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FEATURE-UIAM

UIAM CAMPUS COMBINES MODERN TECHNOLOGY WITH ISLAM AND NATURE

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KUALA LUMPUR: For a new university, the creation of a campus identity is a challenging task, especially so in this age of technological advancement.

Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) is one such university that is creating an identity and has been successful in its task as the campus takes shape in Gombak, in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

At a glance, Islamic architectural features of West Asia predominates. Despite this, the university is unique because local architectural design has been included to stress development in harmony with nature.

The infrastructure now in progress will be completely digital in this country and this gives Malaysia an edge as it pushes ahead to become a centre of academic excellence in this region.

The UIAM campus in Gombak, which is spread over 280ha, originally allocated to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, began accepting students since September 1996, beginning with the Law Faculty.

The plan for the setting up of the UIAM campus was mooted in 1991 and its construction began two years later.

The UIAM'S Executive Director (Development) Assoc Prof Ismawi Zen says the building of the campus is rooted in Islam and its first criterion is environmental management and spaciousness. The surrounding hills and two rivers running across the campus are also blended in.

Several retention ponds are built along the two rivers, Sungai Batang Pusu and Sungai Anak Pusu, to retain water and allow seepage caused by overflow to prevent flooding.

Secondly, the buildings are built on hillslopes and ridges according to the topography of the campus without transforming the image of the surroundings, he said.

Thirdly, in step with Islamic principles, when an area is developed it has to take into account of its neighbours. Usually, intensive development will affect the neighbourhood like air pollution, land erosion and floods. In this aspect, there must be sufficient retention ponds to prevent flooding.

BUILDINGS DISTRIBUTION

"From the aspect of building distribution, the living quarters are built on high ground, lecture halls in lower ground and the mosque, in the centre of all these," he says.

This arrangement of the buildings is to ensure self-respect as taught by Islam.

For instance, the hostels are built on high ground for security and safeguarding the dignity of hostelites and with this in mind, the hostel for the female students are built on ground higher than that of male students.

The university's mosque, located in the centre of the campus, is similar to the Kaabah which can be reached from any side of the mosque.

The UIAM mosque can accommodate a congregation of 9,000 at any one time while the four squares around the mosque can seat 5,000 people. They are to be used for various Islamic activities.

BLENDING OF LOCAL AND ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

Ismawi, says the university also has been able to integrate Islamic

architectural characteristics with Malay cultural feature.

This is illustrated by the students quarters which are local in design with a the pitch roof to ensure that rain water can run off fast, he says.

The infrastructure was built with a view to harmonise the existing trees and hills in the area to conserve the beauty of the natural landscape.

The names of the roads such as Jalan Syariah, Maliki, Hambali, Shafie and Hanafi are reflective of Islamic elements.

Ismawi says efforts were made to ensure that there was no wastage in the use of construction materials. For example glaze-based roofing did not require maintenance compared with cement-based tiles which needed repainting once every 10 years.

"Also, we did not get the help of middlemen to buy building materials," he says.

Building of separate sports complexes for men and women also complies with Islamic rule.

The university will also provide residential quarters for the staff and for married students who undertake post graduate and Ph.D courses.

Another unique feature of the university is the 1.4ha site to be used as a Muslim cemetery and the Islamic International School at 10th mile Gombak.

It is hoped that the school will be able to attract foreign teaching staff to provide Islamic education as an alternative to non-Islamic based international schools.

An open AMP Netconnect cable system costing RM5 million is being installed at the campus. The system will be among the biggest in Asia.

On completion, UIAM will become the first university that is able to provide an integrated telecommunications infrastructure, including to residential colleges.

A fibre optic network will also be installed as the backbone of the campus to cope with various applications in telecommunications, information technology, and voice-activated infrastructural network, such as video conferencing, distance learning, tele-medicine and security systems. "We want to take education out of the lecture room by providing technological infrastructure which enables telephone connection, video conferencing and distance learning," he says.

The facility will be able to accommodate a centralised management system to support the use of a smart card, library management system and the internet, among others.

This will make possible a 24 hour-campus making learning at the university accessible from any part of the world at anytime, day or night.

With 12,329 students from 98 countries and lecturers from 33 countries all over the world, it is hoped that UIAM will become the first university in the country to realise Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's vision of creating a regional centre for academic excellence.

The new UIAM campus is expected to be fully operational by October despite rescheduling of construction work affected by the recent economic downturn.

About RM700 million had been spent but the whole package, when completed, is expected to top RM1.2 billion.

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