

Growing from strength to strength

UPM subsidiary UPM Holdings Sdn Bhd is set to fulfil the Higher Education Ministry's vision for public universities to generate its own income.

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WHILE Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has been steadily climbing the ranks of university rankings here, its subsidiary UPM Holdings Sdn Bhd (UPMHoldings) is also going from strength to strength.

Into its seventh year, UPMHoldings was set up to fulfil the Higher Education Ministry's vision that all public universities should generate income sufficient for at least 30% of its operating expenses by 2020.

Its most ambitious programme by far is to transform a derelict student hostel formerly known as First College or Kolej Mohamed Rashid (KMR).

Last week, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh opened the refurbished hostel now rebranded as KMR OnePutra Residence.

This premium student accommodation is part of an ambitious plan to redevelop that area to turn it into OnePutra Complex that is expected to cost RM100mil.

"OnePutra Complex is an approach by UPM Holdings to achieve the objective of strengthening its image and corporate standing," said UPMHoldings on its website.

"It originated from the idea of refurbishing the long-abandoned KMR. Along the way, the proposal moved from the initial idea of renovation works into a fresh urban master plan proposal by injecting Utopian intervention in order to rejuvenate the current building massing and surrounds to emerge as a new landmark for UPM and to symbolise the growth of UPMHoldings," it added.

KMR began as First College, the first student accommodation during the days of the Agriculture School before it became Agriculture College Malaya.

KMR, which was at one point scheduled for demolition due to its dilapidated state, has now been converted into stylish studio, one-room as well as two-room apartments that will be rented out.

This accommodation is supported by facilities housed in the student centre such as a business centre, a mini market, a student lounge, and recreational facilities enough to



(From left) Idris has a closer look at the planned development together with Dr Ahmad Tajuddin, Dr Siti Hamisah and Prof Mohammad Shatar.

serve 1,000 occupants when all three phases are completed. Phase one of the development, which is already complete, caters to 350 occupants.

"There is now demand for better quality accommodation of international standards, in line with the increase in living standards and improved economic standing. People are now willing to pay for something modern and comfortable," said UPMHoldings managing director Prof Husaini Omar.

It is understood that there is already a waiting list for this premium accommodation, even before it was declared open by Idris.

It is not hard to understand why as they come with air conditioners, built-in wardrobes, kitchen cabinets, living room and basic furniture that includes queen-sized beds.

"This venture has turned out to be a win-win situation for UPMHoldings and UPM as income is generated while new facilities are added," said Prof Husaini, who added that there will also be a 21-storey residential tower at the site, making it the tallest structure in UPM.

Next to the tower will be a six-storey hotel, with both due for completion by November 2019. These two towers sit on three levels of podium meant for commercial activities.

UPMHoldings has also set aside funds to procure an additional bus to add to the number of internal buses currently serving the campus.

For now, UPMHoldings is looking forward to offer its expertise, experience and technical know-how.

"Our client is our business. We have executed several business plans such as tapping on UPM's expertise in providing consultancy and training programme," said UPMHoldings,

which has Tan Sri Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali as chairman of the board.

UPMHoldings' direction is in line with UPM's preparedness to reduce its dependence on government funding. Earlier on, Idris said his ministry had a cut in allocation from RM13.4bil this year to RM12.1bil under next year's budget, a drop of 9.3%.

UPM had an early start when it started a strategic business unit under the purview of the vice chancellor's office in 1980.

Back then, the entity was called the Consultancy Unit, which was a small outfit to promote the expertise in the university to government agencies and industries.

As time went by, business activities rapidly increased in the unit. Because of the growth of this unit the university decided to upgrade it to become the University Business Centre (UBC) in 1996.

As a business consultancy, UBC was expanded to create more businesses related to the core business of the university.

Following the opening of the education and training unit, the commercialisation unit, and the service unit, UBC was transformed to become UPMHoldings in 2004.

UPMHoldings has recorded growth in profits each year. In 2015, its growth recorded a double digit figure, allowing it to pay dividends to UPM to the tune of RM9mil.

Also present at the event were UPM deputy vice-chancellor (Student Affairs and Alumni) Prof Datuk Dr Mohammad Shatar Sabran and Higher Education Ministry deputy director-general Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir.