

# ALUMNI bulletin

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JAN 2021  
APR VOL3



## Cautiously Optimistic



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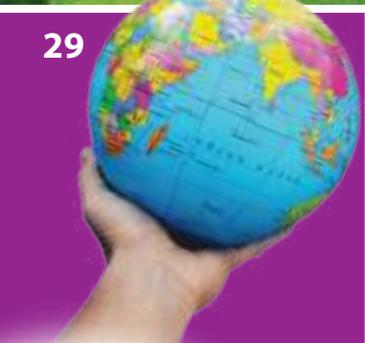
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**Cover rationale:** *Jengga indirectly teaches you to be cautiously optimistic. Adapting your way of thinking as the game progresses. Not only will you have to stay alert with what's happening, but you might also have to strategize and solve problems along the way. You will need to adapt to a new tower structure every turn. A common saying is 'Expect the best, but prepare for the worst.'*

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# From the Vice-Chancellor

## Assalamualaikum warahmatullah/Salam sejahtera.

There's plenty to celebrate when you are part of USM. People in the university are making progress in almost all areas: teaching and learning, research, student affairs, and development. We continue to strive for better accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity. There is a sense of resilience and renewed vigor in the way we think and conduct our affairs.

We know that we are in for the long haul with regards to the pandemic. Everyone is affected in one way or another.

As such, we coined the term Cautiously Optimistic, to encapsulate the paradox that we are facing: progress amidst chaos.

We will nail this.

I would also like to wish you to have a blissful Ramadan 2021. May the Rahmat of Almighty Allah shine upon you and your family always!

**Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan**  
*Vice-Chancellor*



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## From DVC to Alumni



Thank you so much for your generous donation to the **Adopt Your Hostel Room@USM** initiative. We truly appreciate your commitment towards the upgrading of facilities in our campus.

With your help, the upgraded room will be rented out to help upgrade more rooms and hostels. We hope one day this rental practice will also help to add to the Students' Fund.

We couldn't do it without you!  
Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

At the same time, we'd like to wish all our members a fruitful and meaningful Ramadhan; may you'll be rewarded well for your devotion throughout the fasting month.



- ◆ YB Senator Dato' Dr. Ahmad Masrizal Muhammad  
*B. A (Ed.) 1996*
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Raja Muhamad
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  - Dennis Law Huai Yong

**Professor Dr. Aldrin Abdullah** (B. Sc. HBP '93, B. Arch. '94)  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
Students Development Affairs & Alumni*



## GOT NEWS?

- Are you moving?
- Started a new business?
- Doing a charity work?
- Received a promotion?

## STAY CONNECTED WITH USM

We'd like to hear from you. Email your stories to Alumni Development Centre [[dir\\_alumni@usm.my](mailto:dir_alumni@usm.my)]. Include your photo, full name, course and graduation year.

The Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan recently held a brief presentation on current issues pertaining to the University, to the USM community members.

The presentation, which was held from the USM Chancellory Conference Room (CCR) on 14 January 2021 and viewed via Youtube, highlighted a few issues that the VC regarded as essential to be shared for further understanding.

According to Faisal Rafiq, "The aim of the briefing is to keep everyone informed and united in accomplishing the targets set, for USM to go from strength to strength. Everyone will need to continue to play their respective role(s). We need to be gritty and resilient as we expect 2021 to be as challenging."

# THINGS THAT MATTER:

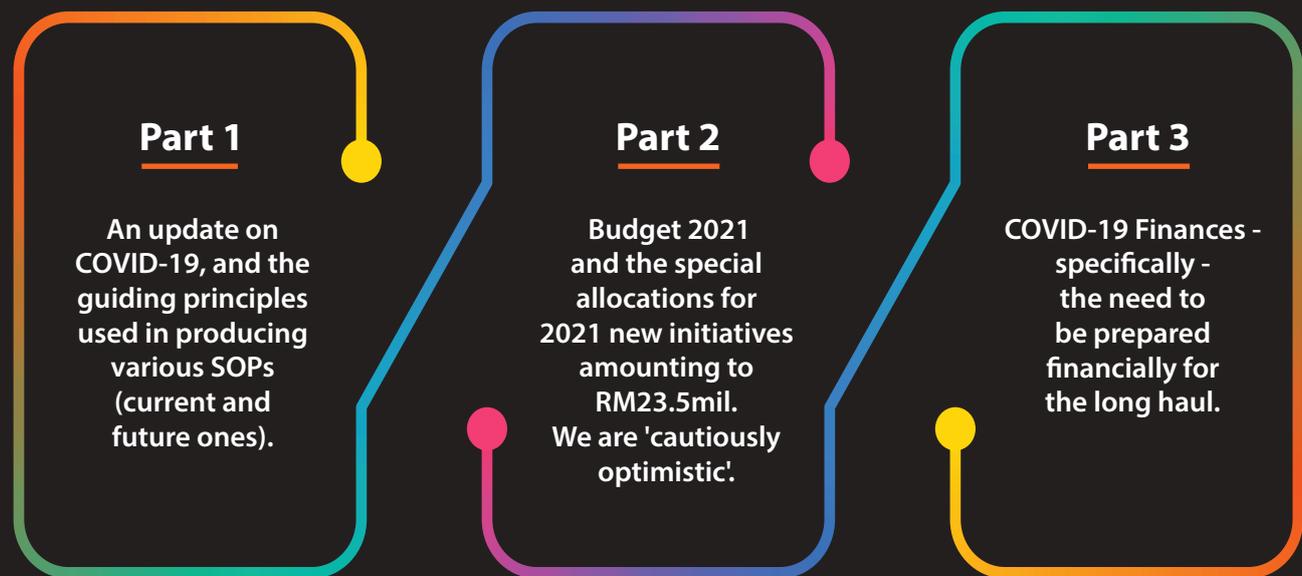
## What The USM VC Brings to The Beginning-of-The-Year Briefing

He began by giving an emphasis on the need to continue to add value in the outputs and to provide the best possible services. At the same time, numbers indicating surplus and deficit need to be seen in perspective. Plans need to be well-executed, and can only proceed with continued financing.

**"On the opposite end, there will be costs for COVID-19 cases to be borne, COVID-related disruptions to deal with, as well as the change in the 2021 Budget."**

“Therefore, in facing the current situation, there is the need to adopt a moderate and balanced approach; it’s not just a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ line of thought. Viewpoints need to be ‘analog’ and not ‘digital’ in nature, and to consider it as a spectrum, not something that is discrete,” he said.

The briefing touched on 3 major parts:



**Part 1: Updates relating to COVID-19**

Vaccines are being developed globally by 6 different suppliers. If there is limited supply, there is the need to take other measures. 60% of staff and students are within the identified group with potential risks.

Even with vaccination reaching our shore, USM will take steps to continue with the tight SOPs while reducing or minimising the risks. This is to ensure that the number of cases can be brought down to manageable levels or even to zero.

At the same time, there is the need to provide support to the government if called upon. There is also the field of R&D that requires attention, in addition to logistics, sharing of knowledge and information and surveillance and monitoring.

Finally, the students, who will be returning to campus, will be another area of concern. Issues such as admission and accommodation, academic and examination activities and if there is a need, a disaster management plan would all need to be considered.

**“Even with vaccination reaching our shore, USM will take steps to continue with the tight SOPs while reducing or minimising the risks. This is to ensure that the number of cases can be brought down to manageable levels or even to zero.”**

## Part 2: Budget 2021

VC mentioned on being 'cautiously optimistic' with regard to the budget. On the positive side, USM received the largest research grant, in addition to emolument for USM and HUSM, which was received in full amount. The admission for postgraduates also recorded the highest number as yet.

On the opposite end, there will be costs for COVID-19 cases to be borne, COVID-related disruptions to deal with, as well as the change in the 2021 Budget.

Therefore, key strategies and execution plans have been laid out to deal with the above-mentioned matters.

Various revenue streams (education-based / health-based / test and measurement / mixed development) have been identified and operational excellence in a few key areas needs to be achieved. Other plans include aligning the growth process, being ready for the future and having penetration into new, global markets.

Timely execution for all the strategies, initiatives and plans is important as the university has limited resources. There will be more investments to be made in 2021 and also in 2022.

At the same time, USM needs to capitalise on its status as the sole APEX university in the country, moving ahead with the agenda on sustainability.



**“USM needs to capitalise on its status as the sole APEX university in the country, moving ahead with the agenda on sustainability.”**

## Part 3: Finances regarding COVID-19

**“Various revenue streams (education-based / health-based / test and measurement / mixed development) have been identified and operational excellence in a few key areas needs to be achieved.”**

The previous COVID Fund (Tabung COVID-19 USM 2020) has been utilised for the purchase of medical-related equipment; CO2 detectors to measure the ventilation quality in lecture halls/meeting rooms/etc.; personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontliners; and for financial assistance in anticipation of future lockdowns.

As such, voluntary contribution from the staff to the Fund for 2021 is very much welcomed.

More than 2,000 people tuned in to the two-hour briefing.

The VC later responded to selected questions in the Q&A session. There were plenty of questions forwarded but unfortunately due to time constraints, only those selected could be answered by him.

*Text: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin / Tan Ewe Hoe*





## USM | WESTERN DIGITAL

### Collaborate to Establish Centre of Innovation and Automation (CiA)

USM-WD CiA Lab is established within the Western Digital premise at Batu Kawan, Penang – the first of its kind in Malaysia.

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Western Digital (WD) announced a long-term collaboration to establish the Centre of Innovation and Automation (CiA), an exclusive technology hub that is focused on driving Industry 4.0 (IR4.0) design and development, prototype build-up and intellectual property (IP) generation.

The collaboration was officiated at a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signing ceremony today at USM's main campus here.

This USM-WD partnership aims to bridge and foster closer ties between leading industry players and the academic community, bringing together the brightest minds and talents to drive breakthrough technology advancements in manufacturing technology.

Under this initiative, both organisations will work together on industry-driven research projects and promote research outputs. Selected PhD students will also enjoy attachment opportunities.

**“...the involvement of USM with the industry further emphasises USM’s commitment in providing the educational and research experience that is beyond the norm to our academicians, researchers, technical staff and students.”**

USM Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan, said, “the involvement of USM with the industry further emphasises USM’s commitment in providing the educational and research experience that is beyond the norm to our academicians, researchers, technical staff and students.

“USM is also committed to forging more industrial collaborations and also creating new ones by forming start-ups. It is therefore increasingly important to have university-industry partnerships in order to keep abreast of the latest developments and trends within the context of IR4.0,” he said.

He further explained, “this collaboration with Western Digital, being the leader in data infrastructure, is truly timely and appropriate. The setting up of this CiA project is the first of its kind in Malaysia, where it puts the ‘university within the industry’ to bring the lecturers and more importantly the students, first-hand experience to equip themselves to be ‘industry-ready’”

**Picture on top. From left: Mr. Vishwanath Ramaswamy (Site General Manager, Western Digital); Mr. KL Bock (Vice President of Global Flash Backend Operations, Western Digital); Prof. Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan (Vice-Chancellor, USM); and Prof. Dato' Ir. Dr. Abdul Rahman Mohamed (Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research & Innovation, USM)**

**“The setting up of this CiA project is the first of its kind in Malaysia, where it puts the ‘university within the industry’ to bring the lecturers and more importantly the students, first-hand experience to equip themselves to be ‘industry-ready.’ ”**

“What was learned previously in labs could now be transformed, transferred and applied in real-world scenarios. This will surely bring added value and further boost the value chain within the industrial sector,” he added.

According to Mr. KL Bock, WD Vice President of Global Flash Backend Operations, the collaboration with USM will further anchor their efforts in the area of Lights Out Automation to achieve resilient operations in dynamic environments and immense gains in both productivity and quality.



**Professor Dato' Ir. Dr. Abdul Rahman Mohamed, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation)**

“The collaboration also reflects our ongoing commitment to the community at large in the development of local talents, industrial capacity and technological co-transfer,” he said.

The CiA will focus on strengthening and amplifying PRiSMS-DnA® elements with IR4.0 components such as Big Data Analytics, Internet-of-Things, Mixed/Augmented Reality, System Integration, Additive Manufacturing, Simulation, Autonomous Collaborative Robots, Cloud Computing and Cognitive Computing.



**Mr. KL Bock, WD Vice President of Global Flash Backend Operations**

The MoA was signed on behalf of Western Digital by Bock and Site General Manager, Vishwanath Ramaswamy, while USM was represented by Faisal Rafiq and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation), Professor Dato' Ir. Dr. Abdul Rahman Mohamed.

WD Group Chairman, Malaysia Operations, Datuk (Dr.) Syed Hussian Aljunid; USM Board of Governors Chairman, Dato' Dr. Awang Adek Hussin, as well as the top officials from the Higher Education Ministry, Western Digital and USM also joined the ceremony via Webex.

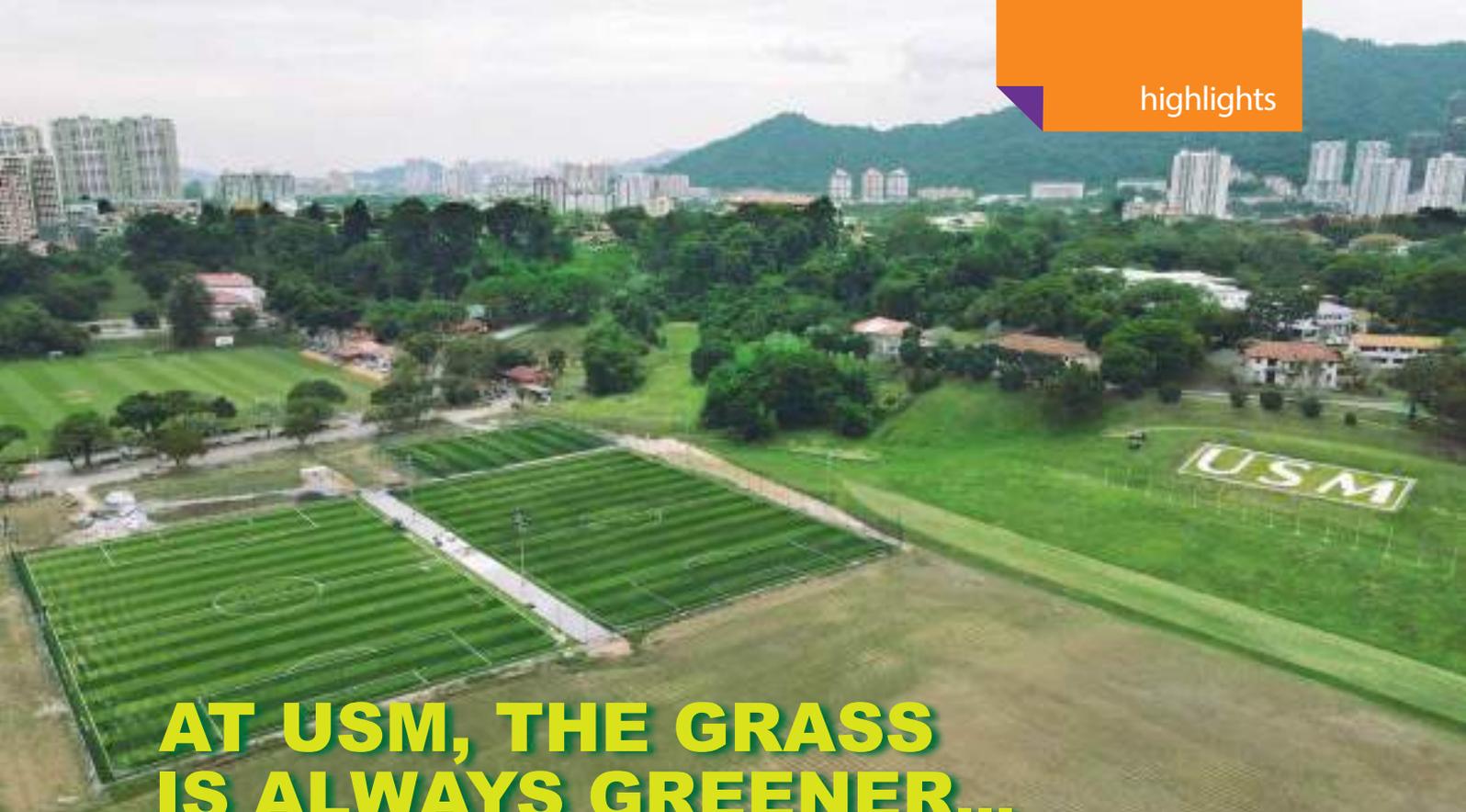
Western Digital is an American hard disk drive manufacturer and data storage company that creates environments for data to thrive. Western Digital has invested almost RM18 billion since establishing its operations in Malaysia in 1973. Western Digital data-centric solutions are comprised of the Western Digital®, G-Technology™, SanDisk® and WD® brands.

