



UPM's Vision 2010

to be among top 20 in Asia

H2-3



Working on UPM's strengths

Universiti Putra Malaysia's new vice-chancellor Professor Nik Mustapha Raja Abdullah tells ARNI ABDUL RAZAK that the university wants to be among the top 20 universities in Asia by 2010.

THE vice-chancellor's room on the fourth floor of Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) administration building at the Serdang campus was in disarray.

"Please excuse the mess," says Professor Nik Mustapha Raja Abdullah. "I've moved in only a few days ago and have yet to unpack."

Since taking office on Jan 1, the newly appointed vice-chancellor of Malaysia's first agricultural tertiary training institution has been busy with the Press (he has so far been featured on TV3 and RTM) and faculty members.

"I had a two-hour breakfast meeting with my three deputy vice-chancellors on my first day; we were plot-

ting to take the university to greater heights.

"I think it is extremely important that we understand each other's thought processes first so that we are able to work better as a team," says the 51-year-old academician, who is the fifth vice-chancellor of the university.

He is currently being assisted by deputy vice-chancellors Professor Radin Umar Radin Sohadi (academic and international affairs), Associate Professor Azali Mohamed (student affairs) and the recently ap-

pointed Professor Abu Bakar Salleh (former head of the Biotechnology and Science Faculty) who is in charge of research and innovation.

A senior UPM professor says the university is fortunate to have three capable deputy vice-chancellors to assist the vice-chancellor in managing the university.

"I think we have a good team," he observes. "They are very good in their own fields, especially Abu Bakar, who has done considerable research in biotechnology."

Nik Mustapha himself is UPM's former deputy

vice-chancellor for research and innovation, a position he held for about six weeks.

Before the appointment, he was the deputy vice-chancellor for development since June 2004.

He also headed the university's Faculty of Economics and Management from 1999 to 2004.

A former student of UPM (he studied for his Diploma in Agriculture there from 1973 to 1976), Nik Mustapha later pursued his studies in the United States, obtaining his Bachelor of Science in Resource Economics from

the University of California, Davis in 1979.

He also received a Master in Agriculture and Resource Economics from Oregon State University, the United States and a doctorate in the same field and from the same university in 1988.

He came back to Malaysia in 1989 and began lecturing at UPM's Department of Natural Resource Economics in the areas of fisheries and recreational economics.

On his appointment as UPM's new vice-chancellor, Nik Mustapha stresses that he will not be making any

major changes to the policies set by UPM's former leaders.

"I don't believe that we should fix something that is running so well. And UPM is running on course, according to our 10-year strategic plan (2000-2010).

"However, there is always room for improvement and if we see something that needs 'attention', we will address it," he says.

Currently, Nik Mustapha's main concern is to push for more agricultural research and to get the university to be more aggressive in commercialising its research products.

"I am aware that commercialisation is a common problem among universities



ABU BAKAR: Responsible for research and innovation



RADIN UMAR: In charge of academic and international affairs



AZALI: Heading student affairs

in Malaysia. Unlike venture capitalists in Western countries who pounce on universities to help market research products, we are less willing to invest in 'something new'. Because of that, commercialisation has become for us an expensive affair for such."

Despite all that, UPM has so far managed to patent four of its products with more than 70 waiting to be filed. The university has also allocated more than RM500,000 to facilitate the filing of patents on behalf of its researchers.

Not only that, it has also managed to commercialise more than 250 of its products, based on agricultural research.

The vice-chancellor says agricultural research is not what it used to be.

With biotechnology in the picture, agricultural research has become far more interesting. Although UPM has a research management centre that emphasises research and development, it is not enough.

"We are now planning to set up a centre for innovation and commercialisation that will oversee the university's commercialisation activities," says Nik Mustapha.

The new centre, which will be one of UPM's eight institutes of excellence, will have its own business development manager, legal advisers and marketing officers who will ensure that products which are produced in the university labs reach the mass market.

Apart from that, the university is also planning to work with the corporate sector to ensure that its research

products are marketed commercially.

"I think researchers should work in the lab and worry about coming up with a good product rather than think about commercialising it. Researchers are not good in business, so we should let the experts handle that," Nik Mustapha says.

UPM prides itself in having some of the best researchers in the country. Last year

Running a university is not an easy task because you have to deal with so many intelligent people who will question your every move. But I'm ready for the challenge. I'm more concerned about making UPM a better university

alone, three of its outstanding academicians received recognition from various international institutions including the prestigious Carlos J. Finlay Prize in Microbiology which was awarded to Professor Khatijah Mohamad Yusoff for her research on vaccine and poultry virus.

"It's good to hear these success stories and we hope

there are more to come. I tell my staff that they have to start working harder with fewer resources," says Nik Mustapha.

He wants nothing more for the university than to see it recognised in the local and international arena.

"The university, in its 10-year strategic plan, wants to be among the top 20 universities in Asia by 2010. It is my job now, as the vice-chancellor, to ensure that everyone works towards achieving this goal."

The down-to-earth Nik Mustapha is not fazed by the recent controversy surrounding his predecessor, Professor Datuk Mohd Zohadie Bardaie, who was "pressured" to step down following a fall out with Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Salleh.

"I've too many other things to think about," he says. "Running a university is not an easy task because you have to deal with so many intelligent people who will question your every move. But I'm ready for the challenge. I'm more concerned about making UPM a better university."

Nik Mustapha notes the vast changes that have taken place at the university over the years.

When he was a student at the university in the 70s, there were only a few hundred students pursuing their studies there; it has one residential college and a handful of newly setup faculties.

The campus landscape has since changed; more faculties were established and the student number has risen tremendously (see report below).



NIK MUSTAPHA: 'I don't believe that we should fix something that is running so well'

"I could hardly recognise it when I got back from my doctoral studies in the late 80s. It has grown in leaps and bounds," says Nik Mustapha, who is also among the youngest at the university to obtain a professorship. He became a full-fledged professor in 1997 at 43.

Nik Mustapha knows that things are going to get more exciting this year, especially with the year-long 75th diamond jubilee celebration that will be taking place from May.

The university will be organising various activities including seminars, conferences and sports tournaments to create a closer bond between the university community and its alumni.

It is also planning to launch Malaysia's first agri-

culture conservatory (housing more than 400 endangered herbs and medicinal plants) as well as to construct the 1,931-inch (denoting the year UPM was formed) Warisan Budi Putra Clock Tower which will bear the names of the university's graduates over the years.

"Clock towers are significant monuments in universities abroad but we are the first university in Malaysia to have its own clock tower. Our graduates are encouraged to buy tiles bearing their names and faculty details to be put on the clock. It gives them a sense of belonging."

As he looks out of the window, probably visualising the clock tower just outside his office, one senses that he wants nothing but the best for the university.

"The success of UPM is not dependent on me alone.

"I need everybody to chip in, including the university community, the alumni association, the government and the public.

"And yes, I need someone to help me unpack too," he says.

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■ Cover picture: UPM vice-chancellor Professor Nik Mustapha Raja Abdullah takes a stroll through the university grounds

■ For more details on UPM's 75th diamond jubilee celebration, visit www.upm.edu.my/jubliantan/