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Islamic heritage conservation

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IN its aim to be the custodian and educator of Islamic art and craft in Southeast Asia, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia recently opened its much-awaited Conservation Centre at its premises in Jalan Lembah Perdana, Kuala Lumpur.

The centre is the first of its kind in the country and region, and will cater for the national and regional needs with special focus on Islamic art and craft. The methodology used is based on Islamic principles and values.

The centre conserves, restores and manages cultural property, safeguarding it for future generations and engaging in heritage advocacy through co-operation with heritage and conservation institutions.

The centre also furthers knowledge and information management in conservation through research and training.

Covering some 1,100 square metres, the centre is built at a cost of RM25 million, funded by the museum and the Albukhary Foundation. Generous sponsorships have been provided by Siemens Malaysia, amounting to RM350,000, while "Centrum fuer Internationale Migration und Entwicklung" based in Frankfurt, Germany contributes to the training of conservation personnel.

The centre consists of five different laboratories each focusing on specific areas such as organic and inorganic material, analysis and a photographic studio.

All the laboratories are engaged in specific tasks and are supplied with state-of-the-art tools and equipment.

The centre is manned by 15 experienced and trained staff.

"Today's world is characterised by fast development and globalisation. The 21st century is the century in which cultural and natural heritage is threatened, damaged or destroyed as never before.

"Conservation and restoration can counterbalance negative effects on tangible heritage, whether they are of social, economic or environmental nature," said museum director Syed Mohamad Albukhary.

The conservation centre was opened by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Also present were Albukhary Foundation executive chairman Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar Albukhary and the museum's conservation centre head Friedrich Zink.