*Text: Mohamad Hafiz Asyraf*

*Editing: Tan Ewe Hoe*

*Photo: Ebrahim Abdul Manan / Mohd Fairus Md Isa*



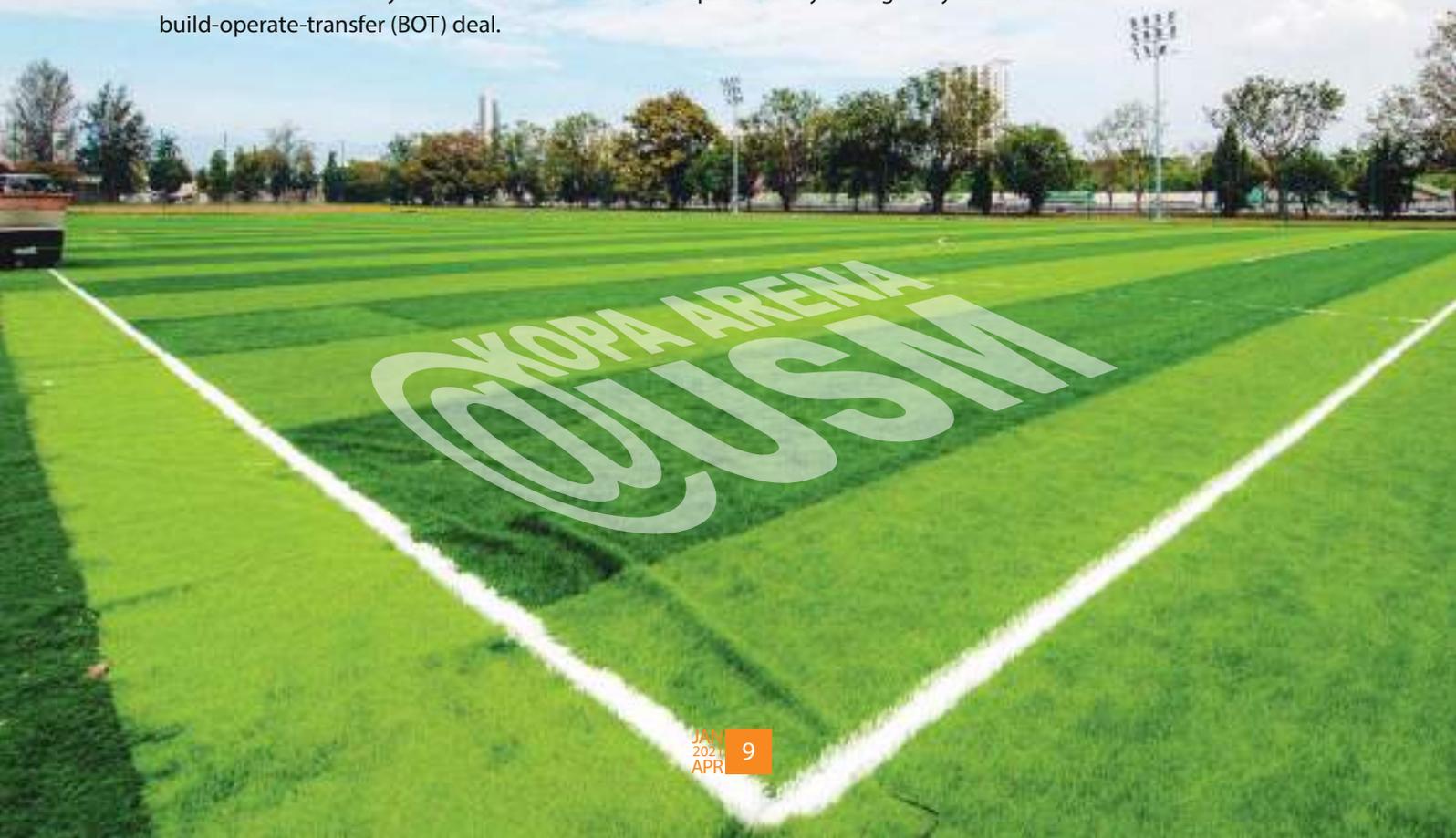


## AT USM, THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER...

If you happen to pass by the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) entrance fronting Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah at night, or even during the day, you'll be able to see two brand-new artificial football (or soccer to some) turfs occupying an area of the varsity's vast green space.

Named KOPA ARENA@USM, the two fields, each one measuring 105m x 68m, are made to FIFA (the highest governing body for international football) standards and are decked with state-of-the-art facilities.

Though located at USM, it did not cost the university a single cent, and even the maintenance will not be borne by USM. It has been made possible by being fully-funded via a build-operate-transfer (BOT) deal.



KOPA ARENA@USM



Below is the tentative usage schedule prepared by the USM Sports and Recreation Centre for USM staff and students:

- PTJ Staff: 2 times per week
- International Undergrads: 2 times per week
- Senior Staff & USM FC: 2 times per week
- Local Undergrads: 2 times per week
- USM Tigers: 3 times per week
- Desasiswa: 2 times per week
- Veteran Staff: 2 times per week
- Postgrads: 2 times per week
- Female Staff: 2 times per week
- Student Societies/Clubs: 2 times per week
- Varsity Student Team: 2 times per week
- Recreational purpose: 2 times per week.

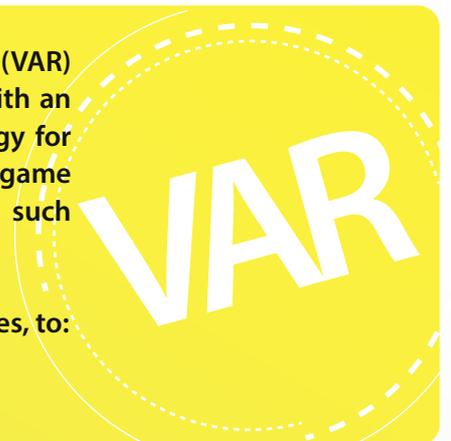
The USM community at the Health Campus in Kelantan too will not miss out on the chance to use such facilities, as two more turfs will be built there as well.

Though USM did not pay for it, students and staff will still have access to the fields (3 artificial grass, 2 natural grass) and a rugby field free of charge until 7.00 p.m. on weekdays.

USM is also looking into adding the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) equipment for the fields. Students, researchers and collaborators with an expertise in image processing/AI/drone technology/other technology for pilot/prototype VAR equipment, as well as in conducting game analytics/statistics for KOPA ARENA@USM are welcomed to offer such services. Priority will be given to USM students.

Please send your enquiries, together with your ballpark budget/figures, to:

- Encik Mohd Rashid Abdul Rejab at [rashid\\_rejab@usm.my](mailto:rashid_rejab@usm.my) or
- Cik Mahfuzah Othman at [mahfuzah\\_othman@usm.my](mailto:mahfuzah_othman@usm.my)



The artificial football turfs look enticing indeed, but anyone that has set sights on playing at the ball park, may have to wait a little longer, at least until the Movement Control Order (MCO) is lifted.

*Text: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin / Tan Ewe Hoe  
Photo: Ebrahim Abdul Manan*



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# USM | INFINEON TECHNOLOGIES KULIM

## Sign MoA to Collaborate on Process Chemical and Materials Research for Silicon Wafer Fabrication

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) has entered into a partnership with Infineon Technologies Kulim to collaborate on the Research of Fundamental Characterization of Process Chemicals and Materials for Silicon Wafer Fabrication.

The partnership was sealed through a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signing ceremony, conducted virtually between both parties on 20 January 2021 due to the Movement Control Order (MCO) travel restrictions imposed nationwide.

USM was represented by its Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan while signing on behalf of Infineon Technologies Kulim was its Vice President and Chief Finance Officer, Dato' Peter Halm.

Under the MoA, Infineon Technologies Kulim will provide a research grant to the USM School of Chemical Sciences and School of Materials and Mineral Resources Engineering.

According to Faisal Rafiq: "USM is thankful to Infineon Technologies Kulim for providing the research grant. I believe with the vast experience and expertise that both Schools have in the related field, this collaboration may seamlessly provide a good platform for both organizations to explore and develop novel characterization strategies to resolve industrial needs.

**"I believe with the vast experience and expertise that both Schools have in the related field, this collaboration may seamlessly provide a good platform for both organizations to explore and develop novel characterization strategies to resolve industrial needs."**

"Although we are facing numerous challenges not only in Malaysia but globally, we are cautiously optimistic of future perspective and looking forward to further strengthening the collaboration with Infineon Technologies Kulim," he said.

He added that USM is also committed to forging more industrial collaborations and also creating new ones by forming start-ups. It is therefore increasingly important to have university-industry partnerships in order to keep abreast of the latest developments and trends within the context of IR 4.0.

Peter Halm said: "As the global semiconductor industry continuously accelerates technology advancement, there is a strong need to build an industry-ready talent pipeline to support the needs in Industry 4.0, Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics not just for the benefit of Infineon but also for Malaysia as a whole."

“The collaboration between Infineon Technologies and USM will synchronize development within a specific field of knowledge between Industry and academia for globally connected and highly automated wafer fabrication facilities.

“Combination of industrial and academic expertise will bring great benefit and support our mission in making life easier, safer, and greener for everyone,” he said.

Infineon Technologies Kulim Vice President of Technology and R&D, Dr. Raj Kumar added: “Developing world-class R&D and innovation capability is crucial for the future of any country. Over the years we have developed one of the biggest frontend semiconductor technologies R&D team in Malaysia by training and upskilling Malaysian engineers.”

“The team is now developing multiple advance technologies for Electric Vehicles, Energy Efficiency and Internet of Things. The collaboration between Infineon and USM will further strengthen our ongoing R&D talent pipeline building efforts,” he further explained.

**“The collaboration between Infineon Technologies and USM will synchronize development within a specific field of knowledge between Industry and academia for globally connected and highly automated wafer fabrication facilities.”**

USM’s relationship with Infineon Technologies Kulim began in the mid-2000s with Infineon lending academic support to the undergraduates at the School of Materials and Mineral Resources Engineering at our Engineering Campus, and later sponsoring the studies of a few postgraduate students from the School.

This was further expanded to a research collaboration between the School of Chemical Sciences and Infineon in 2017. Since then, the number of research projects have grown over the years and have now involved several lecturers from both the aforementioned Schools.



*The Vice-Chancellor and Associate Professor Dr. Oo Chuan Wei*

Among those from the USM School of Materials and Mineral Resources Engineering who attended were its Dean, Assoc. Prof. Ir. Dr. Syed Fuad Saiyid Hashim; and Project Leader, Professor Ir. Dr. Cheong Kuan Yew, while the USM School of Chemical Sciences was represented by its Dean, Professor Dr. Rohana Adnan. Also in attendance were the deputy deans and researchers from both Schools and the senior management team of Infineon Technologies Kulim.

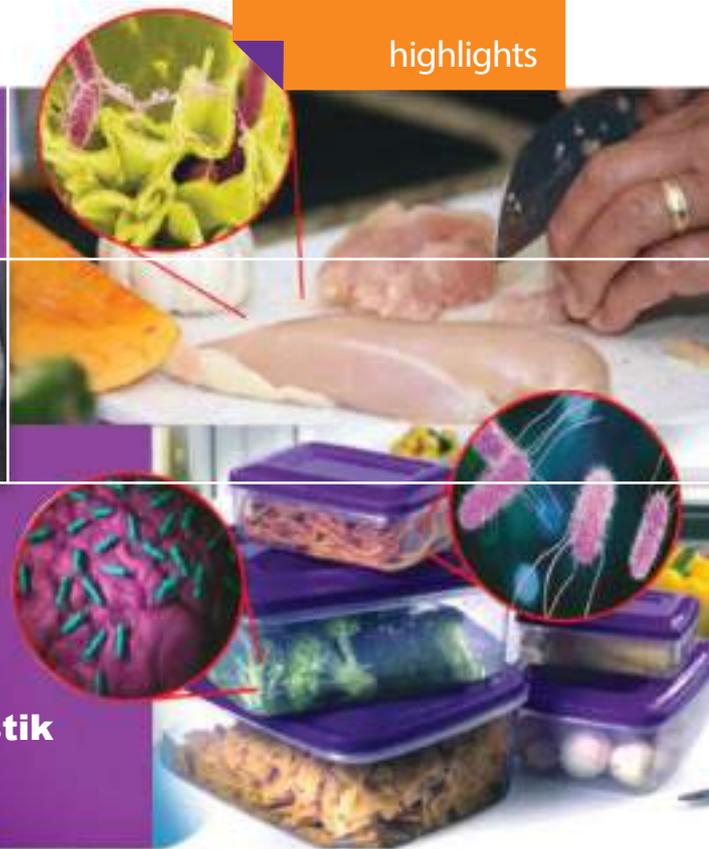
Infineon employs over 12,000 employees in Malaysia. Infineon Technologies Kulim is the company’s first and only fab facility in Asia and positioned as the competence centre for megatrend technologies focusing on automotive, energy efficiency and Sensors for Internet of Things with a headcount of close to 2,900 employees.

*Text: Tan Ewe Hoe / Mohamad Hafiz Asyraf  
Photo: Mohd Fairus Md Isa  
/ Mazilifah Mohd Razak (Infineon Technologies Kulim)*



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## USM HASILKAN MICROBUSTER, Bunuh 99% Bakteria Pada Produk Plastik

Adakah kita sedar bahawa kesihatan kita terjejas hari demi hari ketika berada di rumah mahupun di pejabat berpunca daripada pertumbuhan bakteria berbahaya yang berada pada permukaan produk plastik di sekeliling kita?

Umum mengetahui bahawa semua produk plastik di pasaran seperti bekas makanan, plastik pembungkusan, produk penjagaan diri, peralatan bioperubatan, papan plastik pemotong ikan dan daging mahupun alat permainan kanak-kanak adalah diperbuat daripada bahan asasnya iaitu polimer.

Secara tidak sedar juga, sebenarnya kita terdedah kepada bahan polimer tersebut dengan kadar 70 sehingga 80 peratus sehari, dan ini mampu meningkatkan kebolehjangkitan pelbagai jenis penyakit berbahaya apabila kita bersentuhan dengan bahan tersebut.

Atas sebab itu, sekumpulan penyelidik Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) yang diketuai oleh Profesor Ir. Dr. Srimala Sreekantan dari Pusat Pengajian Kejuruteraan Bahan dan Sumber Mineral berjaya menghasilkan inovasi yang memberi impak besar kepada kehidupan seharian manusia, MICROBUSTER, iaitu sejenis bahan yang digabungkan bersama komposit polimer dengan kaedah fotokatalis ternari, mampu membunuh 99 peratus mikrob patogen (bakteria berbahaya) yang berada di permukaan plastik.

Produk inovasi ini dihasilkan oleh Srimala bersama rakan-rakan pasukannya yang terdiri daripada Norfatehah Basiron, Dr. Ong Ming Thong, Nur Ruzaina Abdul Rahman dan Dr. Rabiatul Basria S.M.N Mydin.

**“Secara tidak sedar juga, sebenarnya kita terdedah kepada bahan polimer tersebut dengan kadar 70 sehingga 80 peratus sehari, dan ini mampu meningkatkan kebolehjangkitan pelbagai jenis penyakit berbahaya apabila kita bersentuhan dengan bahan tersebut.”**

Menurut Srimala, permukaan plastik sebenarnya tanpa kita ketahui boleh menyebarkan pelbagai bakteria seperti *E. coli*, *S. aureus*, *B. subtilis*, *S. flexneri*, *B. cereus* dan *K. pneumoniae* yang terbukti mampu menyerang sistem tubuh badan manusia sehingga menyebabkan kematian.

“Menurut kajian yang telah dijalankan, nisbah 1 daripada setiap 6 manusia di dunia telah jatuh sakit akibat terdedah kepada permukaan yang tercemar, manakala kira-kira 420,000 orang melibatkan 125,000 orang kanak-kanak di bawah 5 tahun mati setiap tahun akibat terdedah kepada jangkitan bakteria dari produk plastik yang berasaskan bahan polimer,” katanya.

Tambah Srimala lagi, apa yang lebih mengejutkan adalah kos anggaran setiap tahun bagi rawatan perubatan, kehilangan produktiviti dan kematian yang berkaitan penyakit tersebut meningkat kepada USD55.5 bilion setahun manakala kos kerugian produk yang dipanggil semula akibat pencemaran mikrobiologi berbahaya mencecah USD99 juta.

Bercakap mengenai kos pembuatan, Srimala menegaskan bagi penghasilan MICROBUSTER ini yang digabung bersama polimer apabila diaplikasikan oleh industri luar, ia tidak mendatangkan kos yang mahal pada produk akhir, sekaligus ia mampu dimiliki oleh semua pengguna.



*Profesor Ir. Dr. Srimala Sreekantan (B.Eng.'99)*

**“...saya ingin memberi kesedaran kepada pengguna akhir di luar supaya lebih cakna dengan kelebihan MICROBUSTER ini yang membantu menyelesaikan permasalahan penyakit berpunca dari polimer, dan semestinya ini memberi kelegaan kepada pengguna apabila mereka mengetahui produk plastik yang dibeli selepas ini mengandungi MICROBUSTER,”**

“Cuma di sini saya ingin memberi kesedaran kepada pengguna akhir di luar supaya lebih cakna dengan kelebihan MICROBUSTER ini yang membantu menyelesaikan permasalahan penyakit berpunca dari polimer, dan semestinya ini memberi kelegaan kepada pengguna apabila mereka mengetahui produk plastik yang dibeli selepas ini mengandungi MICROBUSTER,” ujarnya.

