

Once busy, UMP student hostels now deserted



By **T.N. Alagesh** - February 23, 2021 @ 3:25pm



A view of the almost deserted UMP student hostels in Pekan. - NSTP/FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

PEKAN: The corridors of the hostel, once a bustling hive of activity, are now practically deserted, wooden benches meant for students to sit to discuss things now gathering dust.

Lines outside the hostel rooms, before this filled with all sorts of clothes drying in the hot mid-morning and afternoon sun are empty, with the occasional bird alighting on them the only signs of life.

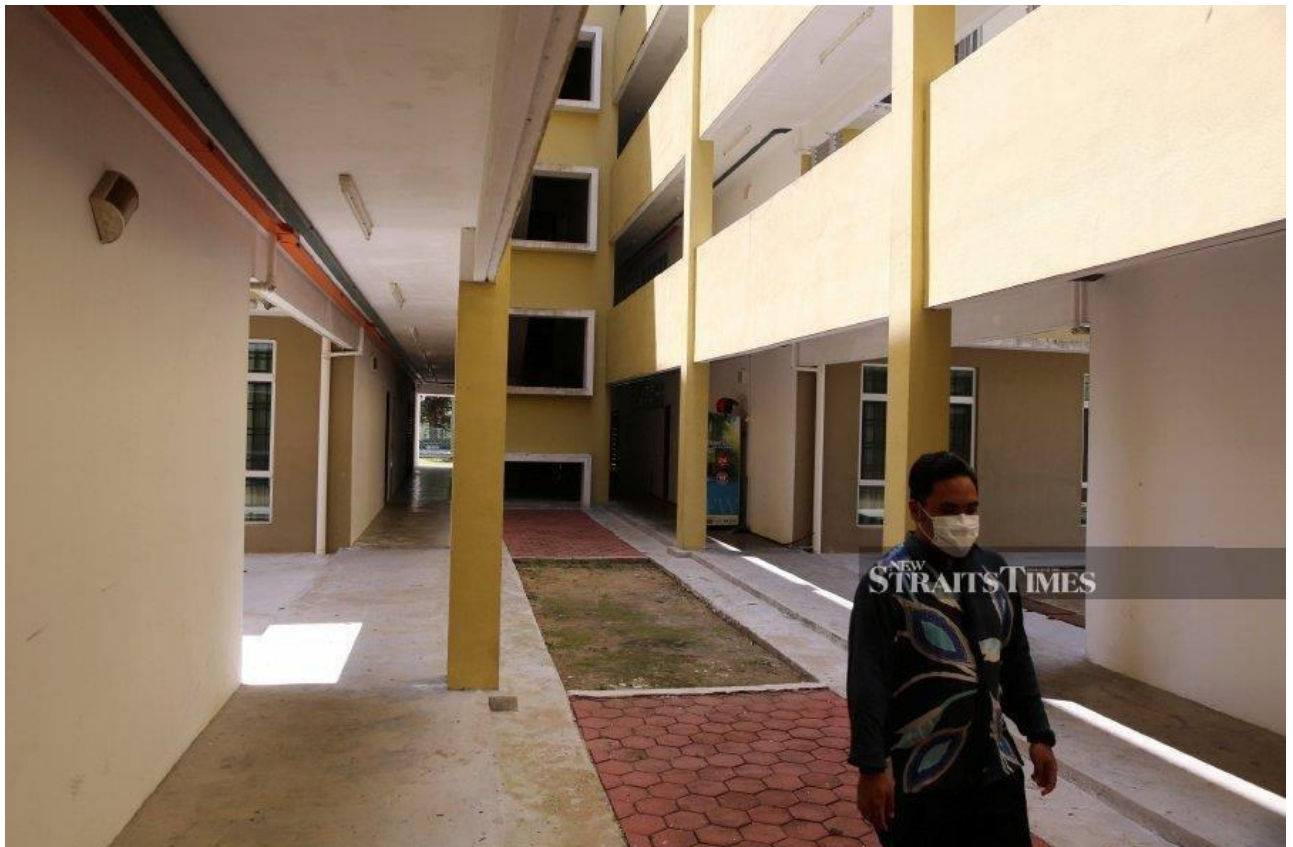
The student parking area is mostly vacant where once it was a chore to find space.

Such is the situation at the hostel in Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) as only a handful of rooms are occupied by undergraduates.

Most of the hostel rooms have been left unoccupied since May, when the students were allowed to return home just before Hari Raya Aidilfitri to continue their lessons through home-based teaching and learning (PdPR).

UMP Pekan Resident 5 principal Muhammad Sallehudin Md Derus admitted that he missed the "lively" hostel environment with students moving about even in the wee hours of the morning, group discussions lasting past midnight and loud music occasionally playing from the rooms on the upper floors.

He said a year of disruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic has left most sections of the campus largely idle and he only had the opportunity to meet the new students from the October (2020/21) intake at virtual orientation sessions.



UMP Pekan Resident 5 principal Muhammad inspects the hostels. -NSTP/FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

"The movement control order (MCO) has certainly taken out the excitement of being a new student, experiencing orientation on campus and other events for freshies. Some 1,000 students were supposed to move into the hostels during the October intake but due to the pandemic they had to postpone their plans.

"Fellows (wardens) only met the students through online orientation sessions and we could not organise any face-to-face programmes. It was a totally different atmosphere compared to the previous years when we held various fun-filled programmes," he said when met at the campus.

He said the new students only had the chance to meet each other through online programmes during the orientation week and the students' absence on the premises for several months appears to be a little awkward for the hostel management.

Meanwhile, Sallehudin, who previously served as a fellow at UMP, said even though there were selected groups of students, including those involved in clinical tasks and practical training, occupying the hostels, the numbers were small.

"Those staying on campus will leave the hostel in the early morning and only return late at night... they spend long hours at the laboratories and other parts of the campus to perform tasks related to their programmes. Even the discussion sections or meeting areas provided at the food court have been left unoccupied for quite some time.



UMP has prepared an action plan to ensure students return safely to the campus. - NSTP/FARIZUL HAFIZ AWANG

"Hostels are usually busy with students moving about, discussions and various activities but it has been lonely for the past one year. Even when I walk around the hostel buildings, I realise that the premises which used to be noisy are now deserted," he said.

Sallehudin said when the movement control order was implemented in March last year, some 700 pupils remained on campus and they were restricted from leaving their hostels.

"Meals were provided and to keep the students occupied, the hostel management organised a few programmes, including online games... some students left their rooms for jogging and sports activities but were immediately told to return to their hostel," he said, adding that the MCO last month was more relaxed as students were allowed to buy food at the cafeteria.

On the new academic semester next month, Sallehuddin said UMP has prepared an action plan to ensure students return safely to the campus and he hopes that more students will return to liven up the hostels.

Six categories of students will be returning to UMP's campuses in Pekan and Gambang to resume their lessons on March 6.