

# Hop on the bicycle

**DUAL ROLES:** A shared passion for recycling and sustainability led to a campaign which promotes carbon footprint reduction and healthy lifestyle in a local university

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**S**TUDENTS waiting for campus buses in the morning is a common sight at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

Most would start lining up at the bus stop at least half an hour before lectures begin to avoid being late.

But a feasibility study conducted by the university suggests that students would get to class even faster if they were to walk or cycle instead.

Vice chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohd Fauzi Ramlan says: "It takes a maximum of five minutes to either walk or cycle on campus. Riding the bus takes longer than that."

Yet only those from the faculties of Medicine and Engineering do so at the moment.

In an effort to encourage more students to reduce their carbon footprint and adopt a healthy lifestyle, UPM recently teamed up with Coca-Cola Malaysia to introduce the Recycle To Cycle programme, which allows students to rent bicy-

cles on campus using a points system.

All they need to do is drop off recyclable items at designated collection centres in the university to collect the points.

The project comes some 40 years after Malaysia's first bicycle advocate Gurmit Singh began promoting the habit of cycling for mobility (**see accompanying article**).

The collaboration between UPM and the beverage industry giant grew from their shared passion for recycling and sustainability.

General manager (Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei region) Gill McLaren says: "We feel it is important to educate youth on recycling and sustainability because they will become role models as they mature. They will discuss the issue with their families, which will make the effort sustainable from the cultural perspective too."

McLaren believes UPM is deserving of the RM750,000 grant from the Coca-Cola Foundation to carry out the two-year project because of its status as the greenest university in Asia.

UPM was ranked sixth among



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*Mohd Fauzi Ramlan,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia  
vice chancellor*

95 universities globally in the GreenMetric World University Ranking 2010 (GreenMetric), behind University of California, Berkeley, the United States; University of Nottingham, the United Kingdom; York University, Canada and Northeastern Univer-

sity, Boston, United States.

The league table takes account of tertiary institutions' commitment to ensuring sustainability, the size and area of their green infrastructure and efficiency in energy use on campus.

In addition, they are also judged on their adoption of green technology, policy enforcement and supervision of transportation and sustainable waste management.

Although UPM dropped to 17th and 19th places in the last two years, it remains the only institution in Asia to successfully position itself among the world's top 10 universities in GreenMetric to date.

The university has had some success with projects involving cycling and recycling in the past.