Produk dinamakan ‘MICROBUSTER: A New Generation Antimicrobial Polymer Composites to Combat Multidrug-resistant (MDR) Pathogens’ ini telah memenangi pingat emas dan Anugerah Khas di International Invention, Innovation and Technology Exhibition (ITEX) 2020 yang diadakan baru-baru ini secara maya.

Selain itu, Srimala berkata, MICROBUSTER telah pun dipatenkan dan berpotensi untuk dipasarkan ke peringkat tempatan dan global.

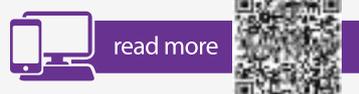
“Nilai ukuran pasaran pada tahun 2020 dijangka berada pada USD25.5 bilion dan ramalan pendapatan yang boleh dimiliki pada tahun 2027 mampu mencecah sehingga USD44.1 bilion jika menembusi pasaran di Amerika Utara; Eropah; Asia Pasifik; Amerika Tengah dan Selatan; dan Timur Tengah dan Afrika,” jelasnya lagi.

Srimala turut mendapat tawaran daripada beberapa syarikat luar yang berminat menjalinkan usahasama, di antaranya Infotech Polymer System Sdn. Bhd. dan penyelidikan bersama dengan B. Braun Medical Industries Sdn. Bhd. melalui Memorandum Perjanjian (MoA) yang dimeterai.

Srimala berharap pihak kerajaan, akademik, industri dan masyarakat keseluruhannya lebih cakna untuk memahami, menilai dan mengiktiraf keberkesanan MICROBUSTER yang terbukti mampu memerangi patogen berbahaya pada produk polimer.

“Ini sekaligus dapat mengurangkan risiko kematian, kos rawatan dan perubatan di dunia serta turut membantu penjaan Perusahaannya Kecil dan Sederhana (PKS) ke arah mewujudkan lebih banyak peluang pekerjaan, seperti yang disasarkan pihak kerajaan,” katanya.

*Teks: Mohd Azrul Mohd Azhar  
Foto: Mohd Fairus Md Isa*



# STORIES

Are Meant to be Told

If you are an alumni of USM, we are guessing that you haven't been hiding under a rock since you graduated. You've landed job, gotten married, earned more degrees and learn a lot about life along the way.

And we want to know about it. Good news or bad news, we hope you can share your stories with the future USMers. Your story is important and it will have an impact beyond what you know. After all stories are meant to be told.

Please share your story to [dir\\_alumni@usm.my](mailto:dir_alumni@usm.my)

"Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world." – Professor Robert McKee

Thank you and Stay Safe.

**Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal**

*Coordinator*

*Alumni Development Centre*



## More Than 450 High-Spec Laptops Handed Over to USM B40 Students

A total of 352 high-spec laptops were distributed for free to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) B40 students via the Division of Student Development Affairs and Alumni Division (BHEPA), USM.

The total does not include the 100 more from the contribution of 'zakat' (tithe) in USM.

"We are providing them with high-spec ACER laptops to ensure that they will fully benefit as they undergo their studies," said the USM Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan.

He personally handed over the laptops to the first group of students, comprising of 38 B40 students from around Penang, with the remaining to be handed over to students from other states when the Movement Control Order (MCO) ends.



*Translation: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*  
*Source: Mohamad Abdullah*



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Limited Ready Stock | Pre-Order Concept |  
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For Men and Women

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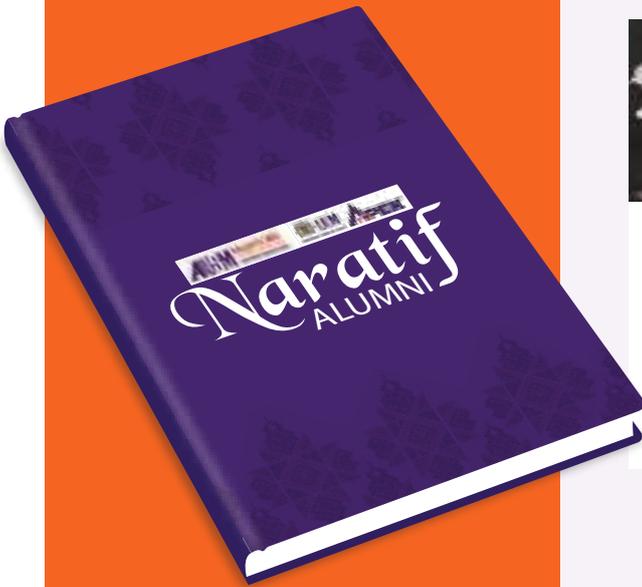


### USM ROUND-NECK TEE RM30/RM35



For further info : 046536481  
mprc@usm.my/shop@usm.my

# Snippets...



## Naratif Alumni

USM Alumni Association (PAUSM) successfully compiled the historical information about Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) since its inception in 1969. This document entails significant milestones and contributions of USM citizens during their period. Another compelling reason to establish this document is to inspire the USM alumni community to have a sense of belonging to their alma mater and to attract them to participate and contribute in any form of efforts and ideas that they believe will benefit USM and the education industry at large.



read more



### The Birth of USM

The story of USM begins with the story of the University of Malaya, which was opened in Singapore in 1905 when it was part of the Straits Settlements and F.M.S. Many pioneers and benefactors in Penang contributed to the initial founding. University of Malaya (UM) sent a team to visit the University of Malaya branch in 1972 Kuala Lumpur. The Singapore campus was called 'University of Malaya, Singapore' while the Kuala Lumpur one was called 'University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur' (renamed there in 1983 when it had that name).

In 1962, UM Kuala Lumpur became independent and took the name 'University of Malaya' while the other campus changed its name to 'University of Malaya Sarawak' (UMS) then 'Universiti Sarawak'. The President of the University of Singapore, Student Union was also Malayan, Dr Ling Looing Sik (my classmate in primary school in Tebing) who, after graduation, moved to Penang and set up a clinic. He joined the University of Malaya Graduate Society that was most active in Penang.

and that USM. It was a high-level team from the University of Malaya led by Dr Chuan Kahin, the eminent Professor Sir Alexander Oppenheim, who led the key governing work of establishing USM. They visited campuses and made strategic recommendations that were adopted. It also was a team from UM in Kuala Lumpur that were the inaugural staff which included the VC, Tan Sri Francis Seow, and 4 professors. The Vice-Chancellor and Librarian were also from the UM, as was a key administrative officer, Dr. Kanchandran. The Singapore was also a graduate from UM which was in Singapore.

USM had had three names, you could say three births, namely:

- University College of Penang (7 August 1963)
- Universiti Pulau Pinang (Universiti Malaysia) (June 1969)
- Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) (April 1972)

“Minden then covered some 239 hectares of land and several barracks and officers’ quarters plus a hospital, cinema and recreational facilities.”



What we know as the Minden Barracks was built before during World War 2, and the structure today remains largely as part of the Universiti Sains Malaysia.

By the way, spice business was going way to commerce and industry. Multiethnic trading to protect their interests, started to establish a military presence in Penang. In addition, there were conflicts between Chinese settlers working in the tin mines and the Malays, and with amongst the Malay chieftains and increase in piracy in the South of Malacca. Under such an environment, plans were set in place to establish a military garrison and Minden Barracks was established around 1930/4, then known as Gallegher Barracks. It was initially converted from one of the former plantation houses and over time, new buildings were added.

The development saw Minden transformed from a plantation to a military establishment and thus the beginning of the new story.

By the way, Minden Barracks got its name from the name of Minden in Germany, that naturally ended the 7 years war – a war fought on many fronts, US/Europe/Mexico between the British, Hanoverians, Prussians against the French and the Saxons. Basically to exercise control over territories and establish spheres of influence.

Minden then covered some 239 hectares of land and several barracks and officers’ quarters plus a hospital, cinema and recreational facilities.

Between 1841 – 1844, the Japanese Imperial Military Force occupied Minden after retreat of the British Force. Not much to tell as very little literature can be traced of these activities at Minden. We can surmise that it was used as the Japanese military centre to coordinate their operations in

### Reminiscences of the Foundation Professor of Physics Universiti Sains Malaysia

The University of Penang (Universiti Pulau Pinang) commenced operations in 1972 and was established by the government to be a natural sciences university. It was temporarily housed at Malacca Peranakan (Malayan Teacher) Training College at Bukit Tengah (now referred to as RECAMP). The Late Tan Sri Prof. Hamzah Senukar was appointed the Vice-Chancellor Designer of the University.

While serving with the University of Malaya, I was requested by the Vice-Chancellor Designer in May 1968 to undertake the responsibility of organizing the teaching of physics and mathematics, the latter was compulsory for all science undergraduates, and establish the departmental structure for the disciplines. The Late Tan Sri Penang School also supported the Late Professor Francis Hamzah to be in-charge of chemistry and the Late Professor E. Mahalingam to be in-charge of biology, both were from the University of Malaya.

Dear Dr. Anwar Faizal, noted that when the University of Malaya Kuala Lumpur Campus was created, the administrators and academics from the University of Malaya in Singapore played a leading role in establishing it and later the institution became the University of Malaya and that in Singapore became the Faculty of the University of Penang. I had recalled, upon the administrators and academics from the University of Malaya were involved to help in establishing it.

By Associate Professor Chee Chuan Cheng, Foundation Professor of Physics and Pastoral Director, School of Physics & Mathematics (near School of Physics)

18 JULY 2022

Equally, Dr. Anwar Faizal, noted that when the University of Malaya Kuala Lumpur Campus was created, the administrators and academics from the University of Malaya in Singapore played a leading role in establishing it and later the institution became the University of Malaya and that in Singapore became the Faculty of the University of Penang. I had recalled, upon the administrators and academics from the University of Malaya were involved to help in establishing it.

“The University of Penang (Universiti Pulau Pinang) commenced operations on 1st June 1969 and was mandated by the government to be a natural sciences-based university.”



### My Unforgettable Experiences and Fondest Memories

It amazes me how quickly the Late Tan Sri Hamzah, a pioneer for having, joined in the science program and became very proficient in it.

The meetings with the Late Tan Sri Hamzah Senukar and the three Deans of the founding natural science schools, serviced by the administrative staff, normally started in the morning and ended at dinner time. Morning tea, lunch and evening coffee and sometimes even dinner was served at the meeting table whilst discussions were ongoing. Such historic meetings were held almost every working day of the week since there was so much to plan and discuss for the start of the academic year of a newly founded university.

The Vice-Chancellor's welcome and open-house sessions to newly recruited staff at the Water Tower in Minden Campus were very warm and welcome by all who joined the university and helped create a cordial, friendly atmosphere advised and supported by all. There was such camaraderie and

“Morning tea, lunch and evening coffee and sometimes even dinner was served at the meeting table whilst discussions were on-going.”

*Sometimes to do the right thing, we must keep a promise we never made*  
– Robert Breault

When I started working with USM in 2018, I saw there were a number of cat colonies in the USM main campus. Having two fat cats of my own, I was wondering whether they have had something to eat, and if they have - have they been eating well?

Deeply bothered by these questions, I started feeding the cats on campus after office hours. Then I met another cat-feeder (if such a term exists), now a former postgraduate student from ISDEV, Azura, who had been feeding cats around her hostel area for more than a year. Then I met Salsabila (Bella), an international postgraduate student from Indonesia studying Biology and then Wei Shan, a postgraduate student from the School of Mathematics. Both have offered to help me feed the cats, so I need not to go to the campus every night. From there onwards, we've started working together as a small team, taking turns feeding the cats.

## TO CARE OR NOT TO CARE, That is the Question.

Our roles grew from feeders to carers and rescuers. When these students noticed cats on campus that require medical attention, they would contact me. We would then plan for their 'capture day' so that we can send them to the vet. Two of my colleagues joined forces with us later, Ms Lim Tan Chin and Dr Ainul Abdul Mohsein, who are feeders and big in animal rescue themselves. Then the group slowly gets bigger as more students, be they the undergraduates such as Siti NurAishah and Muhamad Fithri from the School of Management or the postgraduates, especially the international students, among them Jasmine Xie LiuBin from China, Amal and Alaa from Saudi Arabia, Firuzatun from Bangladesh, Hidayah Sunar from Indonesia and Intekab from India, whom we truly appreciate the times and volunteering efforts that they have committed themselves to.

Noticing the growing number of new litters in the campus, Wei Shan has pressured me to start the Trapped, Neutered and Released (TNR) programme. This programme is widely used to control the overpopulation of strays.

The problems with TNR are that, it is expensive and the cats which went under the surgery would need a place to recover for a week or two. In order to make TNR happen, we would need money and the manpower – people who are willing to foster the cats until they are well enough to be released back to the wild. This was when we started the group on Facebook and WhatsApp, called USM Cat Lovers. This is meant to gather like-minded individuals to help support and finance our TNR programme.

The role of USM Cat Lovers later became more prominent when more cats on campus were found dead, due to brutal attacks by wild dogs. It was when the first MCO was put into effect nationwide last year, we started receiving reports that more cats have died at the hands (or paws, rather) of wild dogs – in fact, every other day on campus. Most of the bodies of the dead cat bodies that were found by students at various locations were hardly recognisable. They were covered with lacerations, some with exposed bones – simply said – they were too unsightly.



**“In order to make TNR happen, we would need money and the manpower – people who are willing to foster the cats until they are well enough to be released back to the wild.”**



Several student members of USM Cat Lovers then went to report these incidents to Jabatan Keselamatan (JK) in early September 2020, but unfortunately the report was not being treated seriously at that time. This has prompted the students to start an online petition to seek for wider support. This helped gather many solo, but active cat feeders and rescuers to join the USM Cat Lovers' community. From them, we have learnt that they have been working in silo for years in feeding and caring for cats in the USM campus who among others are, the amazingly dedicated Ms R. Hemalatha from the School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Pakcik Hamid and Kak Dilla from Bakti Cafe and Makcik Su, the janitor. The coverage we received at that time also inspired more students to volunteer; some of them include Basit and Fatin Hamamah from the School of Humanities, Iffah from the School of Physics and Leah Heng from the Centre for Instructional Technology and Multimedia (PTPM).

Now, the USM Cat Lovers' Facebook has 803 followers, including the Universiti Sains Malaysia official Facebook. This platform has been a very effective communication tool for us because we have been receiving an incredible support from our followers. When we advertised the call for adoptions or donations, they would not hesitate to share it far and wide.

To date, we have 11 active fosterers, and roughly 30 cat feeders from USM. We have spent close to RM9,000 since May 2020 to feed and care for a total of 78 cats, with 35 of them having been successfully adopted, while 15 are still under foster care and 15 of them remained as or released to free-roam inside the campus. Unfortunately, we have lost 13 of them either from the aforementioned dog attacks, or due to severe illness. The actual number of cat death may be larger than this, since we only started to catalogue them when we realised the increasing body count associated with wild dog attacks. As for TNR, we have successfully achieved our small milestone with 19 cat participants.

All these were done under a stretched budget, using money which we raised through crowdfunding. We do have emergency cases in the past, which can get to hundreds or thousands in bills. For the TNR programme, we received half of the sponsorship from a local NGO agency, SAMA. We also went for the subsidized neutering project offered by the Cat Beach Sanctuary, although we do have to travel a bit further to the other side of the island. We will look for any means that can help us, as TNR can be very expensive.

In the future, we hope to have a more systematic and formalised method in place, to oversee medical treatments and the wellbeing of cats on campus. Since last year, I have been working closely with Dr Siti Rahyla Rahmat from the School of Social Sciences in developing a proposal for the USM Cat Centre, in which we hope to emerge as an active control centre for cats on campus.

We hope with the establishment of this control centre, we can instil a culture of compassion on campus and at the same time, position USM strongly right in the centre on the compassion footprint in the wider society.

Based on my experience working with student members of USM Cat Lovers, I can see the students too benefitted when caring for the cats. They became calmer, focused, attentive to fact-driven details, and developed a strong sense of self-initiative, accountability, leadership and teamwork skills. Due to this, we believed that when they are allowed to engage actively with community work, especially with animals, this can unexpectedly help facilitate students' growth in ways that may be restrictively unattainable when they are sitting for lessons in the classroom.

In order to ensure the financial sustainability of this control centre, we plan to branch out the main idea to include grooming and cat hotel services, which can be a steady source of income stream not only for the centre itself, but also for our students. This way, we can serve both the cats and the bottom community in the campus equally.

