

UKM celebrates 35 great years



By TAN SHIOW CHIN

EDUCATION

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What do you do when you reach 35 years of age? According to chairman of the central organising committee for Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (UKM) 35th anniversary celebrations Prof Dr Muhammad Yahaya, it is an ideal time to reflect on the past and plan for the future.

“As we celebrate turning 35, we take stock and reflect on what we have done so far and plan a new direction for the university,” he said.



Looking back

The first university in Malaysia to use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction, UKM was the fulfilment of dreams long cherished by Malay nationalists who wanted to raise the prestige of the language as well as consolidate the position of Bahasa as the main language of Malaysia.

The third oldest university in Malaysia, UKM's first home was in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur, a temporary campus while waiting for their permanent campus in Bangi, Selangor, to be constructed.

Established on May 18, 1970, the university's first intake of 192 students studied in three faculties – Science, Arts and Islamic Studies.

Prof Muhammad, who has taught Physics at UKM for the past 32 years, said: “Before we moved to Bangi, the lab was very simple and the equipment quite limited. Now, we are one of the top research universities in Malaysia.”

The student population in the 1970s was predominantly Malay, but over the years, UKM has grown to



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90,000 alumni

UKM currently has three campuses – the main campus in Bangi; the Faculties of Medicine (Pre-clinical Departments), Dentistry and Allied Health Sciences in its Hospital Kuala Lumpur campus; and its teaching hospital, Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Cheras.

From the three pioneering faculties in 1970, the university now has 12 faculties and six research institutes, including the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation and Institute of Medical Molecular Biology.

Among UKM's strongest disciplines are engineering, medicine, sciences and social sciences.



UKM's pioneer batch of students heading for lectures at the Lembah Pantai campus.

The university's staff are deeply committed to research with lecturers needing to produce at least two publications a year in their own discipline.

About 90,000 graduates have passed through UKM's halls since its first batch of graduates in 1973, and the university is now considered one of the top universities in Malaysia.

With its corporatisation in 1998, the university's management body, the University Council, was replaced by the Board of Directors whose chairman is an ex-vice chancellor of UKM, Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Datuk Mohd Rashdan Baba.

UKM also established a private limited holding company called UKM Holdings in 2001 to handle its commercial activities.

Future plans



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and globally.

“UKM has contributed a lot to national policy, for example, in national integration and Rakan Muda, but we have done so quietly,” said Prof Muhammad.

“We have also contributed to the newer universities. Previous vice-chancellors of universities like Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) were from UKM,” he added.

About a quarter of the way through its Strategic Plan 2000-2020, Prof Muhammad believes that this is a good time to look back over the past five years and adjust the Plan to keep up with current national priorities and objectives.

The 10 areas that the Plan is concentrating on include teaching, Bahasa Malaysia, management and information and communications technology (ICT).

Within these areas, focus will be directed on research and development (R&D), quality assurance and internationalisation.

“We will work along the line where our R&D will support the wealth creation and strengths of the country,” Prof Muhammad said citing environmental studies and biodiversity as areas UKM is strong in.

From a human resource point of view, UKM's emphasis on R&D translates to encouraging its entire staff to further their studies up to the PhD level.

Prof Muhammad, who is also the director of UKM's Centre for Academic Advancement, said: “Our lecturers must obtain their PhD within a reasonable amount of time, if not, they must quit and move on to another place.”

UKM is also actively seeking ISO accreditation for its various departments. “The aim is for all components of the university to have ISO accreditation,” Prof Muhammad said.

Like all other universities, UKM is trying to attract more foreign students. With only 5% of its student population comprising foreign students, it is actively engaged in promoting itself via road shows both in and out of the country.

Due to language similarity, most of UKM's foreign students are currently Indonesians who are doing their postgraduate degrees in Malaysia.

However, at present, about 50% of its science and mathematics classes are taught in English, in line with the government's move to teach Science and Mathematics in English in schools. The transition to English will be completed in two years.



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A whole host of activities has been lined up throughout the year as part of UKM's 35th anniversary celebrations.

The highlight of the celebrations is the Royal Banquet or *Malam Santapan DiRaja*, which will be held on May 18 and attended by UKM's Chancellor the Yang Di-Pertuan Besar of Negeri Sembilan DYMM Tuanku Jaafar Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

The theme for the night is the Minangkabau culture in honour of the Chancellor, and will feature a special Minangkabau performance troupe from Padang, Indonesia.

The same night will also see the launching of the UKM Alumni Association's book *UKM: A Tribute to Excellence*, which will feature the 100 most well -nown UKM alumni.

Activities that have already taken place include the launching of the 35th anniversary celebration logo; a seminar on European Union Higher Education Collaboration and Research Programmes in January; and an Inter ASEAN Universities golf tournament held last month.

There are many more events planned for the rest of the year (see sidebar), including several seminars and conferences in line with UKM's aim to be a top research and development university.

Also keeping in touch with its original objective of developing Bahasa, the university will be holding a conference (PEKEBAYU-05) especially focused on the language in September. As Prof Muhammad said:

“We cannot let Bahasa Malaysia become like Latin or Greek and die. We must continue to focus on developing it. That is the main aim of this conference.”

Note: To find out more about UKM's 35th anniversary celebrations, the public can contact Prof Muhammad at the Centre for Academic Advancement, UKM at 03-8921 3890/1.

UKM alumni interested in joining the Alumni Association can find out more about the association at www.alumni.ukm.my

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