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Sarajevo school rises from the ashes of civil war

THE bravery and will of Professor Faruk Jabucar, his staff and pupils during the war are admirable.

The eruption of war in the Bosnian capital in 1992 failed to dent their spirits.

Amid gunfires and mortar shellings, Jabucar and 46 teachers made their journey almost everyday to teach 940 pupils at Camil Sijaric primary school.

The school was turned into a shelter for the pupils when war escalated.

"For months, the school was a shelter for the children until they had to give it up when it was no longer safe following heavy shellings by the Serbian army," said the 50-year-old school principal of the sufferings of his pupils and teachers during the Bosnian conflict.

When the shellings got worse, Jabucar summoned his staff to an emergency meeting to determine the safety of the children.

"We decided it was safer for the pupils to seek refuge here rather than having to walk daily to the school at the height of the internecine.

"I am proud that my teachers gave their full support and volunteered to come to school everyday to teach the students," said Jabucar.

But continuous shelling of the building by the Serbian army finally cut short the children's stay at the school.

The walls and classes were ruined. Water and electricity supplies were cut off and sanitation became intolerable.

Without a choice, Jabucar, his teachers and pupils decided to abandon the school, for their own safety.

Today, his office is something to be envied of considering Bosnia-Herzegovina is back rising from the ashes of war.

Every new visitor to his school would be offered a chance to view a videotape revealing the brutality of the Serbian army during the civil war.

It was an amateur video, taken in 1992, by one of his staff but it was good enough to send chills down the spine of viewers.

Clips of the video would certainly touch their hearts.

It rendered the chronological events leading to the destruction of the school and the predicament of the teachers and pupils at the height of the war.

It was a picture of how the school's bullet-riddled walls were ripped apart by mortar fires. Seventy per cent of the school's facilities were ruined.

"Our school was the most modern in Yugoslavia before the war broke out," said Jabucar.

It still is. And it was with the help of Malaysian teachers and pupils.

The Camil Sijaric school was reconstructed with RM4.25 million contributed by teachers and pupils during a fund-raising campaign in Malaysia a few years ago.

"We will never forget the help from Malaysians. They have a special place in our hearts.

"We tried our best recently to do something to pay it back. We hope we succeeded," he said, referring to the choir performance staged by his pupils during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently.

"Everything at the school even the television set was donated by Malaysians. We wish we will have a closer relations and contacts with the

teachers and pupils of Malaysia.

"We hope teachers from Malaysia are willing to become our guests ... we appreciate our friends from Malaysia."

(END)