*Text: Dr Sarini Azizan  
Editing: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*



**Some of the USM fosterers**



**Cat feeders and sitters**

**“In the future, we hope to have a more systematic and formalised method in place, to oversee medical treatments and the wellbeing of cats on campus.”**



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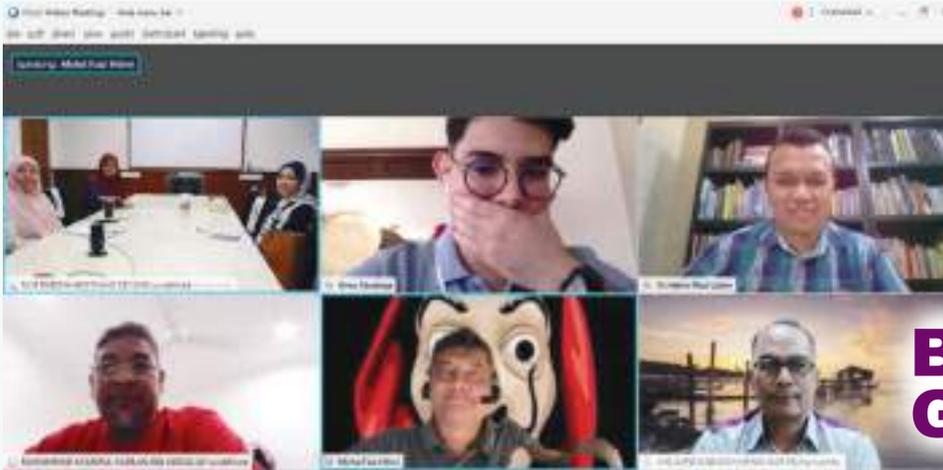
**USM Cat Lovers**



**usmcat**



**USM Cat Lovers' Documentary**



## BE GRATEFUL

"To become a better you, remember to be grateful to the people who have contributed in making you who you are today." This is why I feel indebted to the gracious goodness of everyone magical to my journey as a professional.

As everyone knows, a dream does not become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work. I, however, think I wouldn't have achieved anything if I didn't get the support of the people along the way. I am grateful to everyone who has helped my progress along the way, whether it be through acute direction and instruction, a helping hand, or something as simple as a kind word.

In March 2018, I was just a vibrant, ambitious and bright-eyed 27 years old, brimming with qualities that could burn out if not harnessed. Three years later, I am standing before you with a Ph.D from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and a story about resilience and grace.

I extend my gratitude to everyone who has played an intrinsic part in my success. My employers in Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) who believed in me and sponsored my education and to everyone else whose supports were unwavering, I say thank you.

I will forever be grateful to USM for not only seeing my potentials but giving me a platform and providing me with a Ph.D offer to pursue my research in business management. Your faith in me was the first to make a difference in my life truly.

In July 2020, amidst the pandemic, I was on a situation to do my viva voce online. It was not easy, to prepare for it, and with online guidance from my supervisor, Dr Mohd Faiz Hilmi, but yes, I have done it and I have graduated with a Ph.D in management and Graduate On Time (GOT).

USM is a prestigious university with an outstanding atmosphere to do your Ph.D. programme. The programme is well-managed and my school takes care about every single aspect of my study life. Everyone gave their very best to help me out whenever I ask for anything.

So it is with great esteem and much graciousness, that I say, once again: Thank You.

**Dr. Anas Abudaqa**  
**Ph.D '20**  
**School of Distance Education**  
**UAE**

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# JOM KEMBALI

ke Desasiswa  
Secara Dalam Talian



Lebih 100 mantan MPP, MPD, PPMS, PPSL dan ahli persatuan-persatuan telah menghadiri sesi perjumpaan secara dalam talian anjuran Majlis Penggawa Desasiswa Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) yang telah diadakan pada 6 Mac 2021.

Perjumpaan santai yang dipengerusikan oleh Encik Zulkifli Che Hussin, Penggawa Desasiswa Cahaya Gemilang ini membincangkan perkembangan terkini serta program desasiswa dan Universiti.



Timbalan Naib Canselor HEPA, Profesor Dr. Aldrin Abdullah berkongsi mengenai program Adopt Your Hostel Room @USM yang telah berjaya mengumpul kutipan sebanyak RM46,200 serta mengalu-alukan sumbangan daripada alumni yang ingin menyumbang kembali kepada bilik desasiswa mereka. Selain itu, projek Staycation@Desasiswa juga sedang dalam perancangan di mana bilik-bilik Desasiswa akan disewakan serendah RM20 bagi dewasa dan RM10 bagi kanak-kanak di bawah 12 tahun kepada para alumni yang ingin mengimbuai semula pengalaman di kampus bersama keluarga.

Turut berkongsi pandangan dan idea pada malam itu ialah Encik Nazru Ismail, mantan Pendaftar DRB-HICOM mengenai pengalaman beliau sepanjang berkhidmat di BHEPA dan sebagai Penggawa. Pengalaman yang beliau tidak dapat lupakan adalah ketika mengendalikan program-program bersama pelajar di luar kampus selama lebih 40 hari berkampung di pedalaman di Kedah.

Sesi ini juga turut dihadiri oleh Dr. Mohamed Maliki Mohamed Rapiee Pengarah Pusat Belia Antarabangsa (IYC) yang sama-sama berkongsi pengalaman beliau semasa menginap di Desasiswa sewaktu pengajian di USM. Maliki sebelum ini merupakan Penggawa/ Pegawai yang telah berkhidmat di USM selama lebih dari 15 tahun sebelum berpindah ke IYC. Maliki juga menyambut baik program Adopt Your Hostel Room @USM dan bersetuju menyumbang bagi program tersebut.

Para alumni turut memberi pandangan mengenai peranan Persatuan Alumni USM (PAUSM) dan bagaimana untuk menarik lebih ramai alumni menyertai program yang dianjurkan serta ada cadangan daripada Encik Azad Jasmi mengenai konsep "Post Graduate Contribution" iaitu program bagi para alumni untuk menyumbang apabila melanjutkan pengajian di peringkat Ijazah Tinggi di USM.

**“Timbalan Naib Canselor HEPA, Profesor Dr. Aldrin Abdullah berkongsi mengenai program Adopt Your Hostel Room@USM yang telah berjaya mengumpul kutipan sebanyak RM46,200 serta mengalu-alukan sumbangan daripada alumni yang ingin menyumbang kembali kepada bilik desasiswa mereka.”**

Teks: Syahnaz Riza Sukor  
Suntingan: Nor Rafizah Haji Md Zain



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# SALING BERKONGSI

## Pengalaman dan Minat

Situasi semasa tidak menghalang sekumpulan alumni Himpunan Anak-anak Kelantan Universiti Sains Malaysia (HAAK USM) untuk berkumpul dan saling berkongsi pengalaman dan minat bersama Timbalan Naib Canselor Hal Ehwal Pembangunan Pelajar dan Alumni (HEPA), Profesor Dr. Aldrin Abdullah.

Mereka berkumpul dan masih akrab disebabkan minat yang sama iaitu bola sepak kerana sepanjang pengajian, padang minden telah menjadi tempat bermain, berlatih dan juga menyertai pelbagai perlawanan.

Program sebegini sangat disambut baik oleh pengurusan USM kerana para alumni juga disarankan untuk menyambung perhubungan bersama rakan-rakan seperjuangan semasa menuntut ilmu serta berkumpul bersama kohort masing-masing.

Alumni yang hadir terdiri daripada pelbagai bidang pengajian dan bergraduasi di antara tahun 1988 sehingga 1999. Masing- masing berkongsi pengalaman sepanjang pengajian mereka di USM dan mengenang kembali saat-saat manis di kampus suatu ketika dahulu di samping tempat-tempat yang masih wujud sehingga kini.



**Perjumpaan antara ahli-ahli HAAK USM dengan Prof. Dr. Aldrin Abdullah di The Bricks**

Turut diadakan adalah satu perlawanan bola sepak persahabatan di antara Pasukan Veteran USM dan Alumni USM bertempat di Kopa Arena USM.

Perlawanan persahabatan ini diadakan bagi mengimbau semula kenangan alumni HAAK yang juga merupakan bekas USM Tigers sepanjang pengajian mereka di sini.

Sebelum sesi perlawanan, Aldrin turut menjemput para alumni yang hadir untuk melawat The Bricks di samping berkongsi perkembangan terkini mengenai penambahbaikan desasiswa yang sedang berlaku di Universiti.

Turut hadir adalah Naib Canselor Profesor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan, Timbalan Naib Canselor Kelestarian dan Pembangunan Institusi Profesor Dr. Md Roslan Hashim dan Penyelaras Pusat Pembangunan Alumni, Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal.

*Teks: Nor Rafizah Haji Md Zain*

*Foto: Ebrahim Abdul Manan / Syahnaz Riza Sukor*



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## ‘SAND-ING’ A MESSAGE of Appreciation to The Nation’s Frontliners

*Mohammad Ikhwan Ibrahim  
(B. Sc. HBP '16)*



A Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) alumnus from the School of Housing, Building and Planning (HBP), Mohammad Ikhwan Ibrahim, 30, recently presented a message to the nation’s frontline heroes who have been working relentlessly since the country was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This message was created to show appreciation and support to the frontline heroes who did not know the meaning of despair in caring for Malaysians during the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said.

Made as a sand sculpture, it portrays four figures, each one representing a different frontliner group, namely the food delivery service, the police force (uniformed bodies), the Director-General of Health, Tan Sri Dr. Noor Hisham Abdullah (frontline leader/government) and nurses (healthcare workers).

Citing BERNAMA, Mohammad Ikhwan, who is also a visual artist and the only known active sand sculptor in the country, said that it is the only sand sculpture art in the country to feature the four figures representing the frontline heroes.

It was made possible with cooperation from the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, National Art Gallery (NAG) Langkawi and the Marine Department, who manages the venue.

The sand sculpture, located at the Passenger Ferry Terminal in Kuah, Langkawi, measures 3.048 meters long (10 feet) and 1.6764 meters high (5.5 feet). It uses 2,000 kilogrammes (kg) of sand with the words 'Thank You Frontliners'. 70 bags of river sand, each weighing roughly 30 kg, were used for the project.

“This project started on 22 December 2020 and it took 2 weeks to complete (5 January 2021). This sand sculpture art will remain at this location for a month,” he further said.

“What is more unique is that it was made indoors, as opposed to most which were made at the beach.”

Also known as ‘Ikhwan Saloot’, this postgraduate sand sculptor from Bayan Lepas, Penang, said that this sculpture is easier to create because it uses sand from the river as compared to using sand from the beach.

He added that this sand sculpture art can last up to three months before its texture would start to fade and erode. He has also been involved in a few other commissioned sand sculpture projects.

Mohammad Ikhwan graduated in Bachelor of Science (HBP) in 2016 and Master of Science in Landscape Architecture in 2020 from USM.

*Text: Mohamad Hafiz Asyraf*

*Editing: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*

*Photo: BERNAMA*



read more



After taking a break for 2020, this year the USM Masjid Al-Malik Khalid will open its door again with a few activities including Iftar Jama'ie monitored with strict adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The food is prepared for 1800 people, and only 600 people is allowed to break their fast at the mosque.

To date, more than 600,000 people have benefitted from this Ramadan food effort since the programme was first introduced on a small scale more than 30 years ago.

# Iftar after MCO



# Iftar

before MCO



Before Covid-19, USM Masjid Al-Malik Khalid received more than 2,000 students from various religious backgrounds, including international students from various countries, gathered for iftar and share the joy of Ramadan in an atmosphere of unity in diversity.

The goal of this ceremony is to foster a sense of family and togetherness among USM residents and the surrounding community. The celebration then continues during Eid where USM residents will have the opportunity to attend a Raya Open House with the USM top management.



**INFAQ RAMADHAN**  
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 - MINYAK  
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YAMM  
 YOGA  
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WAKHAN 2021 GABUNG BERMAKHLAK

# CELEBRATING RAMADHAN and Eid-al-Fitr away from home

Muslims around the world will be celebrating Eid-al-Fitr, after one month of fasting from dawn to sunset during Ramadhan. It is also a month that encourages followers to focus on purification, charitable acts, prayers, and an overall increased closeness to God. For most Muslims, it is generally a communal observance with a gathering for meals between friends and families that break the fast called iftar, preceded by joining the evening congregational prayers held daily in mosques. In most Muslim countries, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated during the first three days of the month of Syawal and it is a time of official receptions and private visits, when family and friends greet one another, new clothes are worn, and a variety of delicious food being served to celebrate guest. Let's hear what are our alumni and students' observation celebrating Ramadhan and Syawal in USM.



**Abdelrahman Abdalla Abdelrahman Abdelaziz** • Bachelor of Engineering 2020 • Egypt

"The Rituals of Ramadan in USM is of a whole new level of wholesomeness, whether it is tarawih prayers, huge gatherings for iftar or even the sense of belonging to a closely-knitted community. For me, Ramadhan and Syawal are like a two-months long celebration, where you enjoy doing your religious obligations with a high level of serenity. I hope this year we can have the same experience, since last year we had a very quiet Ramadhan and Eid because of COVID-19."

**Dr. Narguesse Saliminia** • PhD 2016 • Iran

During my study at USM, I had several years of experiencing fasting month there. And now that I have graduated, every year in Ramadhan I will remember those memories. Ramadhan was one of the big festives and meals were prepared daily by the USM Mosque for iftar. The meals around the hostels also were sold at reasonable prices. Eid celebration was full of joy, where I was exposed to a lot of Raya dishes like *ketupat* and *rendang*. The students were exchanging wishes as we were celebrating it all together. I hope to celebrate this Eid as joyfully as the previous years with peace, abundance and Covid free.



**Dr. Ismail Abdel Wahab Ragab Fayed** • PhD 2018 • Egypt

"I like the friendly and social environment while fasting in Malaysia. There are many global threats now to health, education, economy and mental health. I believe people need to get together, as we do in Ramadhan, supporting each other to face this new world dilemma. Back home in Egypt, it is quite similar where people like to gather for Iftar. But, right now I'm in Canada; it is so different! With COVID-19, the gatherings and activities are limited. I hope this year's celebration will bring happiness and safety back to the world."



**Bashaer Hassan Alamoudi** • M.of Science 2020 • Yemen

"In Malaysia, I am being exposed to other cultures and learn about them. There is such a beautiful blend of people with different ethnic backgrounds, where religion makes them come together. In addition, I celebrated it with the non-Muslims too and enjoyed such glorious days with everyone. That was the most beautiful experience here where every religion can unite during iftar at the USM Mosque and visiting their friends' houses during Syawal. I am hoping for the happy moments to happen again".



**Alyaa Abdulhussein Kareem** • *Fifth year • Master of Science 2019 • Iraq*

This is my fifth year celebrating Ramadan and Eid here in USM Penang. I have to say that Ramadhan is a lovely month and we used to have a huge gathering at the mosque with local and international community. It's where you feel warmth by the people surround you. However, last year because of Covid-19 a lot of things change. It's quieter and we could not even gather at the mosque. Alhamdulillah, now that we have adapted to the new normal, the USM Mosque is welcoming its community again with restricted SOP. I am so happy and thankful because the *masjid* is our gathering place and I always feel at peace there and make me feel like I am at my hometown. The difference back in my hometown is that the decoration. There are many decorations along the roadside back in my hometown and only the men allowed to pray in *masjid*. But here, both men and women are allowed. Hence, I have the opportunity to perform prayers with all of my female friends. I hope things will get better and there will be no more MCO so that we can celebrate Eid as before.



**Amer Mohammed Saeed Hajeb** • *Second year, School of Chemical Engineering • Yemen*

"The food in Malaysia is very good but some dishes are not really favorable to me. The celebration of Ramadhan back at my hometown is that the shops and restaurants will continue to open until after midnight and you will see the streets full of people, even children. However, here during the old norms the food stalls will be full of visitors until iftar."



**Musab Hussein Ahmed** • *Second year, School of Computer Sciences • Somalia*

I feel like home in USM because I have a lot of friends from my country and also some from other countries with a similar culture. I arrived last year when MCO was declared in Malaysia. So USM gave us food vouchers as the SOP were really tight. The big difference is the food for iftar and Syawal. Since I spend most of my time in Libya, the food served is rather heavy compared to Malaysia, where you tend to eat more. And of course, not being able to celebrate with my family. This year, I hope this celebration will not be like in 2020. Last year, I felt like it was a public holiday during Eid, not a celebration as there are many restrictions."



**Dr. Ali Badeen Mohammed Al-Rikaby** • *PhD 2018 • Iraq*

"I always remember seeing students wear new clothes, women dress in white, and who could forget the variety of foods that were distributed for free. During Syawal, there were even more food and gifts that are often exchanged. Most of the students will gather their families and pray at the mosque. Back at my home town, the exchange of gifts is not very popular, but we often visit friends and families for gathering which is quite similar in Malaysia."



**Shahd Ashraf Semida Moawad Abdelhamid** • *Third year, School of Humanities • Egypt*

I see the many local food stalls preparing for iftar and I think that is a precious way to create Ramadhan spirit for the students. Being an introvert, I seldom attend big gathering without having familiar faces around. However, the ambience here makes you feel at home where you will easily get connected and join the group. I've always love the Hari Raya traditional music. For me it is a very beautiful way to celebrate the occasion and making you closer at home. At home we mostly do gatherings and 'Ramadhan specific' food and sweets. Hoping that this year I will be able to gather with my friends and for everyone to gather with their loved ones and share beautiful moments during these precious occasions.



