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KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has launched a new Theatre with Dance Programme aimed at strengthening specialised training in the performing arts while meeting evolving educational and industry demands.

The programme was announced during MAHAKARYA 2026, an annual showcase organised by the Academy of Arts and Creative Technology (ASTiF), which also featured final-year student projects demonstrating the application of artistic research, critical thinking and creative practice.

ASTiF Dean Associate Professor Dr. Zairul Anwar Md. Dawam said the programme was introduced through improvements to the academy's academic structure to strengthen the focus of studies in theatre and dance, while complying with quality standards set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

"This step aims to ensure a clearer academic focus, deeper expertise development and a more meaningful learning experience for students," he said.

Zairul said the integration of theatre and dance would enable students to develop not only performance skills but also emotional sensitivity, discipline, self-confidence and the courage to express ideas.

Speaking at the event, UMS Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr. Kasim Mansor said MAHAKARYA 2026 served as an important platform for students to demonstrate their ability to connect academic knowl-

edge with the realities of society and the contemporary creative industry.

"Each work presented is not merely the result of natural talent, but is shaped through a long process of learning, training, research and critical thinking," he said.

His speech was delivered by UMS Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International), Professor Datuk Dr. Rossita Shapawi, during the officiating ceremony held recently at the Theatrette Ahmad Nisfu, ASTiF.

Kasim said the exhibition was more than a display of final-year projects, describing it as a platform for testing knowledge, artistic exploration and the application of creative research acquired throughout students' university studies.

He also stressed that art is not merely a form of entertainment or emotional expression but a language of civilisation that reflects the identity, values and thinking of a society.

"Art teaches people to see beyond what is visible, to listen beyond what is spoken, and to understand life through a broader humanitarian perspective.

"A nation is remembered not only through its physical development or economic strength, but also through the artistic and cultural works passed down to future generations," he said.

MAHAKARYA 2026 was held at the Theatrette Ahmad Nisfu, ASTiF, and attended by university officials, academic staff, students and invited guests.