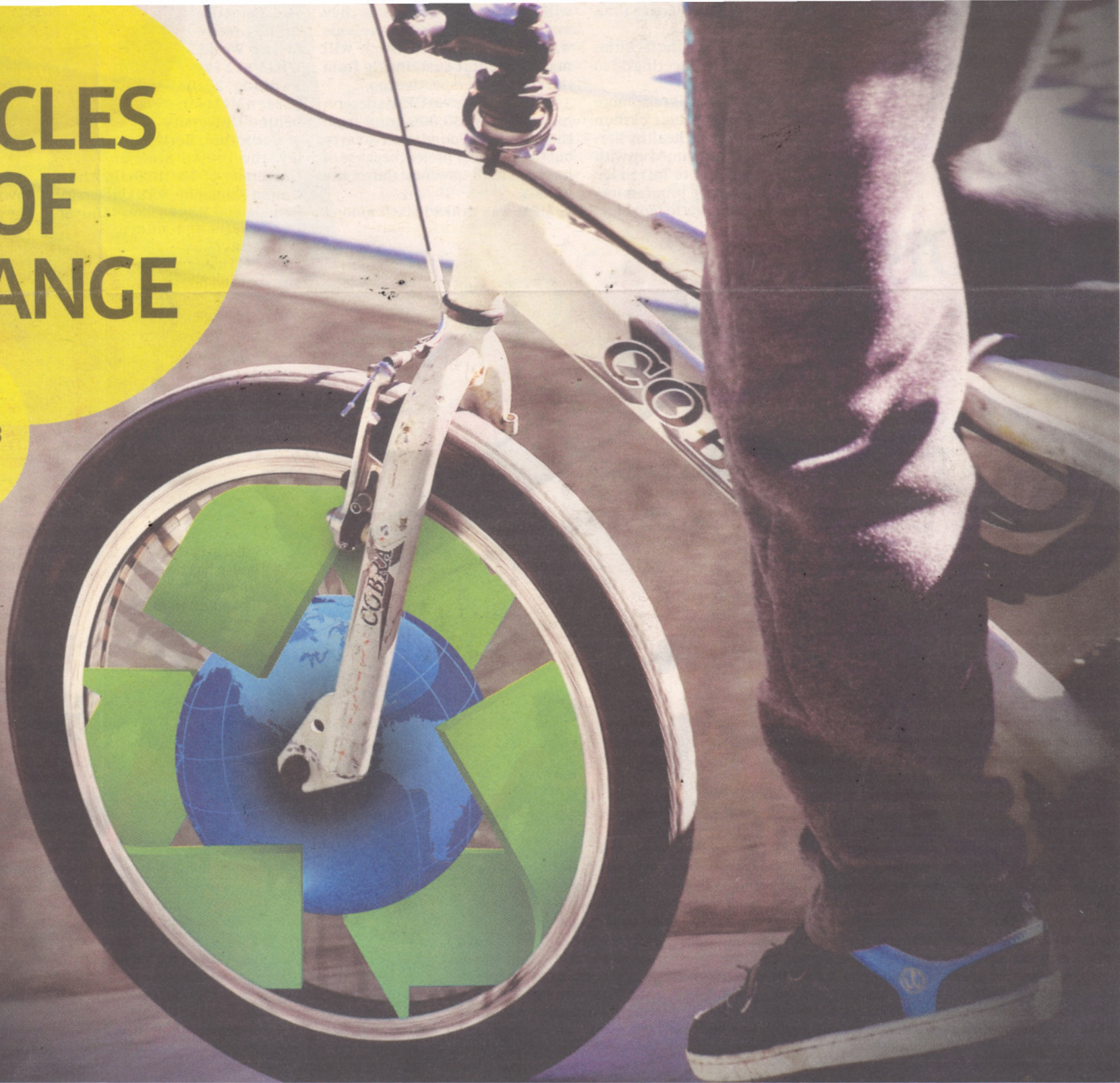


*It takes a maximum of five minutes to cycle to class on UPM campus.*



# CYCLES OF CHANGE

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**Ahmad Ismail**



**Gill McLaren**

# Good concept

MALAYSIA'S first bicycle advocate Gurmit Singh used to cycle to University of Malaya from his home in Petaling Jaya during his student days some 50 years ago.

So it is little wonder that the environmentalist views favourably recent efforts by local universities to promote cycling on campus.

Gurmit considers the recently launched Recycle To Cycle initiative by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Coca Cola Malaysia "a good concept".

"It is timely as many cities in the developed world are aggressively promoting cycling for mobility," says Gurmit, who is also chairperson of the Centre for Environment, Technology and Development Malaysia.

Recycle To Cycle is a bike-sharing venture which enables UPM students to rent bicycles on campus using a points system.

They need only drop off recyclable items at designated collection centres in the university to collect points.

It is hoped that this will inspire more students to reduce their carbon footprint and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Gurmit considers the initiative commendable and would hate to see it fizzle out.

"There are many practical issues to consider, starting with how to interest

students in continuing to support the cause," he says.

"The incentive of renting bicycles might not be enough for some young people who value cash more than points," he says.

The programme's operation mechanism must also be well-thought out for it to succeed.

"How long can students keep the bicycles? Can they bring them home? Does earning more points allow them to keep the bikes longer? Who will be responsible for lost or damaged bikes? These are details that need to be clear from the start," he adds.

While Gurmit is critical of the project, he applauds UPM's plans to introduce

separate bicycle lanes as he has been campaigning for them in Malaysia for a long time.

He urges the university to not stop there.

Besides bicycle lanes and secure parking spaces for bicycles, there should also be shower and changing facilities for cyclers, he says.

"These are a must for new buildings. I used to be embarrassed when I turned up for meetings drenched in perspiration because I couldn't shower," he adds.

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**Gurmit Singh**



**Gurmit Singh (pictured) peddling his bicycle on World Environment Day in 1979.**



"We started promoting the use of bicycles on campus five years ago. Recycle To Cycle has reintroduced bicycles as a mode of transport to students," says Mohd Fauzi.

Biology department head Professor Ahmad Ismail, a major proponent of the campaign in UPM, considers it an important milestone in the history of recycling in Malaysia.

"I do not know if any other university has done it before," he says.

Universiti Sains Malaysia, for instance, had introduced a cycling on campus campaign several years ago but did not combine it with the recycling component.

Mohd Fauzi feels it is about time that such a project was being introduced. The timing of the campaign launch is perfect as students had just begun a new semester.

"I hope that 3,500 students will walk or cycle to class by September," he adds.

The university community can also expect a series of promotional exercises all year-long.

"Preregistered student volunteers will cycle on campus to generate interest in the movement. They will also be on duty at the collection centre located at the Biology department," says Ahmad, a professor of Wildlife and Ecotoxicology.

The proper facilities must be in place if the university wants stu-

dents to cultivate the walking or cycling habit.

"Bicycle lanes and walkways will be constructed around campus next semester as an incentive for students to walk or bike," he says.

There will also be substations along the bicycle and footpaths covering residential colleges, academic buildings and places in between them.

Each will be located only one minute apart by bicycle.

"This means that the next station is just a minute away if it rains," says Mohd Fauzi.

He hopes that the practice will eventually spread across the entire campus.

"This will not only reduce carbon emissions but also vehicular accidents," he adds.

The university intends to research into how the campaign has affected students' health and well-being before the two-year project ends.

"We hope to gather information such as how much energy we have saved and how students' health has improved from cycling daily," says Ahmad.

It appears that the campus community is responding enthusiastically to the initiative.

"The number of volunteers increases daily. The management staff will cycle on campus every



Mohd Fauzi Ramlan (right) leads students, staff members and guests on a short cycle around campus.

Friday as part of the campaign. I'm optimistic that this will produce a good result," he adds.

McLaren foresees the programme carrying on for many years.

"Recyclable items which students leave at the centres will be sold and the money will be channelled into the project," she says.

Mohd Fauzi expects Recycle To Cycle to go global.

"We already have a large network of international students on campus. If they buy into this idea, they may return to their respective countries and replicate it. It will set off a chain reaction," he says.