, was inspired by a news report about a group of students who lost their way going down Mount Santubong earlier this year.

Head of the invention team, Norhayati Suleiman, told *The Star* yesterday that the team was delighted, honoured and did not expect such stellar results. Even more surprising, perhaps, she spoke about the team's seed of inspiration for the product.

"We read an article in the newspapers about a group of students who lost their way coming down from Mount Santubong earlier this year," the senior textile and fashion design lecturer said during an interview at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak here.

"We then carried out a survey involving the boy and girl scouts, hikers and even storekeepers. We asked them about the common problems in similar outdoor activities. Based on the

consumer feedback, we had this idea that we should think up, literally, a wearable sleeping bag."

Unimas stunned the international community with their multi-award winning exhibits at the British Invention Show held in London, England, recently. The 20-year-old university — with an enrolment of only about 8,500 students, which makes it a small and young university by any measure — won a total of 11 gold medals and five special awards. It submitted exactly 11 products.

Unimas' exhibit included innovations from computer counselling software to the reuse of oil palm waste as fire deterrent materials, from textile dyes made of plants in Sarawak to the wearable sleeping bag.

The last clinched the Diamond Award, the highest accolade at the international invention show, which had a judging panel of 25 world experts. The wearable sleeping bag, which has

already attracted commercial interests, also won the Romania Diploma Certificate Award.

Their invention, which took almost a year from conceptualising to end product, was on display at the opening of Unimas' 1st International Conference on Design & Innovation (ICDI).

At first glance, the wearable sleeping bag appears simple.

It is light, thick enough in some parts to keep out the cold and reflective in other parts to keep the heat out. But there are two more features of the sleeping bag that set the invention apart.

The first is a slot or zipped area around the hood. "You can zip on a mask over your face or a net. That will keep out the insects when you sleep in the jungle at night. Consumers told us they often worried about insects falling onto their faces. It can be used by beekeepers as well," Norhayati said.

The second feature, more important and with detailed designs still kept under wraps, is for

safety.

The wearable sleeping bag was designed with rescuers in mind. It has slots that can accommodate rods or sticks that turn the wearable sleeping bag into a stretcher. "Even there are no sticks nearby you could just lift it up at the four ends and it can carry a person up to 80kg." The design team is presently exploring lighter and tougher materials, which could withstand up to 100kg.

Norhayati said part of the design was a response to natural disasters like the Japanese tsunami. ICDI chairman Prof Dr Khairul Aidil Azlin Abd Rahman said the design was well thought-out and relevant, citing its potential usefulness in the recent Superstorm Sandy, which hit the US.

"The design is simple, cheap and innovative. It can be used casually, but crucially, meets immediate needs in times of disasters," Khairul said.