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Prof Kelly named Mahathir Science Award winner

KUALA LUMPUR: Professor James M. Kelly from the University of California's Civil and Environmental Engineering Department has been named the recipient of the Mahathir Science Award 2012.

This was announced by Mahathir Science Foundation Award chairman Tun Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid at a press conference, here, Friday.

Ahmad Sarji said Kelly was chosen in recognition of his contributions to the development and application of seismic rubber bearings used for protecting buildings, bridges and other structures against the devastating impact of earthquakes.

"(Former prime minister) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad will present the award and prizes to Prof Kelly at a date to be fixed later," he said.

The award carries a cash prize of US\$100,000 (about RM300,000), a gold medal and a certificate.

The winner was picked through a voting process by the Fellows of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, based on evaluations made by an international advisory panel which included Nobel Prize winner Prof Lee Yuan Tseh from Taiwan.

A statement released at the press conference says that Kelly, known as the father of base isolation in the United States, has spent more than 30 years leading the research of many graduate students in simulating and analysing the effects of using base isolation systems to mitigate structural damage during episodes of strong ground shaking.

In the 1970s, Kelly began work with the Tun Abdul Razak Research Centre (TARRC) in London, which is the world's renowned research and development centre on rubber.

His work culminated in the use of high damping rubber bearings, the world's first, developed by TARRC for the Law and Justice Centre building in San Bernadino, California, in 1985.

The statement says seismic rubber bearing technology offers important advantages over conventional protection methods because it reduces the earthquake forces transmitted into the structure.

This technology ensures that critical structures such as hospitals, telecommunication centres, bridges and nuclear reactors are protected and will continue functioning after a major earthquake. The technology is used in more than 10,000 structures in earthquake and natural hazard-prone countries such as China, Japan, Indonesia, Iran, India, US, Taiwan, Italy, Armenia, Turkey and New Zealand.

Launched in 2004, past recipients of the Mahathir Science Award included Prof John Sheppard Mackenzie who solved problems related to the Japanese encephalitis virus and the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia for its role in the development of the rubberwood furniture industry - Bernama