

Diet of **instant noodles**

ONE WAS the envy of many riding his scrambler all over campus while another survived on half a packet of instant noodles for each meal. One pursued physical education and scaled new heights later in life while another was the first post-graduate student of the university and now an adjunct associate professor at his alma mater.

They were all students of Universiti Putra Malaysia, a 75-year-old institution known by other names in the past. They have all made a name for themselves and have come a long way from their memorable student days.

StarEducation catches up with several luminaries who have made their university proud, including the current vice-chancellor Prof Dr Nik Mustapha Raja Abdullah.

In fact, he was an undergraduate when the College of Agriculture was upgraded to Universiti Pertanian Malaysia in 1973.

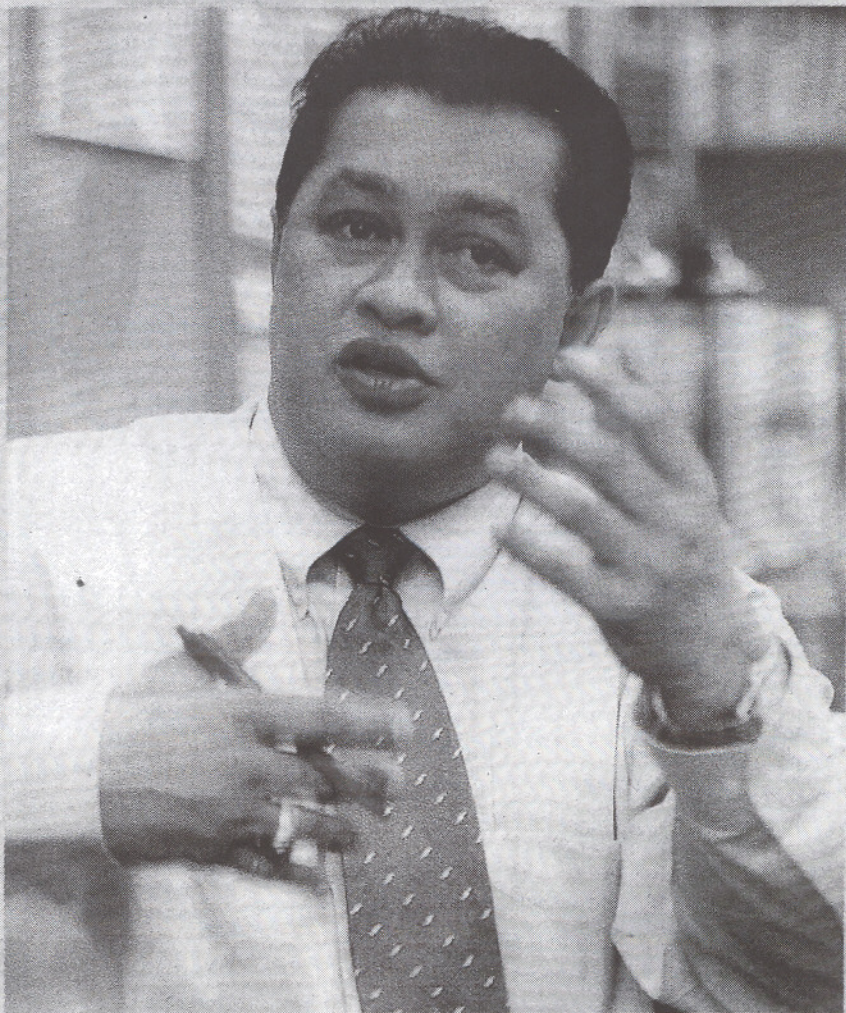
A keen basketball and rugby player at university, he describes his three years of study there as fun.

"I stayed in the same room in Block B in First College for the entire time I was there. Back then, Block B was notorious as it had all the naughty boys," he says with a laugh.

A Diploma in Agriculture student back then, he says he has remained in contact with many of his friends from the university.

"On a recent visit to Sarawak, I was waiting in the Chief Minister's office to see Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud when I met Datuk Amar James Wong.

"Imagine my surprise when I introduced myself and he told me he had studied at UPM when it was the School of Agriculture. It was an amazing coincidence," he adds.



Now highly successful, Mansoor went through tough student days, barely surviving on instant noodles.

One of his friends from the university, Avon Malaysia president Mansoor Wan Abdullah recalls how Prof Nik Mustapha used to go to lectures on his scrambler.

"As a *kampung* boy, I was impressed as I walked to all my classes while (Prof) Nik (Mustapha) rode a scrambler," he says.

Asked about the scrambler, Prof Nik Mustapha recalls buying it for about RM1,000 in Kuala Lumpur.

"It was certainly a convenient way of getting around the campus," he adds.

Upon completing his Masters and PhD at Oregon State University in the United States in the 1980s, he returned to UPM as a lecturer.

"Back then, UPM was still small and the lecturers knew all the students by name. We all had a cordial relationship.

"It is different now as UPM is big and I don't even know the names of some of the staff," he says.

Prof Nik Mustapha has literally grown with the university, first as a student then as a lecturer in the early 1980s and now as the fifth vice-chancellor.

"I was on cloud nine when I was first appointed. It is a heavy responsibility but it is a good feeling to contribute back to the university and bring it to greater heights," he says.

He was the former deputy vice-chancellor for research and innovation, as well as the deputy vice-chancellor for development.

From tobacco to lipsticks

Recalling his time at the university, Mansoor who was there from 1974 to 1978, says he chose UPM because his

degree, a Bachelor of Science in AgriBusiness was a combination of the two disciplines.

"That's why I ended up in Serdang even though I had three siblings in Universiti Malaya at the time. I liked the multi-disciplinary combination better," he says.

But life was not easy for Mansoor as he had to survive on RM30 a month. His father died when he was seven and his teacher mother had to raise nine children on her own.

"I never bought any books or paper because it was too expensive. I spent all my time in the library and did not go to the canteen with friends because I couldn't afford it," says this father of four.

He would use whatever paper he could find to write notes.

"I took very good notes and my friends always borrowed them. One day, someone copied my assignment word for word and handed it to the lecturer.

"My original grade of 90 over 100 was halved. The lecturer said we deserved 45 each!" he recalls.

Mansoor survived mainly on instant noodles – he would have half a packet for lunch and the rest for dinner.

When he was in his third year, his brother who was then a naval officer visited him but he was out.

Upon seeing the half-eaten Maggi noodles packet, he asked the roommate what it was for and was astonished to discover how his brother had been surviving all along.