☐ New Straits Times
☑ New Sunday Times
Tarikh: 29/4/2012
Hari: AHAD M/S: 4
Ruangan: R&D MALAYSIA

Excellence in social

Through its Transformation Plan, Universiti Utara Malaysia is poised to emerge as one of the country's leading universities in management and social science scholarship, writes *Victor Chan*.

"THE setting up of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is an acknowledgement of the role of social science in national development," says Professor Datuk Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, the Vice-Chancellor of UUM.

"Management pervades all aspects of our lives. Whether it is at the level of the individual, organisation, society or country, one must learn to efficiently manage one's time, studies and learning, financial and non-financial resources, personal and professional relationships, and so on. UUM is well positioned to provide leadership in management scholarship as well as research and innovation in the social, behavioural and economic sciences."

To realise its aspirations, UUM designed a Transformation Plan last year. The plan is a roadmap for the future pursuits of UUM, and is divided into two phases.

The roadmap to social science excellence

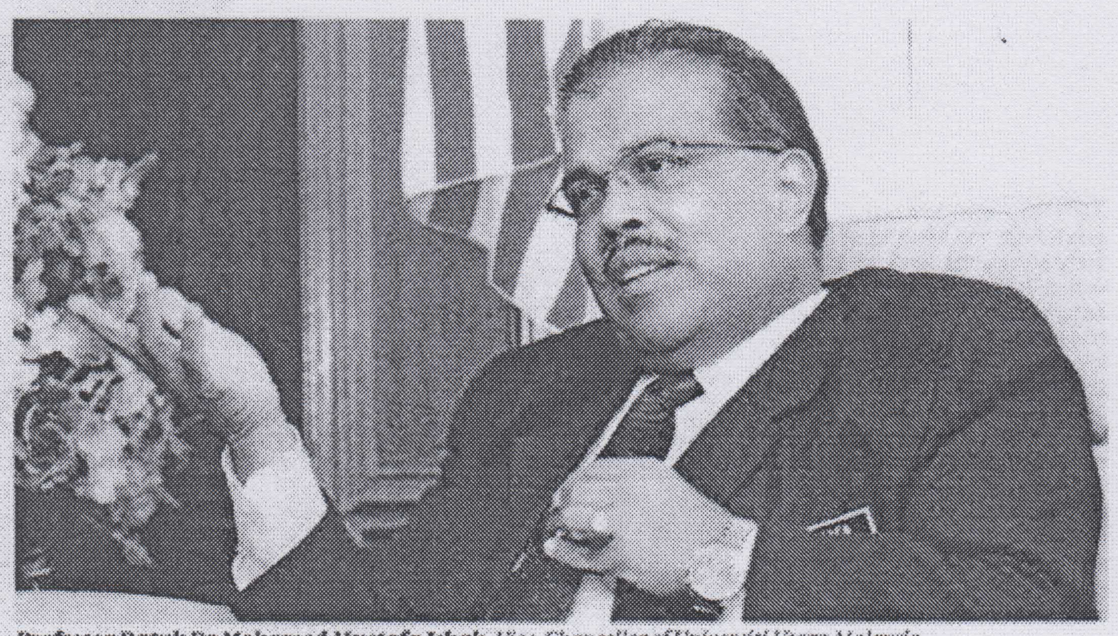
Phase I Targets:
UUM in the National Higher Education Landscape
- To develop a culture of excellence in management scholarship
- To develop holistic students
- To enhance academic and international activities
- To practice sustainable financial and resource management

Phase II Targets:
UUM in the Global Higher Education Landscape
- To have 85% faculty members with doctoral degrees
- To be amongst the Top 25 universities in Southeast Asia
- To be amongst the Top 50 universities in Asia
- To be amongst the Top 500 universities in the world

RESEARCH SUPPORT AND LEADERSHIP: According to Professor Mohamed Mustafa, to achieve these objectives and targets, UUM will focus on its eight research niche areas. UUM's three Graduate Schools and five UUM Institutes are responsible for sustaining the university's competitive edge in these priority areas.

Research niche areas and their champions

- **Entrepreneurship:** Cooperative and Entrepreneur Development Institute (CEDI)
- **Business Leadership and Innovation:** Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School (OYAGS) and Institute for Management & Business Research (IMBRe)
- **Economic and Financial Analysis:** OYA and IMBRe
- **Governance:** Ghazali Shafie Graduate School (GSGS)
- **Consumer and Market Analysis:** OYA
- **Information and Media Management:** Awang Had Salleh Graduate School (AHSGS), International Telecommunication Union – Universiti Utara Malaysia (ITU-UUM)
- **National Resilience and Nation Building:** Institute of Dr Mahathir's Thoughts (IPDM), GSGS, Northern Corridor Research Center (NCRC), AHSGS, and ITU-UUM
- **International Studies:** GSGS



Professor Datuk Dr Mohamed Mustafa Ishak, Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Utara Malaysia.

