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Forging ahead

MISSION: Two months into his position as vice chancellor of Universiti Teknologi MARA, Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr Hassan Said outlines his vision for the institution

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A LARGE tertiary institution must adopt a structured approach in managing and carrying out all processes through the right system that stresses on a combination of principles and tools to boost its performance, said Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) vice chancellor Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr Hassan Said.

The key to success in achieving operational excellence for a huge university such as UiTM, which has 13 state and 18 satellite campuses nationwide, is for its people to have the right skillsets—starting with the right definition that they can understand that will translate into achievement at all levels of operations.

In his first interview since taking the position in February, Hassan stresses that getting the right system process is his focus for the university this year. He said: “When you have the talents, you have to put the system process in place. In order to make changes to a university, we must focus on governance and look into autonomy, compatibility and empowerment at the same time. So a big university like UiTM must have all that. We have to make sure that we have the right skillsets in the university. With the right system process, we can go further.

“Whether it is UiTM Shah Alam or UiTM Machang, we must have a similar process and the same quality of service. When the public look at the traits of the organisation, they would know this is UiTM.”

UiTM offers 350 courses and caters for 165,500 students. “One of the biggest universities in the country, UiTM

has enormous support and power in comparison to other public tertiary institutions. We have no problems with the talents but the challenge is to polish them.

“It is vital to leverage on the strengths of the large number of talents that UiTM has to offer, not focus on weaknesses.”

While in the past, the curriculum vitae of a vice chancellor would have been dominated by a strong academic and research record, appointees today also have a range of skills including proven managerial and leadership qualities.

“Education leadership nowadays is not about following the norm. One must challenge the norm in order to see changes. Creativity and entrepreneur skills are now necessary to make a profit for an institution.”

Hassan’s contribution to the higher education landscape goes back a long way prior to his appointment as the ninth UiTM vice chancellor. He was director-general of higher education from January 2005 to April 2008 before becoming Taylor’s University vice chancellor and president till February this year. Taylor’s attained full university status under his leadership.

At UiTM, Hassan’s vision is to produce top graduates for the society and industry. “Work-ready UiTM graduates must possess qualities similar to those from the top universities in the world who are well-sought after by the industry. These graduates are not only hired by top firms but they also create jobs and provide leadership in their areas of specialisation.”

With “global graduates” being the buzzwords among employers and higher education institutions, it is high time for UiTM to explore further avenues to create more opportunities for students to develop in settings



worldwide.

"We need to expose students to the international community through short attachments and internships in overseas companies.

"The momentum towards globalisation has gathered with UiTM students taking up internships overseas but these are limited to a privileged few. As it requires funding, we need to strategise to support students without financial means."

UiTM is among the biggest human capital provider in the country, providing 42 per cent in comparison to other public universities. Last year, the graduate employability was 78.1 per cent out of 25,972 who graduated from UiTM. With a target of 80 per cent employability for 2016, Hassan hopes that the figure can be pushed to 90 per cent.

In its 60th year as a higher education institution with a substantial number of graduates each year, UiTM has one of the largest alumni bodies in the country.

"I would also like to look into engagement from the 645,862 UiTM alumni with some holding key positions in government-linked companies. Even 10 per cent of this number can contribute in many ways through professional experience, intellectual capabilities and specialisation. For example, their projects can benefit students and the alma mater."

As an example, the culture of giving back to the alma mater at National University of Singapore is comparable to what takes place in developed countries. Hassan hopes to encourage a similar culture at UiTM.

"For their minimal investment in a UiTM education, the culture of giving back, at a level that is significant to the alma mater, is one way of saying thanks for the opportunities."

Financially too, Hassan has set his sights on improving UiTM's standing. "Whether we like it or not, we have to start thinking about making money and my experience in the private sector has also made me look into growth that is business-oriented.

"At the same time, I hope to see more academicians applying for research grants from outside the country. Although it is competitive, it will not only contribute to UiTM's reputation but it can also be a way to reduce operational costs."

Moving forward, UiTM's focus is on research and entrepreneurship. At the same time, Hassan stresses the importance of enhancing teaching and learning capabilities with the right quality of teachers, support system, infrastructure and methodology. With the education ecosystem in place, he hopes for UiTM to be a highly respected university fulfilling demands in the country and making its presence globally at the same time.



- **Penasihat**

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Utusan Malaysia, Mingguan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Berita Minggu,
New Straits Times, The Star, Sunday Star, The Sun, Star Metro,
Kosmo, Harian Metro, Sinar Harian.