**Fawwaz Abdel Rahman** • *First year, School of Management* • Jordan

This is my first time celebrating iftar in USM, but my second time in Malaysia. Unfortunately last year, Malaysia was also affected by Covid-19. Hence, the celebration is rather quiet. However, we have a great community and friendly local friends who served us with local Raya delights. I have the opportunity of attending a small gathering among the local communities. This year, I saw many local stalls around USM where people will buy food for iftar. In my country, we normally cook at home and have iftar with the family, then we go to the mosque for tarawih. I also realized that there are not many decorations put up here during Ramadhan compared to my hometown. But USM makes me feel at home as the local and international communities gathered happily during Ramadhan. I appreciate the University's effort in making sure all the international students are comfortable by providing Iftar food to everyone. For me, this is a real Muslim attribute that has been carried out by the University and Malaysia. I hope that this year we can celebrate Syawal and help more people that need assistance."

**Dr. Ali Abbas Falah Alzu'bi** • *PhD '19* • Jordan

"It is nice and fun fasting here in Malaysia and honestly it is not much different from my country, other than not having decorations throughout Ramadhan. Alhamdulillah, I had a great experience in USM. My hope for this year is that all Muslims will be safe and healthy."

**Beribeche Houssam Eddine** • *Third year, School of Languages, Literacies and Translation* • Algeria

"The first year in USM, it was weird because it was the time to be fasting alone away from my home country. In the first two weeks of Ramadhan, I was struggling to cope with the fact that I was away from my family and missing out on large gatherings during this holy month. The last two weeks I got more comfortable as USM hosted a grand Iftar gathering during USMi Ramadhan Awareness Event. I had another interesting experience when I was invited by the Yemenian community, for Iftar celebration. USM gave me memories to cherish forever, one of which is the first Ramadhan away from home.

My observation is that USM's top management makes sure that all the international students feel comfortable by providing Iftar food to everyone. I was really happy and surprised to see this kind of effort that USM had put in. This made me really proud to be a part of this esteemed institution. The organizations, food, logistics and other preparations were top-notch. It was a new feeling to meet people from different parts of the world here at USM.

Also, for the first time I was missing Algerian food, having different and new dishes every day for the entire month of Ramadhan. I was only fasting and have ready-made food with my mom and the entire family gathering, a culture followed for generations in my family. When I first came to Malaysia, the first two weeks of Ramadhan I was struggling to prepare Algerian food, looking for the groceries to create the same vibe. In the third week I received an invitation to celebrate with USM during Iftar (USMi Ramadhan Awareness Event). Me being open-minded and into exploring different cultures, I started enjoying the last two weeks. I felt a huge gap between Algerian and Malaysian cultures. Especially, the food was what made me feel this way. After this, I experienced another good vibe when I was invited by the Yemen community, I got the same feeling because of the culture gap.

But, what made me feel more homesick was when I watched people eating outside in restaurants because this is something I have never experienced or observed in my home country during this holy month. I explored something else, too. In my country, women enjoy Ramadhan as they are seen enjoying fasting and cooking grand feasts for Iftar for the whole month. I would like to end by saying that I would definitely be open in spending an entire day with a local Malay family to observe more closely and to explore more about their culture.

Initially, I was not expecting much from this year's Ramadhan celebration due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has created a havoc. But I am expecting that this holy celebration begins the same way it was before COVID-19 kicked in. The hopes are high as we are going to have a huge Iftar gathering soon in USM. I am sure it will take us back to the old norms. I expect and hope that different communities in USM will make Iftar gatherings for all international students to represent and present their cultures."





# EXPERTS PREDICT

## What The World Will Be Like in 2021

After a year that produced endless surprises, it may seem like folly to forecast what will happen in 2021. We have decided to do it anyway and approached some of our experts in various fields to hear what they have to say. Here's some enlightening potpourri of predictions by our experts.



### **Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan**

*Optical Physicist and Vice-Chancellor*

USM will nail 2021 with grit and laser-focused resoluteness. As magical as ever. The biggest turnaround to date. Watch this space for more amazing achievements!

### **Professor Dato' Dr. Ahmad Farhan Mohd Sadullah**

*Expert in Transportation Engineering and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & International)*

2021 will see the world and its inhabitants becoming more agile, adaptive and resilient. I see more people will take the "dare to fail" attitude. Unfortunately, it will not always be for a positive purpose.

Daring crime may also be on the rise, if desperation continues. One thing is for sure, those resisting change will be left behind and may soon be irrelevant. Get the best out of the 2020 adversities.



### **Professor Dr. Aldrin Abdullah**

*Expert in built Environment and Crime and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Development Affairs & Alumni)*

The year 2020 can be summarized as a challenging one for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic. No one saw it coming. Having endured the various obstacles that year, it is only natural that 2021 is greeted with high hopes and expectations. The availability of vaccination is a relief and perhaps it is the light at the end of the tunnel we are all waiting for. However, until we have access to it, anxiety will continue to run high. It has been a challenging time to manage teaching and learning. Our ability to quickly react to the new normal is a testament to our true quality.

In 2021, we anticipate an even more challenging year for Malaysia compared to 2020. The current trend of cases has increased from 200 per day in the earlier stages to now above 2,000 daily. Mathematical modelling by various parties predicts the figures to rise above 5,000 come mid-year. If the university is to open its campus for all students to return in March, our ability to provide a safe haven will be severely tested. As such, our new normal will have an even newer interpretation. We will continually have to modify all our work processes, work culture and most importantly our expectations of how things should be must also be different. So, for 2021, how creative and innovative we do things differently will be key. A newer norm.

**"Our ability to quickly react to the new normal is a testament to our true quality."**



**Professor Dr. Md Roslan Hashim**

*Expert in Nanoscience and Technology and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Sustainability and Institutional Development)*

Year 2020 is about aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. 2021 will come with even more uncertainties. Though we're experiencing new cases in four digits daily, one thing that we have learnt is that in every problem there comes an opportunity. Hence, let's look at 2021 ushering opportunities aplenty.

The pandemic has left the human population with no choice but to work together, complementing each other's strength in achieving various common goals.

Thanks to the pandemic, nobody anticipated that online teaching and learning has come this far. Experts in different areas of the globe can now hold virtual conferences anytime with almost no cost. Even though lecturers and teachers are struggling in building the contents of their teaching material, we anticipate that they would be able to overcome it over time. Online business is the order of the day where goods and favourite meals are delivered to our homes at the touch of our finger tips. Some clinics and private hospitals are 'closing shops' with fewer people becoming sick as a result of staying at home.

No one could imagine that the football league could survive without an audience, but instead the club and sponsors could get the returns from online pay per view and brand merchandising. These new ways of doing things indicate that the pandemic has really opened up opportunities for those willing to adopt positive thinking.

As a leader during tribulations such as the pandemic, one can assume running in a dark tunnel with restricted movement. This is the time where we can build our strength and skills, for we never know when the tunnel is going to end. We however need to prepare ourselves with new skill sets and knowledge, anticipating that when we come out of the tunnel the environment has already changed. By then, we would have readily equipped ourselves to face the new challenges and to excel in whatever we are doing.

**“The pandemic has left the human population with no choice but to work together, complementing each other's strength in achieving various common goals.”**



**Professor Dato’ Dr. Aileen Tan Shau Hwai and Professor Dr. Zulfigar Yasin**

*Marine Biologists, Centre for Marine and Coastal Studies (CEMACS)*

As the world heals in the post-Covid period and normalised activities pick up, the environment which has been given some respite and which has improved will quickly decline again - unless we realise our past mistakes and make corrective measures. Key to this will be on self attitude and behavioural changes in adaptation to the new norms to battle with environmental challenges. However, given the negative state of most economies, this will take time.

On a more positive note, we hope that the US under the new Biden administration will correct the environmentally-antagonistic policies to climate change for the past 4 years and provide a better global leadership on this front.

In Malaysia, the controversial mining suggestions by the State Government in Kedah and our water woes in Selangor will dominate the forum on environmental protection and livelihood improvement.



**Professor Dr. Sivamurugan Pandian**

*Political Scientist, School of Social Sciences*

2021 will see no end to politicking; uncertainty and instability continues with moral and political legitimacy at stake when the government holds razor-thin majority. The debate on political leadership will continue and I will not be surprised to see Parliament dissolved and snap polls held as soon as the Covid-19 pandemic is under control.

The biggest challenge is to balance political perception with the demands and needs of the masses and in mapping towards the people’s thoughts. What exactly will be the priority - politics, health, security, economy or just ‘People’!



**Professor Dr. Azlan Amran**

*Accounting expert and Dean, Graduate School of Business (GSB)*

2021 Year of Correction. Looking back, most of us would agree that not a single event in Malaysia’s history seems to have yielded a lost year in the way 2020 has. Covid-19 has challenged humanity to its limits, with an enormous loss of human lives and causing disruptions, making it impossible for us to go back to “normal” or how life was in the past. The Movement Control (MCO) was imposed to control the movement of people in order to reduce infection but the ramification to the Malaysian economy was huge. Consumer spending has been reduced, and with unemployment rates spiking while public and private investments slumped due to poor demand.

Schools and universities were ordered to cease operations, leading to nationwide disruptions to the overall teaching and learning activity. Businesses too began slowing down, resulting in sharp layoff or retrenchment of the workforce.

Losing a job would lead to disruption in one’s mental health, bringing in an array of feelings which includes depression and anxiety.

The 'new normal' in 2021 will demand a new and more flexible approach to weather the storm of the pandemic. The spread of Covid-19 need to be mitigated more effectively in a proactive and collective manner as the number of infection rates reach more than 1,000 daily. Survival of businesses that are already in a precarious position require greater efforts to be 'resuscitated' to continue its survival from the effects of the pandemic.

On a positive note, there is always a silver lining in the clouds. Malaysia plans to spend a record RM\$322.5 billion ringgit (\$77.94 billion) to boost the domestic economy post-Covid era. Scientists have also claimed to discover a vaccine that has proven to be 95% effective after undergoing clinical trials. Purchasal by the government with a RM3 billion budget of this vaccine would cater to almost 70% of the total population in Malaysia.

An increase in public spending will also give confidence to businesses to chart a better year ahead. Businesses will continue to remain financially prudent, as it will no longer be business as usual, and it is timely to be more socially and environmentally oriented. Issues on workers' living and workplace conditions too should be the priority. In addition, there will be a greater for technology to provide multiple solutions to problems regarding mankind and businesses with regard to the pandemic. More innovations leveraging on technology is expected to be introduced in 2021.

We can truly hope for all Malaysians to become more united now after going through the hardships in 2020.

**“Survival of businesses that are already in a precarious position require greater efforts to be 'resuscitated' to continue its survival from the effects of the pandemic.”**



**Professor Dr. Lee Keat Teong**

*Expert in Biofuel Production and  
Director, Research Creativity & Management Office (RCMO)*

Personally I do not think much will change during the first half of 2021. Only by mid-2021 perhaps the majority of the vulnerable group will get vaccinated. Those with disposable income will continue to spend on activities allowed in the new norm or home-based. Those in the baking/gardening industries will continue to prosper, as both these sectors are very home-based and do not require much effort and expertise. In leisure activities for socialising, I think the gyms will be more popular than ever, as even now, there's not much indoor leisure activities allowed and gym is among the very few.

Now for the second half of the year, things may get a bit more interesting. International borders I think will begin to open, especially for regional travels, supporting the tourism sector to survive through till then. However, international travel may no longer be the same. We'll most likely be subjected to rapid test for Covid-19 before departure/arrival and vaccination will be commonly questioned at border posts or those already vaccinated may be prioritised in many things. Travel insurance on Covid-19 will be a new norm. Discrimination against those NOT vaccinated maybe a new issue to be hotly-debated by all.

Some industries will need a longer time to get back to pre-Covid-19. For instance, people are so used to watching movies at home that cinema may no longer be necessary or people are so used to baking goods like bread and cake at home that commercial bakeries may continue to see a drop in their sales. The bottom line is, 2021 will definite be an interesting year to watch as the world begins to recover from Covid-19 pandemic.

**“Travel insurance on Covid-19 will be a new norm. Discrimination against those NOT vaccinated maybe a new issue to be hotly-debated by all.”**



**Associate Professor Dr. Saidatulakmal Mohd**

*Expert in Welfare Economics and Director, Centre for Global Sustainability Studies (CGSS)*



2020 has created a borderless world - a world of limitless communication and engagement. Internet has established its importance, without which 2020 would collapse miserably. The 'new normal' will become habitual in 2021: remote working, online learning, virtual meetings. Yes, we adapt and yes, life goes on; but how do we sustain productivity and navigate through the challenges brought upon us? WFH, for example, is a two-edged sword! Too much work vs no work at all, or flexible work schedule vs chaotic house rules.

2021 will continue to be a challenging year. Not only that we need to learn the art of work-life balance, we also need to learn to be sincerer, truthful and emphathetic in playing our roles as employees, employers, academics, students and individuals. Superiors ought to know the boundaries of the new borderless world, while subordinates need to understand the true meaning of WFH! Academics need to be ready for a paradigm shift - embrace technology for smart remote learning. The 4th IR is now! We all need to play our part to remain relevant and productive in these challenging times.

**Dr. Siti Khayriyah Mohd Hanafiah**

*Microbiologist, School of Biological Sciences*

It's hard to separate 2020 from the pandemic that made so many of us grieve. I think there was a stage when we denied it (and some still do), we got angry; now we are trying to bargain in some way for a kind of life with Covid-19.

So, it goes to think that some of the panic and shocks that happened in 2020 will be felt more deeply in 2021. We will be faced with some depression. But afterwards, there will also be some respite, acceptance, moving on, and as usual with us humans, we will soon forget.



**“Network administrators should anticipate an influx of malware proliferation activities within their organisations...”**

**TS. Dr. Shankar Karuppayah**

*Cybersecurity expert, National Advanced IPv6 Centre (NAv6)*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2020 has seen a rapid and drastic change in adopting the culture of online digital learning and working from home. When the transition occurred, however, many people and organisations were not ready. As a result, many devices, such as laptops, computers, and smartphones need to be shared or used among family members to access the Internet via unsecured networks. This new-normal scenario has introduced a broader attack surface for cybercriminals as supported by the increased number of attacks reported worldwide in 2020.

2021 is expected to show a similar trend as 2020 in the sophistication of attacks, but with an increased rate of infections and attacks. Network administrators should anticipate an influx of malware proliferation activities within their organisations when the pandemic situation is resolved, and users return to their respective organisations. Infected devices of the users of the organisation will attempt to infect other devices that are accessible through the network of the company. As such, the year 2021 is expected to be relieving for most of us with the hopeful end of the pandemic. However, those in the domain of cybersecurity can expect a challenging year ahead of them.



**Professor Dato’ Dr. Azhar Mat Easa**

*Nutrastrategist, School of Industrial Technology*

Blue light in devices such as smartphones, PC monitors, flat-screen TVs and LED lighting is more energy-intense than other types of light. Blue light penetrates deep into the eye, which over time, can lead to degenerative conditions that may result in blurred vision and other eye diseases.

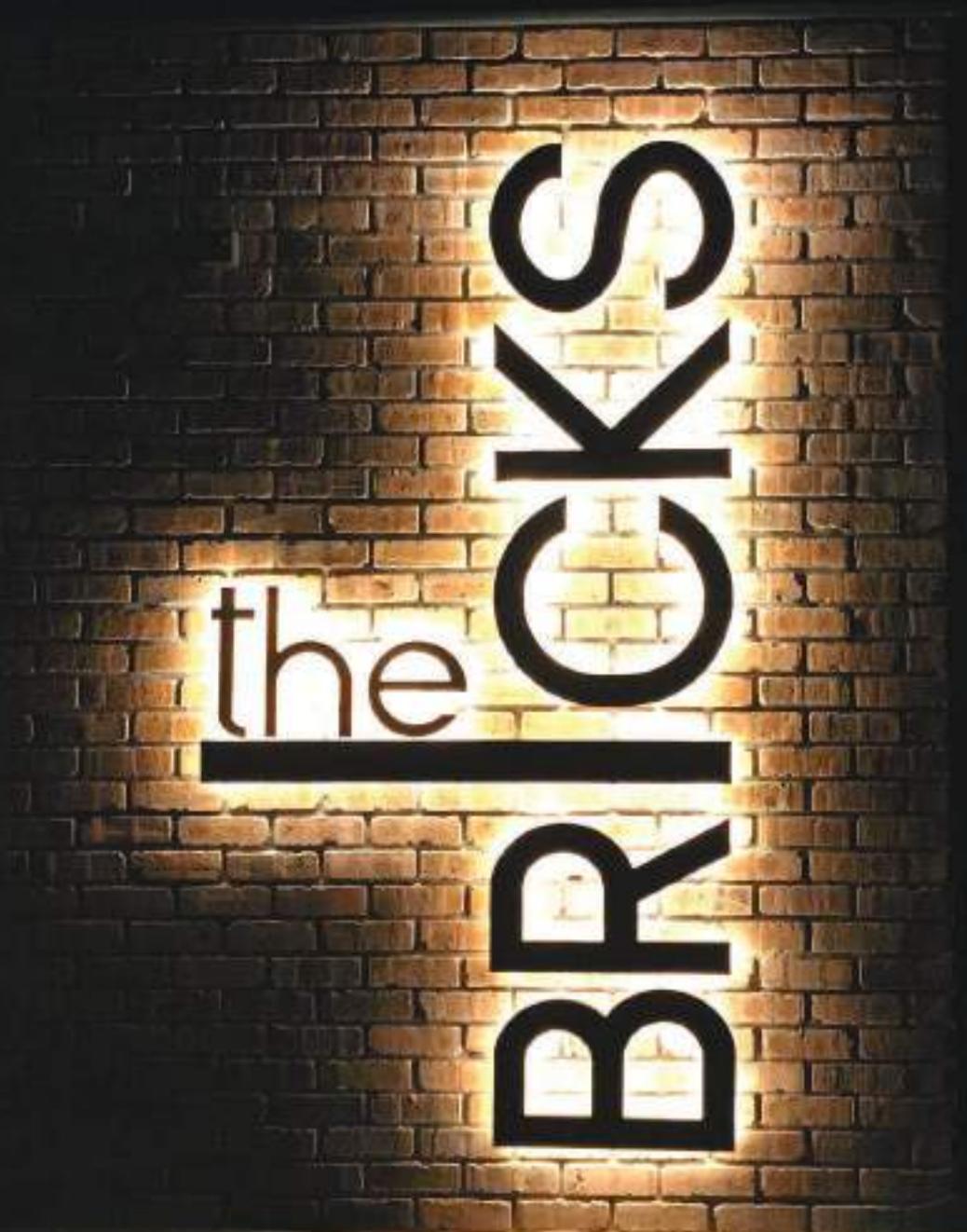
Beyond 2000 and before 2020, we have already been dedicated users of smartphones. A study has estimated that on average, we spend 3 hours and 15 minutes daily looking at our phones. In some countries, more than half of all children own a smartphone by the age of seven. That was before the year 2020.