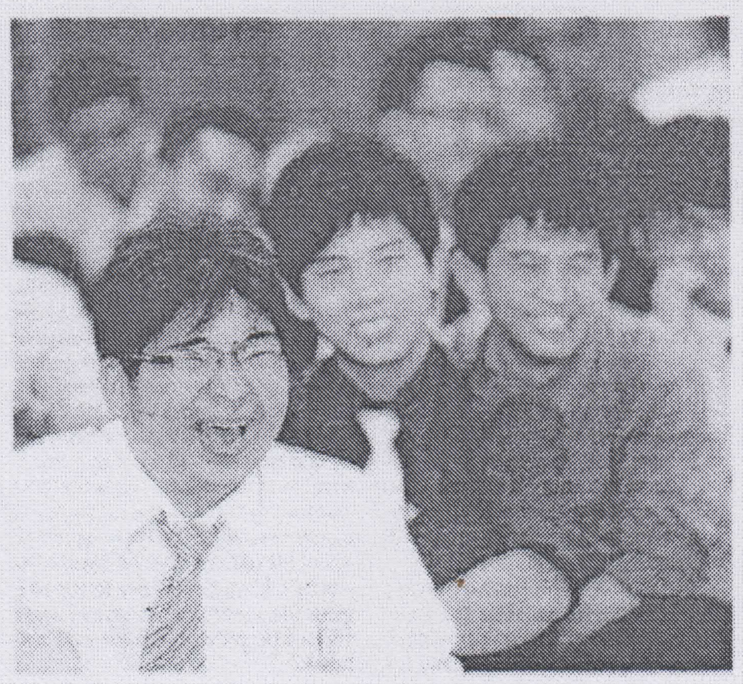
INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL: Professor Mustafa explains that UUM has a two-pronged strategy – at the institutional and individual levels. At the institutional level, its three graduate schools and five institutes have been tasked with championing research excellence in their respective niche areas.

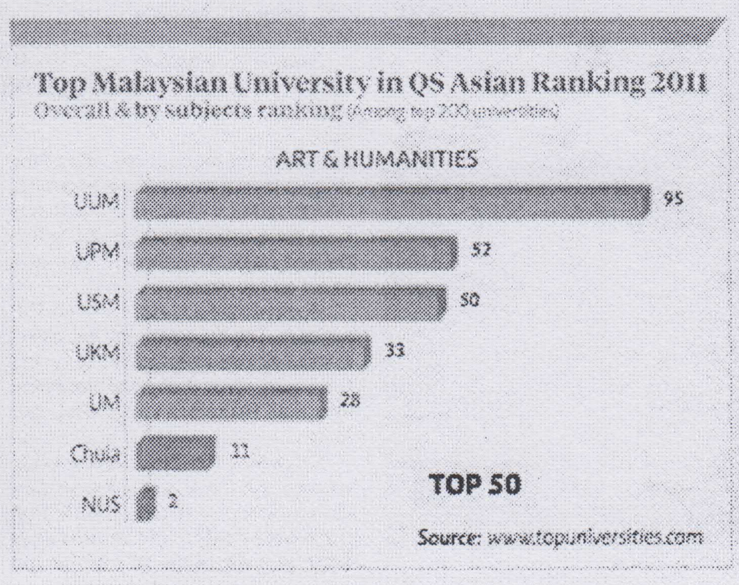
The five UUM institutes now offer postgraduate studies in the university's research niche areas. In spearheading excellence in postgraduate research, UUM doctoral students and their supervisors are encouraged to participate in R&D projects. In addition, the UUM Centre for University-Industry Collaboration (CUIC) also plays an important role here as it has started to offer the Industrial PhD programme. Through the CUIC, UUM has links and collaboration with more than 2,000 companies from within the country and abroad.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: At the individual level, the university has instituted the Leadership Development Programme Scheme (LEADS), and there are currently 124 groups engaged in carrying out research in the eight niche areas. UUM also has a pool of 120 foreign visiting scholars. This is a lot of talent and potential to tap into in terms of excellence in research at the individual level.

Of the four public universities with high returns on their R&D projects, UUM topped the list with RM3.4 million. This was followed by Universiti Malaya (RM1.27 million), Universiti Sains Malaysia (RM1.02 million), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (RM1 million).

UUM launched the Year of Research, Innovation and Publication last year with the theme: Turning Management Ideas into Action @ UUM. There is also a University Publications Laboratory (UPL) to facilitate publication activities. As such, there has been a significant increase in the number of high impact publications from UUM in the arts and humanities. Within a short span of time, the measures taken are beginning to show results.





Taking charge and stock of social science research impact

PROFESSOR Mustafa believes that, if in the past, the perception of the public and certain quarters in academia vis-à-vis the social sciences have been negative, the onus is now on the social science scholars and practitioners to take charge and take stock of the potential role and contributions of the myriad disciplines labeled as the soft sciences. There is no dearth of discourse on the hard (physics, chemistry, and the other natural sciences) versus the soft (social) sciences.

The weak articulation of the potential contributions of the field as well as its subsequent neglect in this country have led to the lack of interest, and in turn, dwindling funding of research and development in the social sciences. There are, however, signs of renewed interest as can be seen in the 2010 Harvard conference on 'Hard Problems in Social Science.' UUM has already organised two International Soft Science Conferences (ISSC). The inaugural ISSC was held in Kuala Lumpur in 2009, and the second was in Hanoi, Vietnam last year.

There is, in the final analysis, no dichotomy between the hard and soft sciences, only that between good and bad science. UUM is very serious about its aspiration to become a Social Science Research University, it is ready to take charge, providing leadership in excellence in social science research.