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Student Achievement in Cybersecurity Competition

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Student Achievements at Siber Siaga 2024: Showcasing Excellence in Cybersecurity

– By Dr. Firdaus Sahran, Bryan Raj

Our students made us proud once again by demonstrating their exceptional skills and dedication in the field of cybersecurity at Siber Siaga 2024: Code Combat & iHack Capture the Flag (iHACK), one of the most prestigious cybersecurity competitions in the region. The event, which was organized by Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence Malaysia (MINDEF), took place at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in July and August 2024. It provided a unique platform for students from higher learning institutions to test their mettle in solving real-world cybersecurity incidents while building connections with industry experts, government officials, and their peers.

This competition was not just another academic exercise; it was a significant learning experience designed to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry expectations. The event featured a variety of challenges that mimicked real-world

cybersecurity threats, pushing participants to think on their feet, work as a team, and apply the knowledge they had gained in their courses.

A total of 19 students from our Computer System & Network program participated in the event, supported and guided by our lecturers from the Department of Computer Systems & Technology. The students were divided into teams, with each team tackling different aspects of the competition, from the Online Qualifiers to the Attack & Defence scenarios, culminating in the highly competitive Grand Finals. The challenges were designed to test various facets of cybersecurity, including network defense, penetration testing, and incident response, ensuring that participants gained a holistic understanding of the field.

The competition was intense, with teams from universities across Malaysia, as well as from international institutions, all vying for the top spot. The challenges were rigorous and designed to simulate real-world cybersecurity incidents, giving students a taste of what it is like to be on the front lines of cybersecurity defense. Despite the tough competition, our students displayed remarkable resilience and adaptability, qualities that are essential for success in the cybersecurity field.

We are incredibly proud to report that one of our teams, Team B016, managed to secure the 8th best overall position, a significant achievement considering the scale and competitiveness of the event. Team B016's performance earned them a cash prize of RM500, a testament to their hard work, strategic thinking, and ability to collaborate effectively under pressure.

A Closer Look at the Competition

The iHACK competition was designed to challenge students on multiple levels. It began with an Online Qualifier round that served as the initial screening process. During this round, participants were tested on their ability to quickly identify and solve cybersecurity issues, focusing on key skills such as vulnerability identification, penetration testing, and ethical hacking. The qualifiers required participants to demonstrate not only technical proficiency but also creativity and resourcefulness in addressing various cybersecurity challenges.

Those who passed the Online Qualifier advanced to the next stage, the Attack & Defence round. This stage of the competition was particularly challenging as it required participants to both protect their systems from cyberattacks and launch offensive strategies against their opponents. This dual nature of the challenge mirrored the real-world scenarios that cybersecurity professionals often face, where they must defend their systems while simultaneously identifying and exploiting weaknesses in an adversary's defenses. Team B016 showed outstanding strategic skills during this round, demonstrating their ability to think like both defenders and attackers, a key attribute in the cybersecurity domain.

Finally, the Grand Finals brought together the top teams for a high-stakes competition that tested everything the participants had learned throughout the event. The final challenges were comprehensive and required teams to employ a wide range of skills, from securing networks and preventing data breaches to responding to live cyberattacks. It was during this final stage that Team B016's perseverance and skills shone through, securing them their impressive 8th place overall.

The Value of Industry Exposure

While the competition itself was a significant achievement, the value of participating in iHACK extends far beyond the rankings and prizes. One of the primary objectives of the event was to provide students with the opportunity to build connections and gain experience from industry leaders and government officials. The cybersecurity field is fast-evolving, and keeping up with the latest trends, technologies, and practices is

essential for any aspiring cybersecurity professional. By participating in this competition, our students had the chance to engage with professionals from the cybersecurity industry and government agencies, gaining insights into the practical applications of their academic studies.

This kind of exposure is invaluable for students, as it allows them to see how their theoretical knowledge can be applied in real-world scenarios. It also provides them with the opportunity to build a professional network, which can be crucial as they begin their careers. These events help to bridge the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that our students are not only well-versed in the theory of cybersecurity but also prepared for the challenges they will face in the workforce.

A Team Effort

The success of our students is a testament to their hard work, dedication, and passion for cybersecurity. It is also a reflection of the support and guidance they received from their lecturers in preparing the students for the competition. Their mentorship and encouragement were key factors in the students' success, providing them with the confidence and knowledge they needed to excel.

As we celebrate the achievements of our students, we also look forward to the future. Competition is an important part of our students' education, helping them to develop the skills they need to succeed in their careers. We are confident that with continued support and dedication, our students will go on to achieve even greater things in the field of cybersecurity.

Congratulations to all the participants, especially **Team B016**, for their outstanding performance! We are proud of your accomplishments and excited to see what the future holds for each of you as you continue to grow and excel in the world of cybersecurity.

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