Then came Covid-19. Logical predictions would say that 2020 is when there was a significant increase in screen times for adults as well as children. 2020 is thus the year we strained our eyes the most, and along with it we stressed our brains. So, what will happen in 2021? Will vaccines solve the pandemic problems? Maybe, but it will not be immediate. 2021 will be a year of transition. We will carry on living and working in the new norms, with similar damaging effects on eyes and brains. Stress will build up and peak around June or July when people will anticipate the end of the pandemic, but disappointed to learn that supplies of the vaccines are delayed due to various technical and logistic issues.

Cutting edge companies dealing with functional foods and nutraceuticals would need to devise smart marketing strategies to persuade smartphone and computer users to consider supplementing their diets with health-enhancing bioactive compounds that can protect the eyes while improving the performance of the brains. More new nutraceuticals, food supplements and even functional food products will be launched somewhere around April to meet the demands of eye and brain health of these desperate consumers. We will hear “new” health-enhancing ingredients in the market such as lutein, zeaxanthin, bilberry fruit extracts, marigold flower extracts, lecithin, citicholine etc that are delivered as food supplements or incorporated in food products.

2021 will be a year of transition for living and working, and in that year many of us will spend repairing over-used critical, executive organs.





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**Q & A with Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Development Affairs and Alumni)**

**How do you come up with a concept?**

It all started with the need to provide an experience. We call it 'distinguished learning and living experience' towards nation-building and meeting global expectations for our students. That is always the basis of our action and this is what the University agrees in providing the great experience for our local and international students. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and International), Professor Dato' Dr. Ahmad Farhan Mohd Sadullah and I are both looking at this concept; he will look at the aspect of learning experience and I look into the aspects of living and learning experiences. Being the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Student Development Affairs and Alumni (BHEPA), I need to look at both aspects aligning with the H.E.B.A.T student agenda that focuses on the learning experience. Then we realised that we need to create the place to develop and enhance students' creativity. Prior to this, we have developed the Student Representatives' Council (MPP) Room with the same concept.



**“The whole building was sponsored by MARA and The Bricks was completed using the winning cash from MEA (Ministry of Education Entrepreneurial Award).”**

**Do you find it challenging to work with your team during the pandemic?**

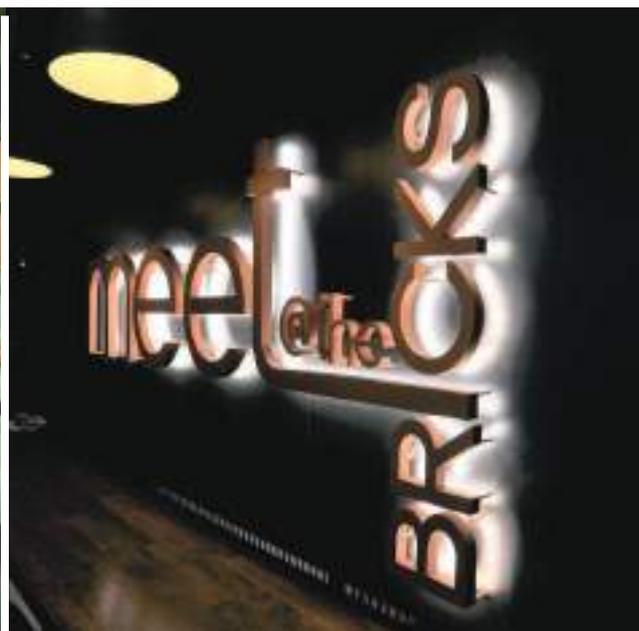
It is the opposite actually, since there were fewer students and events. A lot of my time was previously allocated to attend events and due to the current situation, there has been a noticeable reduction in its number. When there are fewer people around, it is easier and safer to do the work. Everything is smooth from both the contractor's and our side. I managed to be on site throughout the project and Alhamdulillah, The Bricks was completed on time. If you ask me, the pandemic has helped to make the process easier.

**How long did it take to complete Phase 1?**

It took us about six (6) months to complete. We were lucky because the building is already here. We just need to work on the lower part. The whole building was sponsored by MARA and The Bricks was completed using the winning cash from MEA (Ministry of Education Entrepreneurial Award).



Ole2



### Why should people visit this place?

This is a place that has three (3) main functions. The FIRST is the lounge, where you can have an informal meeting and presentation. We have a big 85-inch television screen that can be connected to your mobile phones and laptops so that you can use it as a presentation screen. We also have a platform which can be used for formal and informal events. A formal event for example, in the near future we are planning to do a Ted Talk kind of activity, where we will allow students to voice out their opinions. They can also use it for other less formal activities like what we are seeing now, where they are can play the guitar, read, have discussions, watching Netflix or even studying and relaxing while waiting for their next class. We have three (3) separate time slots for this space to be utilised. In the morning, it will be mainly for Departments, Schools and alumni members to organize their preferred activities. In the afternoon, it will be opened to students and at night for formal and informal events depending on the situation. Booking is FREE, however there will be a minimal charge for Netflix and snooker. It won't be expensive as the main purpose is to provide easy access.

The SECOND space is the mini gallery for a small, short presentation. For example, the School of Biology wants to display their final-year student projects or any Telco company planning to do a promotion on the latest package. Of course, there will be charges for the external exhibitors.

The THIRD is the merchandise shop called Ole2, which means a small gift. The shop sells our merchandise, which can be products coming from BHEPA, Purple (produced by Media and Public Relations Centre), lecturers, students or even the alumni. They can sell their products, but we control what products will fit Ole2. We welcome proposals from anyone as it will give the entrepreneur an opportunity to offer products to the USM community. It will also be a good branding exercise, where we now have t-shirts for kids and toddlers.

**“..in the near future we are planning to do a Ted Talk kind of activity, where we will allow students to voice out their opinions. They can also use it for other less formal activities like what we are seeing now, where they are can play the guitar, read, have discussions, watching Netflix or even studying and relaxing while waiting for their next class.”**

### Why 'The Bricks'?

While thinking of a suitable name, we do have a few options and one of them is Galleria. Our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dr. Faisal Rafiq Mahamd Adikan instead said that it should be something that people can easily remember. Then I realized since he came in, he has never given a name to any place. So I requested him to do the honor of naming this place. After a week, he came up with 'The Bricks'. I didn't ask why, since it was already quite clear why the name was chosen, as the building only used the bricks and glass in the construction.

### What would you say the WOW factor of The Bricks?

Of course, it's more than just the appealing design...you can always design beautiful buildings. It is about the possibility of the functions of the building. For example, now we have a very conducive space for students to hang around, to discuss and to have a platform to share ideas and opinions.

We also have our merchandise shop to serve as a case study and the test bed for entrepreneurial activities. Students will be exposed to the real process of entrepreneurship such as accounts and financial management, marketing, products production, operations and retailing. They can also apply the methods in any other field such as a service-based business. Obviously, you must have something that you can offer that people want to buy, as it is the basic rule of having a business. It should be attractive and reasonable in terms of pricing and last but not least, considering the aspects of demand and supply. Hence, this is a good training place to polish the students' skills and knowledge.

It is also a place where we have our JORAN (Job Opportunity, Recruitment and Networking). The students who are working here are not only being paid, but it's the experience they attain that will matter more. It is also a place where we have our JORAN. As you can see, the products will benefit the people through this concept.

### Who are the main players in making this possible?

A lot of people are involved in making this possible. The HEBAT Development Centre (HDC) team, the School of the Arts led by Associate Professor Dr. Muhizam Mustafa (Sam), Dr. Tetriana Ahmed Fauzi and Dr. Siti Suhaily Surip. Dr. Sam was involved in the branding, where he had a team of students working on the design, the name and the logo of Ole2, School of Housing, Building and Planning, and the students volunteers. It is a collective effort of many people.

### Why must we have a place like this?

You need to have a space that is conducive for students to learn and to live. You must always improve by upgrading the facilities. This will then be a 'marketing tool' to attract the students to come and study.

So why would they want to come and study in USM? To me it is about the quality of education that we provide, the facilities that we have and the experience that we give. This place will promote the HEBAT experience for students and the facilities will prepare the ecosystem that supports the experience.

**"It is also a place where we have our JORAN (Job Opportunity, Recruitment and Networking). The students who are working here are not only being paid, but it's the experience they attain that will matter more. It is also a place where we have our JORAN. As you can see, the products will benefit the people through this concept."**

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*Text: Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal*

*Editing: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*

*Photo: Mohd Fairus Md Isa / Ebrahim Abdul Manan*

# 2nd phase

### What is your future plan for The Bricks?

First, we have an ambitious plan to go into the second phase. In the second phase, we will be developing another section towards the main road. It is to improve the facilities that we have, as there will be an e-sports section, electric bicycle rental, convenience mart, international food kiosk and we are thinking of creating elevated walkway beside the trees. We are looking for sponsors and alumni to donate a small gazebo which will be elevated so that you can enjoy the nice garden view. So, if there are parties who are interested in this project, we very much welcome any contribution. The gazebo will cost RM20,000 each. If you wish to know the details, you may email to: [dvc\\_stu@usm.my](mailto:dvc_stu@usm.my).



We are off to a good start in 2021, with the editorial being given the opportunity to conduct an exclusive interview with our distinguished Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) alumni who is now in the 'who's who' list in the nation's administrative circle. He is of course the Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA), Senator Dato' Dr. Ahmad Masrizal Muhammad. He was kind enough to share with us his thoughts on building a career and climbing up the ladder to become part of the nation's leadership.

Elaborating on the need to have the right attitude and practices, Masrizal said; "When I do something, I will do it seriously and ensure that the outcome will be the best that I have done.

"Therefore in whatever task that I do, the reward is not something that I will have in mind as much as focusing more on the issues regarding quality and achievement. For me, what matters most in our lives is that we have a clear focus on what we want to achieve. It applies to all aspects of our lives, from the time we enter school, up to the University and so on," said the Education (B.A Ed 1996) graduate.

**"Our academic background at times will be vastly different than the work that we have gone into... It all depends on the individual, actually."**

With regard to that, having an aim solely is not enough if there is no determination to pursue it. 'You must set a goal and go for it'. Being able to achieve and yet not becoming a 'go achiever' will not make you different from the rest. If I can sum it up, my *success habits* are to work with a clear target and achieving excellence as part of my principle. More so as a Muslim, to give similar emphasis when one starts doing work is to give total reliance to Allah S.W.T".

### Career Management

It is commonly known that not all graduands from a University will be able to find a career that will fit well with the degree that was earlier pursued. However, it is also not impossible for that person to achieve success. "Our academic background at times will be vastly different than the work that we have gone into. I have many friends whose degrees are different from their careers. Nevertheless, they have managed to realise their self-potential. It all depends on the individual, actually.

"I would like to inform my 'juniors' out there, having a degree is one of the first platforms available for us to determine our future. The degree will not actually determine whether we will succeed or falter, as it will all depend on us.

## A Moment With The Deputy Minister: 'UNIVERSITY IS A PLANNING GROUND'

Ahmad Masrizal Muhammad  
(B. A. Ed. '96)

He emphasised that, the factor or secret to success is to challenge your own individual self. "As I have said, even having a different degree, but with the person capable of adapting to a new work environment, he or she could become the best worker. A degree can be considered as 'a bird that was hatched from an egg'; being hatched from the egg is the degree, but how the bird flies will depend fully on the bird; flying from one tree to another, flying to the left or to the right, flying up or down, it will all depend on the bird. So, with our graduands, that will be the analogy, as having a degree will provide you with the foundation, unless you have reached the PHD level and so forth," he said.

Sharing a bit about himself, he said; "Take me for example, I graduated from USM with a degree in Education (Geography), and I became a teacher for only 5 years; then I went on to become a lecturer for about 15 years, and then as a political analyst, and now as a Deputy Minister. In that respect, there is not even one degree that I have which is related to Political Science. However, I will continue to give my best. That is one analogy on how we can 'dress' ourselves up. I was then the Head of the USM Student Representatives Council (MPP) in 95/96 and I have honed my skills and capabilities to become a better person. It's not about the degree, but it's on how you realise your own potentials," said Masrizal.



**"The University is not the place to achieve purely academic success, it is also the place to prepare and to be ready before venturing into the working environment."**



Added Masrizal, education at the University will serve as the 'planning ground' for those who desire so. He said; "The University is not the place to achieve purely academic success, it is also the place to prepare and to be ready before venturing into the working environment. For example, I have met many outstanding individuals, among them are the chief executive officers (CEOs) of high-achieving companies, heads of administration from various agencies and ministries, and entrepreneurs; they don't really depend on their undergraduate degrees. They have various skills, capabilities and their own charisma.

"Being at the University therefore provides us the place where we try to do our best, identify our capabilities, discover our strengths, seek out new potentials, and hone our skills among others. And finally, our self-worth will be combined with our academic excellence, InsyaAllah which will lead to, all of us achieving success regardless of where we are," he emphasised.

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### Understanding The Reality of Career Life

Charisma and self-worth are important ingredients for a person to become unique when compared to others. When commenting on it, Masrizal also said that, a person needs to understand the reality for him or her to be able to be the best in the respective field.

"In life, reality is different from fantasy. For example, we have the impression that when we enter an organisation, we will be treated well as we have an impressive degree or while at the University, we were among the popular ones. Thus, we hope that we will be well-accepted upon joining the organisation.

**"It is not solely about knowing what to say, but on how to communicate well/ effectively. When we are given the opportunity, utilise it well."**

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"It is not as easy as that. As we go into the working environment, the reality will be different, and when it is different, we will need to rely on our inner resilience, mental discipline and personal principles. If there is no resilience, we may not be able to survive in the long run, and we will be 'drowning' in the 'waves' at the workplace.

"The challenge for all students, and graduands who will be seeking for jobs, will be to remain in the job for the first year; if all goes well, we need to realise that we are the 'rookie'; don't think of yourself as the 'senior', remember to 'behave as a new employer'; therefore it is important to understand the situation; when you are asked to perform something, do it and do it well, and not to be a slacker; and what is more important when we are at work will be, we need to have our own principles. This is important as having principles will determine whether you will be capable to go higher up and to be the best, or to remain as one of the 'ordinary' workers like many others," he said.

"One principle that I held strongly to, was when I first joined the work sector, which was to be steadfast to the principle of believing what God, which is Allah S.W.T, had said that one's destiny will not be changed by Allah, unless that person initiates the change with his or her own will. That is the situation, and that was why I was committed in pursuing my undergraduate degree, then on to my Master's and finally my Doctorate. I 'heard' the 'call' to advise my 'juniors', being a Muslim and to instill such matters in our lives. Allah S.W.T. will not bring hardship upon us, unless we are capable of enduring it; therefore, when we are assigned a responsibility, a task, regardless of whichever sector, that will be the 'right' sector for us, and we will have to 'carry' the responsibility, in our own way.

"We also need to have an understanding of various situations, to think out of the box, to become someone unique; but let me say this again, another important thing to have within ourselves is to be able to communicate well. Communication plays a major role in every element and once there is a breakdown in communication, that is when a major problem will start to appear; when we go to work, we do not mix around with others, or unable to communicate well. It is not solely about knowing what to say, but on how to communicate well/effectively. When we are given the opportunity, utilise it well.



## Unforgettable Experiences at USM

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### • Desasiswa Harapan

It was where I started my life at the University. It was where I got to know friends. More importantly, that was where I set a strong foundation in leadership, where it all began from Year 1 until I graduated.

### • Pathway along the library until the Lecture Halls

Those were the times when students would only walk or use motorcycles, easy to find parking space and the pathway was quite beautiful. It was filled with posters and rows of information, aside from being a meeting place for friends, among others.

### • The scenic USM Campus

The landscape is well-maintained. The old buildings are well-preserved too. USM has an impressive museum that would be good to visit. One thing that I missed most is 'Nasi Kandar Sharif'. Then, the food stall was located in Gelugor and it was once a location for USM students to get together after their sports meet or other activities.

*Text: Marziana Mohamed Alias*

*Translation: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*

*Photo: Shahnizam Ab Rahim / Mohamad Alif Ismail*

**Shahrill Ramli @ Romli is a full time Science and English Language teacher at Sekolah Kebangsaan Serendah, Hulu Selangor. He is also a Ph.D candidate majoring in Human Communication (Rhetorical Communication) at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Prior to his experience in education line, Shahrill worked in Affin Islamic Bank as an Assistant Relationship Manager circa 2007-2008. As a self-professed bibliophile, Shahrill enjoys great books with doze of caffeine - either Starbucks' Chocolate Hazelnut or Mamak's Nescafe Tarik - will do!**

## SPIRITUALITY in The Time of Corona

The COVID-19 pandemic is a double-edged sword. For most people, it brings lethal effects while others attempt to thrive and make the most of it. How to keep your positivity when you are suffocated in the black tunnel without light to show you the way out? Haha! Sounds metaphorical, I know but as cliché as it is, hanging on to your faith and be positive are the only solace you can count on during this trying time.

As a school teacher, I have to adopt to the new norm. Conducting classes through Google Classroom or that little interactive platform affectionately known as Gmeet. It feels surreal but you've got to do what you've got to do! Nevertheless, you cannot expect the routine in the physical world to be translated into the virtual world. For instance, the common sense of being punctual. You have reminded the pupils that the time for lesson is at 8.00 a.m. which actually means that the lesson to be commenced on that time but of course surely along the way, pupils would begin popping-in like spring time daisies half way through the lesson. Can you give them a 10-minutes nagging for negligence? No sire! And then as a teacher, you are the one who have to wait for the pupils instead of pupils waiting for you. They said "manners maketh man" but do you think the parents would want to hear you lecturing their children through the Gmeet? No, sire! Nevertheless I guess it is part and parcel of trying to accommodate with the new norm. As for my pupils who do not have laptops, I have prepared pre-recorded video lessons and shared them through WhatsApp. I guess this new environment has forced me and my colleagues to seek new mediums to impart knowledge to our pupils and I've found great applications such as Screencast-o-matic and Canva which helped me to do just that for my financially-strained pupils as navigating through Gmeet consumes more data.





**“I guess in life, it is important to be strong and resilient especially during this tumultuous time. Just do whatever that makes you happy; listening to music, video-calling your friends or loved ones, reading or even writing as your therapy.”**

Apart from working as a teacher, I am also pursuing my PhD in Human Communication. Thus, I have to juggle between work and thesis. Sometimes I get frustrated with my colleagues at school who never seem to understand the intricacy of pursuing a PhD. All they know is that a PhD candidate is bound to complete the thesis without realizing that one has to endure the rigorous proposal defence, the writing and oral comprehensive exams and also to publish articles in order to graduate. Hence, they were nonchalant when I expressed my dissatisfaction for being elected for essential positions in school such as the PIBG Treasurer, The School Assets Officer or teaching two UPSR subjects namely English and Science. I have to say there were certain points of time, I got burnt out and decided to be a sloth for several days. Usually prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I would travel just to ease my mind and that was therapeutic. However when you are cooped up in your home and unable to venture out anywhere for fresh air whilst your mind is filled with too many dishes on the plate, you tend to be psychologically vulnerable. Your body becomes weak and you just want to lie down in bed all day long.

There are brickbats and bouquets of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like I mentioned before, it challenges me to become more innovative in my outsourcing especially as a teacher but it also hinders my psychological mood as a student. Nevertheless, I have found that spirituality and empathy really help me to keep my mind in perspective. As a Muslim, I began to practice non-obligatory fasting and also perform voluntary prayers such as Tahajjud (The Night Prayer) as means to recalibrate my sense of connectivity with God. I also keep psyching myself by immersing into empathy. When I feel down, I often reflect on those people who have lost their jobs or struggling during the pandemic and my rational side reprimands that emotional side by saying – “How dare you to feel like that? Do you have any idea how lucky you are to still have a job while others are struggling to put bread on their table?” It may sound funny but that very small voice of conscience would pull me back to reality and remorse.



**Conducting classes online**

I guess in life, it is important to be strong and resilient especially during this tumultuous time. Just do whatever that makes you happy; listening to music, video-calling your friends or loved ones, reading or even writing as your therapy. John Locke said that the human mind is a mere white paper in Tabula Rasa while Natasha Bedingfield sang that life is a book unwritten but I choose to concur with Al-Ghazali’s idea in his book “Wonders of the Heart” that states life is like the light whereas spirit is like the lamp. Thus, having sense of spirituality really helps me to be more positive especially during this trying time of the COVID19 pandemic.

**Text and Photo: Shahrill Ramli@Romli (B.Sc 2007)  
Editing: Isyam Amran**

## OUR STAR ALUMNA Continues to Shine

USM has discovered numerous 'gems' in many different areas of life. For this edition, the editorial is curious enough to find out more about the 'success secrets' of this local award-winning journalist, with her impactful writings being reflected not only on her personality, but also to society and the country. Let us find out more from our editorial interview with Christina Chin, M.A (Communication), Universiti Sains Malaysia. She is currently an Acting Editor, Education, Star Media Group.

### What is your success-forming habit?

I try to give 110% in everything that I do and I am constantly looking for ways to improve myself on a personal and professional level. I am a firm believer in life-long learning and while experience counts, you cannot rest on your laurels. The day you think you've succeeded and have nothing left to strive for is the day you stop growing.

### As you are regarded an award-winning journalist, what drives you to ensure that you keep up with your good work?

The people I work with! My colleagues make me want to be better because they are so good at what they do. I've been in journalism for 15 years now and I still get excited about my job. Being a journalist comes with a great responsibility - not only to your readers but to the people who have entrusted you with their stories. It is my duty to give my best.

### Compared to the thousands of reporters out there, what differentiates you from others?

No two people are the same. No two journalists are the same. Every journalist approaches a story differently - our family backgrounds, education, professionalism, training, attitude and skillsets are just some of the factors that come into play in determining the kind of journalist we end up becoming.

### How did you overcome challenges, especially when dealing with the current scenario when media organizations have to deal with disruptive technologies? (shrinking and etc)

Disruptive technology has a somewhat negative connotation to it but I am a firm believer that in the long term, the media industry will emerge stronger from it. I think it's important to understand and embrace change in order to leverage on it. And we, as an industry, is doing just that. The challenge is in adapting and changing the way we do things. Change is never comfortable nor easy but it is necessary. It's really about attitude - if you are willing to upskill and learn, you will thrive.



**Christina Chin**  
Acting Editor, Education  
M.A (Communication), Universiti Sains Malaysia  
LLB (Hons), University of London  
Khazanah-Wolfson Press Fellow,  
University of Cambridge  
China-ASEAN Center of Advanced Studies Fellow,  
Communication University of China

**"I am a firm believer in life-long learning and while experience counts, you cannot rest on your laurels. The day you think you've succeeded and have nothing left to strive for is the day you stop growing!"**

**Covering the inspection of Penang Second Bridge in 2012**



**“The challenge is in adapting and changing the way we do things. Change is never comfortable nor easy but it is necessary. It’s really about attitude - if you are willing to upskill and learn, you will thrive.”**

**Can you list out at least 3 of the most memorable experiences throughout your involvement in the media industry.**

**1 | The most outstanding figure you have interviewed**

There have been so many - from politicians, ministers and Hollywood celebrities to academics and ordinary Malaysians - it’s impossible to cite one but for personal reasons, I would have to say former finance minister Tun Dr Daim Zainuddin. I had interviewed him during his graduation at Universiti Malaya in 2019 - as a PhD candidate myself, it was inspiring to see an 81-year-old earn his doctorate. Tun has accomplished so much yet he decides to work for a doctorate degree instead of just being satisfied with an honorary title. To me, that is outstanding because it shows that learning should never stop no matter how old you are or how much you have achieved.

Besides Malaysian leaders, sportsmen and celebrities, I’ve been fortunate to have covered many interesting personalities including Nobel Prize Laureates (Physics) Peter W. Higgs and Francois Englert who won for conceiving the “God particle”; Hollywood actors Chris Hemsworth, Bruce Willis and Hugh Jackman; and bands like Bon Jovi.

**2 | The most outstanding event you have attended**

Witnessing the Scorpene-class KD Tunku Abdul Rahman dive in Langkawi (2011) when former Defence Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi invited former Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng to “go for a ride” in the vessel. The national submarine was a subject of criticism by opposition leaders for “not being able to dive”.

**3 | The most challenging interview session**

In 2013, I interviewed the late Karpal Singh. I had covered many of his press conferences prior to that but it was the first time I would be doing a feature story on the Tiger of Jelutong. As a law graduate, I had great admiration for his brilliant legal mind so I had to make sure that I did my homework well because he is sharp - very sharp. If you are going to ask him a question, you had better make sure that you know the issue well or you will end up looking like a rookie reporter when he responds. This was a challenging interview because I had such great respect for him. Until today, this interview is one of the most memorable experiences of my career.

**4 | Your fondest memory that you will never forget**

Receiving the Firemen’s Excellence Medal (Pingat Cemerlang Bomba) 2017 for a story I had written about my friend. She had sustained severe burns from a gas explosion at home. She suffered 80% burns when a gas leak caused an explosion in the kitchen and was warded in the Penang Hospital for a year. She is doing so well now. The incident led to me writing about keeping homes safe from kitchen fires and gas blasts. Receiving the award is something I will never forget because it reminds me of my friend’s courage and her will to survive. Her story inspires me even to this day and the award I received is actually an ode to her bravery.



*Firemen's Excellence Medal (Pingat Cemerlang Bomba), 2017*



*Witnessing the Scorpene-class KD Tunku Abdul Rahman dive in Langkawi, 2011*



## AWARDS

- Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council Medical Travel Media Awards (Travel Journalist of the Year 2020)
- Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council Medical Travel Media Awards (Best Online Report of the Year 2020)
- Ministry of Health Blue Ribbon Award 2018 (Second Place)
- Penang Press Club Business News (Commendation) Award 2017
- Penang Press Club English News (Commendation) Award 2017
- Most Supportive Journalist 2016 2017
- Firemen's Excellence Medal (Pingat Cemerlang Bomba) 2017
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award (Features Category) 2017
- Ministry of Health Blue Ribbon Award 2016 (Second Place)
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award (Features Category) 2016
- Penang Press Club English News Report (Excellence) Award 2016
- Penang Press Club English Feature (Commendation) Award 2016
- Feature Blue Ribbon Award 2015 (Second Place)
- Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry Best Print Media Award (Second Placing) 2015
- Penang Press Club English Business News (Excellence) Award 2015
- Penang Press Club English News Report (Excellence) Award 2015
- Penang Press Club English Feature (Excellence) Award 2015
- Malaysian Health Ministry Award (English) 2015
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award (Features Category) 2015
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award (Features Category) 2014
- Environment State Government Green Journalism Special Award (News Report Category) 2014
- Penang Press Club English Business News (Excellence) Award 2014
- Penang Press Club English News Report (Commendation) Award 2014
- Tourism Malaysia Best English Article Award 2013
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award (Features Category) 2013
- Environment Penang Press Club English Business News Award 2013
- Penang Press Club English Feature (Commendation) Award 2013
- **Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Vice-Chancellor's award 2012**
- **Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Best English News Award 2012**
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Special Jury (News) Award 2012
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Special Jury (Features) Award 2012
- Penang Press Club Journalism Award (English) 2012
- Penang Press Club Sports News Award 2012
- Penang State Government Green Journalism Excellence Award 2011
- Penang State Government Media Merit Award (English category) 2007
- SEAMEO-Australia Press Award (Shortlisted) 2010

### Last but not least, can you share with us your unforgettable memory while you were once in USM?

Graduation. The graduation ceremony was one of my proudest achievements because pursuing my Masters while working full time was such a challenge. There were times when I wondered whether I would ever graduate, especially when I had to take a semester off because I could not work on my thesis - it was during the General Elections and I just could not go on leave.

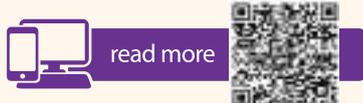
*Text: Marziana Mohamed Alias*

*Editing: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*

*Photo: Christina Chin*

## USM SHARES EXPERTISE in The Use of Drones with The Fire Department Airbase in Bertam

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) together with Lestari Aero Industries Sdn. Bhd. and the Malaysia Fire and Rescue Department (JBPM) Airbase in Bertam recently held a training session on the use of high-technology drones for officers of JBPM Bertam, under the guidance of lecturers and researchers from the School of Aerospace Engineering from the USM Engineering Campus.



Teks: Mohd Azrul Mohd Azhar • Foto: Mohd Fairus Md Isa



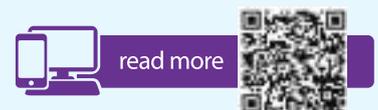
## A VACCINE A DAY Keeps The Covid-19 Virus Away

*"The final aim in getting everyone vaccinated is to build herd immunity within communities all over the country. Reaching herd immunity against COVID-19 is arguably our greatest challenge. We must collectively work together – the public and private sectors, communities, families and individuals – to achieve this goal. Without this, we will continue to see wave after wave of the coronavirus devastating effects."*

With the recent arrival of the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines, the time has come for Malaysians to get a 'taste' of the medicine.



Text: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin and Tan Ewe Hoe  
Photo: Ebrahim Abdul Manan

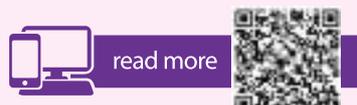


## USM | INSTITUT SUKAN NEGARA Jalin Kerjasama Pacu Kecemerlangan Sukan Negara

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) dan Institut Sukan Negara Malaysia (ISN) melakar sejarah apabila menjalin kerjasama dengan memeterai perjanjian persefahaman (MoU) buat julung kalinya hari ini.

Majlis tersebut yang diadakan secara maya, berlangsung serentak di Bilik Persidangan Canselori, USM dan Bilik Mesyuarat Aras 15, Kementerian Belia dan Sukan, Putrajaya.

Teks: Zamzami Rasidi  
Suntingan: Tan Ewe Hoe  
Foto: Mohd Fairus Md Isa dan Institut Sukan Negara



## REAL-LIFE STORY: Lessons That Won't Be Found in Books

Sorting it out from last year's calendar, most of us could not run away from the 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience when the COVID-19 pandemic went global. It wasn't easy and most of us are still trying hard to cope with the new normal. It clearly gave many of us challenges to our psychological resilience and well-being.

A student of ours who studies in India, at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)-KLE International Medical Program in Belgaum, Hirresh Sai Suria also has a real-life story with his colleague to share. Hirresh is now in his fourth year and will soon be coming back to our beloved country for good. His story explains what his life was like during the last 12 months of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it affected his life and the lives of his friends, in ways that were both positive and negative.

Being away from his family, it was a terrible time to be in during the first chapter when the pandemic became global. Furthermore, India was one of the countries with the largest number of confirmed cases in Asia and also in the world.

Hirresh said; "It was in March that a lockdown was imposed in India. We were all actually surprise when we were told that we may not be able to sit for our assessment for the practical work posting because COVID-19 has already reached Belgaum. At first, we were a bit worried on how things might affect us, especially our academic activities, as we have been told that we couldn't even see patients at the hospital because they were afraid to come to the hospital.

"So, we knew something was wrong and that things may go otherwise. So, we contacted Dr Ashuk Panggi, the person in-charge of the students. He said, things may go on as usual but the Indian Prime Minister (PM) will be issuing a statement the next day. When next day came, the PM then announced that they will impose a lockdown in India, as the number of positive cases continues to spike. We have been told to just stay at home."

**"It was in March that a lockdown was imposed in India. We were all actually surprise when we were told that we may not be able to sit for our assessment for the practical work posting because COVID-19 has already reached Belgaum."**

### The Real Challenges

Hirresh added that, the lockdown has somehow left them with mixed feelings. Hirresh and all Malaysian students were already expecting the worst. Not only were they worried of themselves, their families were also looking at the best way on how to protect their loved ones from afar.

"We were not sure what was going to happen because our food sources will soon be depleted, our freedom to go out will be hampered and most importantly we won't even be allowed to go to the hospital. So we started thinking about ways to deal with this problem. How do we go about handling the issue.

"So, the first to be given focus was the food. As soon as the lockdown was issued, all the restaurants around the campus area were not allowed to open. The only option that we had were the canteen on the ground floor and also the food catering service. We have to find restaurants that could sustain us for the next few months also. So, we first started with the canteen; they could supply us with food, and USM came into the picture, they helped us contact the canteen staff, they made sure that the food was paid for, and everything was being taken care of, to the extent that we got some relief," he said.

He then said, there was an incident where a couple of students communicated with the local newspaper and said that the food provided was not good, which came as a surprise to him. For most of them, in view of the difficult situation the entire global community have to face, the food was excellent and most importantly it was being paid for.

**"The best lesson one should learn will be the real-life experiences. And the pandemic has thought us the greatest lesson which you will never find in books."**

"There was a need for improvement though, as we have to find ways on getting the food supply regularly, as it would not be served twice daily. What we did was, we found a vendor willing to supply us with chicken and we served it at the canteen. It wasn't easy at first as we didn't have much sources around. But luckily, with the help from many especially USM, we managed to overcome the food issue, even though it took us a couple of months. After that, we stopped acquiring the catering service and USM had helped us to find a restaurant, or in India it is known as a hotel, to serve us food. We just have to make sure that hygiene was being taken care of; we made sure that the source of raw material was good and most importantly, we had to make sure that the staff/worker had not contacted the virus yet," Hirresh said.

After a while, Hirresh and his friends managed to adapt to the new norms and started to continue their daily life as usual. Even though it was not the same as before, they went on their usual routine of studying, playing sports, watching movies and they filled their time with whatever activities they could. There were some point in time that the campus community felt that they were even surrounded by the same circle of people throughout.

"We would often fill our time by playing outdoor sports like futsal, badminton and basketball. Then, we realized that it was not safe, although it was a homogeneous group and we were all in the campus or hostel together, and we were not exposed to anyone outside. Even then, we still had to take precautions, and we then issued a statement saying that we should not be involved in sports. So, our students started looking for alternatives for sports. So what they did they do? They started to go jogging inside the hostel, up and down the staircase, just to sweat it out. We needed to adapt to the situation and to comfort each other to overcome the changes."

### Adapting to The New Norms of Studying

"We reached the point when we needed to refocus on our academic life. Whether we like it or not, lessons have to start and we have to find ways to keep our academic activities on track. This is where online classes began and have continued since. And this greatly helping us because we had no clinical exposure, although we went for our clinical years. So, we really needed something other than books alone to teach us the values that will be used in the future.

"Daily life then started to continue until came 11th of May, when a majority of our students (250) left the country (India) to return to Malaysia and to continue with our classes online. There were 33 of us who stayed back and studied on campus. We filled our time in order to manage our lives better. There were a lot of hands who helped us to stay on and to look alive. Be it to secure food for us, to ensure that we were in good condition and even offered us support for us to finish our academic term.

### An Experience He Will Never Forget

Hirresh believes in values that USM had taught them, especially when dealing with difficulties. "In my opinion, I believe that our students had gone through the hardest journey that one could face. We leaned on the word sustainability itself and has proven it with the action we had taken in managing the circumstances on our own. USM is not just a University that you want to be in, but the University you have to be in. So take this opportunity and learn as much as you can. Because there is no other time to do it. The best lesson one should learn will be the real-life experiences. And the pandemic has thought us the greatest lesson which you will never find in books," said Hirresh.

*Text: Marziana Mohamed Alias*

*Editing: Mazlan Hanafi Basharudin*



Sekumpulan penyelidik Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) mencipta sejarah apabila berjaya membuat 'lakaran wajah Perak Man', rangka manusia tertua berusia 11,000 tahun yang ditemukan 30 tahun lalu di Lembah Lenggong, Perak.

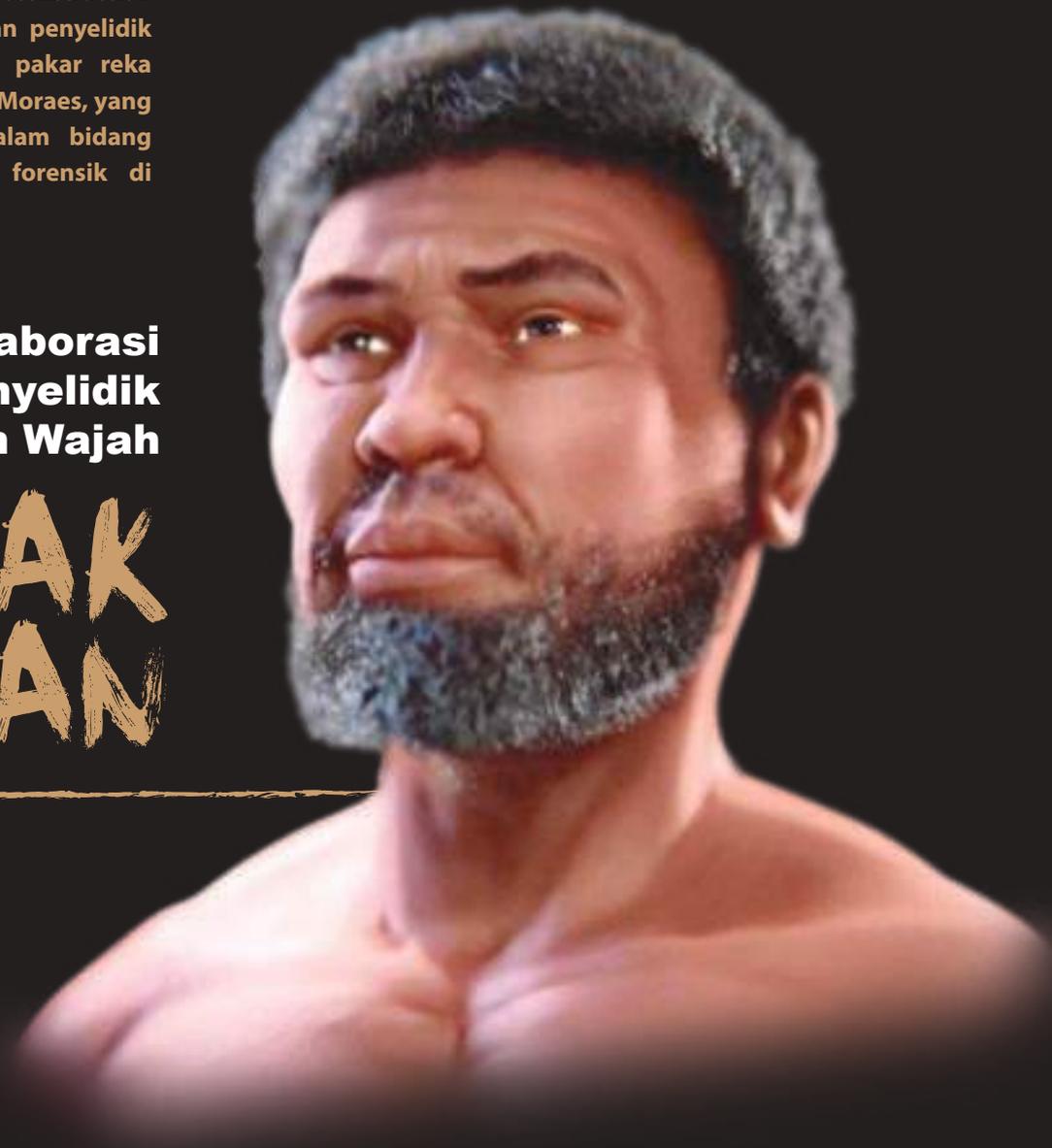
*Perak Man* juga adalah rangka tulang manusia dari zaman batu era Paleolitik yang hampir sempurna yang ditemui di Asia Tenggara dan merupakan tulang prasejarah yang mempunyai congenital deformity yang dikenali sebagai Brachymesopthalgia.

Lakaran wajah Perak Man itu dibuat menerusi kaedah *3D virtual reconstruction* melalui kolaborasi kepakaran penyelidik pelbagai bidang, termasuk pakar reka bentuk 3D dari Brazil, Cicero Moraes, yang sering menjadi rujukan dalam bidang pembinaan semula wajah forensik di negaranya.

## Kolaborasi Kepakaran Penyelidik Hasilkan Wajah

# PERAK MAN

**"Saya yakin projek ini merupakan titik permulaan bagi USM untuk bekerjasama dengan universiti-universiti lain di dalam dan luar negara dalam bidang penyelidikan radiologi kerana sebelum ini penyelidikan hanya berdasarkan fundamental atau 'pilot study' sahaja."**



Artikel jurnal berkenaan diterbitkan menerusi 'Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences USM'.

Pensyarah Radiologi Oral dan Maksilofasial, Pusat Pengajian Sains Pergigian USM, Dr Johari Abdullah individu yang bertanggungjawab menghasilkan lakaran wajah 'Perak Man' berkata, perbincangan dan perancangan untuk menghasilkan wajah 'Perak Man' sebenarnya bermula sejak dua tahun yang lalu dan ianya adalah cetusan idea Pakar Bedah Neurosurgeri Hospital USM, Profesor Datuk Dr Jafri Malin Abdullah.

Johari berkata, pakar bedah USM itu menyuarakan idea berkenaan dengan mengambil kira pelbagai kelebihan yang ada pada USM untuk merealisasikannya kerana skeleton tersebut sememangnya ditemui oleh penyelidik dari USM sendiri.

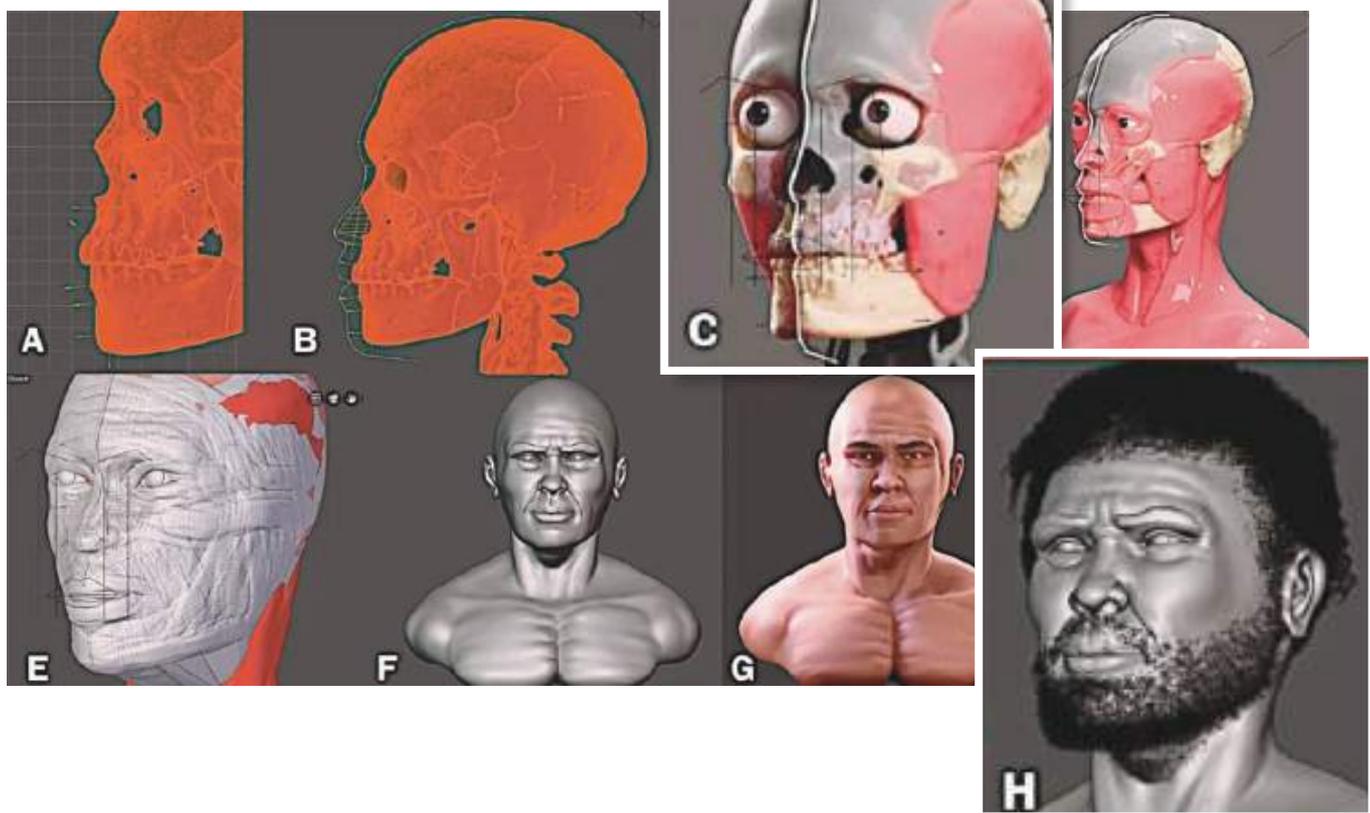
"Ia ditambah pula dengan proses CT Scan yang turut dilakukan di Hospital USM dan hal ini memberikan kelebihan kerana data yang ada boleh digunakan dalam membentuk penghasilan wajah 'Perak Man'.

"Melalui pembacaan buku berkenaan 'Perak Man' hasil tulisan Profesor Zuraina Majid yang bertajuk 'The Perak Man and other Prehistoric Skeletons of Malaysia', beserta data-data yang ada, saya cuba dapatkan 'hypothetical face' Perak Man di samping mendapatkan data dari tengkorak yang lain, yang saiznya lebih kurang sama dengan rangka yang ada", ujar Johari.

Dengan kepakaran dalam bidang pengimejan kraniofasial dan rekonstruksi 3D, beliau telah membentuk semula tulang kepala Perak Man untuk membuat lakaran wajah Perak Man, menggunakan teknologi 3D yang lebih cepat dan mudah berbanding proses penghasilan patung menggunakan tanah liat sebagaimana teknik yang biasa digunakan sebelum ini.

Tambah beliau lagi, penghasilan lakaran dalam imej tersebut mendapat bantuan Cicero Moraes, pakar reka bentuk 3D dari Brazil yang sanggup membantu dan berkongsi idea memandangkan beliau sememangnya berpengalaman luas dan telah menghasilkan banyak reka bentuk sebegitu.

**"Dengan kepakaran dalam bidang pengimejan kraniofasial dan rekonstruksi 3D, beliau telah membentuk semula tulang kepala Perak Man untuk membuat lakaran wajah Perak Man, menggunakan teknologi 3D yang lebih cepat dan mudah berbanding proses penghasilan patung menggunakan tanah liat sebagaimana teknik yang biasa digunakan sebelum ini."**





**“Perak Man juga adalah rangka tulang manusia dari zaman batu era Paleolitik yang hampir sempurna yang ditemui di Asia Tenggara dan merupakan tulang prasejarah yang mempunyai congenital deformity yang dikenali sebagai Brchymesophalangia.”**

Sementara itu, Pensyarah Kunjungan di Pusat Pengajian Sains Pergigian USM, Profesor Dr Zainul Ahmad Rajion merangkap ahli pasukan yang terlibat dalam penyelidikan ini turut berkongsi pandangan beliau berkaitan penggunaan teknologi 3D yang mampu memberi impak positif dalam bidang rekonstruksi berdasarkan data radiologi sebagaimana penghasilan lakaran wajah Perak Man.

“Saya yakin projek ini merupakan titik permulaan bagi USM untuk bekerjasama dengan universiti-universiti lain di dalam dan luar negara dalam bidang penyelidikan radiologi kerana sebelum ini penyelidikan hanya berdasarkan fundamental atau ‘pilot study’ sahaja. Dengan adanya kepakaran sebegini, penyelidikan boleh diperluaskan lagi dengan kepelbagaian bidang atau ‘interdisciplinary research’.

Dalam pada itu, Mokhtar pula menegaskan, beliau amat teruja dengan penemuan berkenaan dan menyifatkan pendekatan arkeologi kini sememangnya menumpu kepada saintifik arkeologi.

Katanya, sains diperlukan untuk membolehkan interpretasi lebih holistik dapat dilakukan terhadap penemuan-penemuan arkeologi zaman silam

“Saya sangat menghargai usaha pasukan penyelidik ini khususnya libatsama pakar Neuro USM dan juga pasukan Radiologi Oral dan Maksilofasial ini. Ia adalah satu permulaan yang baik untuk manfaat dalam memperkasa kajian-kajian arkeologi di masa akan datang,” ujar beliau.

*Teks: Marziana Mohamed Alias / Lailatul Hafiza Abdul Rashid*

“Setelah selesai merekabentuk tulang kepala Perak Man, saiz dapat dianggarkan dan perbandingan dibuat dengan saiz otak manusia moden. Melalui data yang diperolehi, sekali lagi perbandingan dibuat antara saiz otak rakyat Malaysia dengan rakyat luar negara kerana berdasarkan kajian sebelum ini, dipercayai Perak Man adalah daripada etnik ‘Australo-Melanesia’ dan sub-etnik Negrito.

“Di sini, satu lagi kelebihan bagi kita kerana pakar Arkeologi USM, Profesor Datuk Dr. Mokhtar Saidin juga banyak membuat kajian ke atas suku Lanoh yang merupakan orang asli dari puak Negrito, selain beliau memang terlibat secara langsung dengan penemuan Perak Man,” katanya.

Disebabkan itulah, timbul persoalan bagaimana dengan warna dan ciri rambut, jambang, misai serta kedutan-kedutan yang terdapat di muka Perak Man. Pasukan penyelidik yang terlibat telah menyediakan pelbagai versi sebelum dipersetujui dengan lakaran yang diterbitkan menerusi ‘Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences USM’, yang mana wajah Perak Man nampak kemelayuan.



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