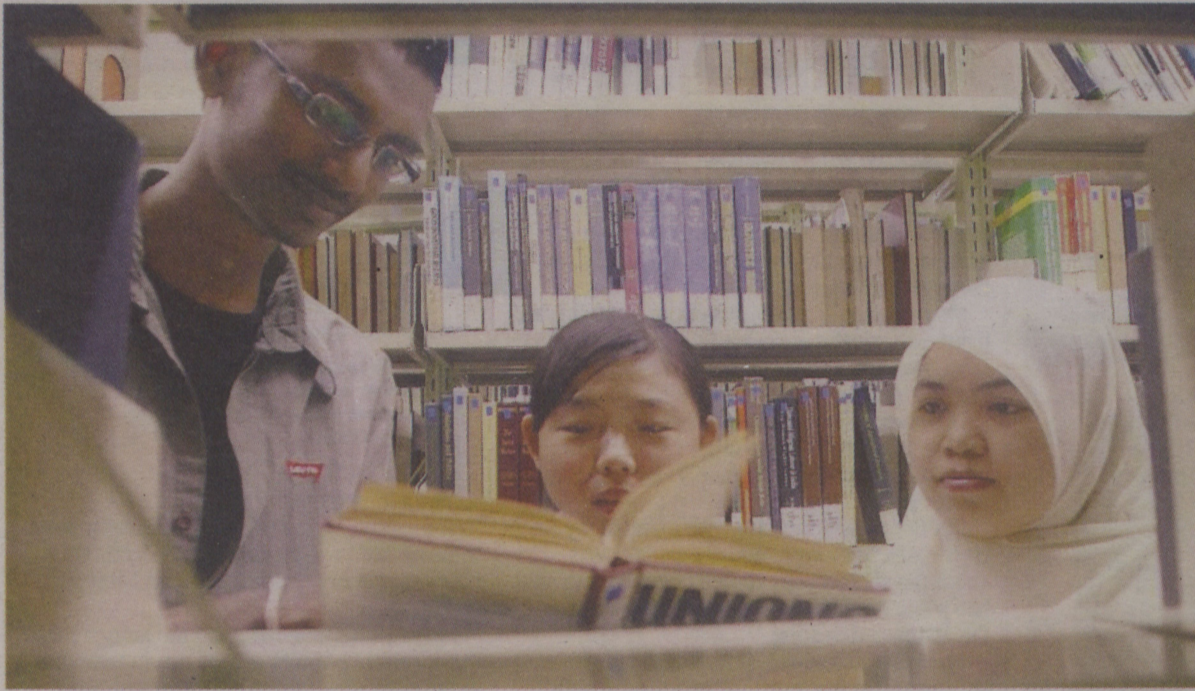


same aims



THREE'S COMPANY: Rajendra, Soh Pei Pei, and fellow UKM student Inul Azianti Noranizan, 21 catching up on their reading.

penalty systems. While books may go missing due to carelessness, other not-so-accidental incidents have also been reported.

"We had some cases of bag thefts, especially when they were stored in open lockers," says UKM assistant head librarian Azemi Ahmad. "This led us to instal a CCTV surveillance system. Once, that helped us identify a culprit and appropriate action was taken against him.

"It is important for students to have peace of mind while they study and the CCTV system is effective in preventing monkey business. Some students may dislike the presence of cameras but the university does this for their own good, and we welcome feedback from them."

Getting to know you

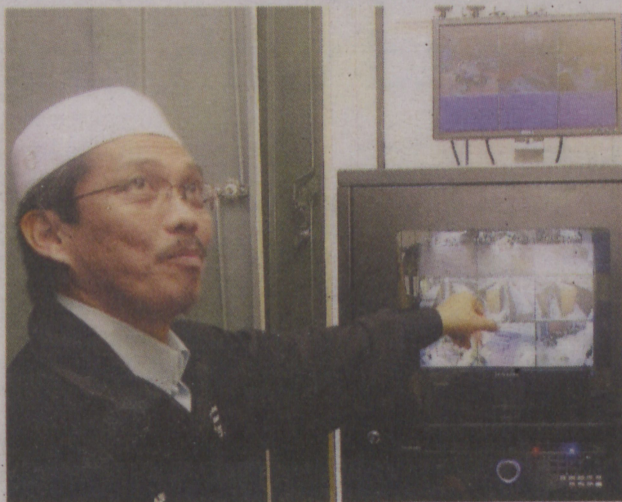
Having taken the world by storm, the Facebook craze is now affecting libraries, literally.

UM's library has its own Facebook page and staff use the social networking application to communicate with its student community.

"It is very important for us to understand our students and their needs," says associate professor Dr Nor Edzan Che Nasir, who is in charge of UM's library. "They have raised various issues, from toilet cleanliness to photocopy services to the abuse of cell phone usage.

"I normally check the page once a week and respond to the students. Facebook is proving to be very useful as some students are apprehensive when it comes to expressing their grouses face-to-face.

Azemi monitoring the library's CCTV surveillance system.



EASY DOES IT: A UKM student being briefed on the library's self-service book drop system.

"Some of their concerns are valid and, in fact, we have noted some suggestions.

"We're now thinking of ways to allow students to look out of the library because some have complained that they're surrounded by shelves and walls all day and they'd like to see some greenery. Unfortunately, the windows are taken up by all the offices but I'm sure we'll find a way to address that concern soon," Dr Nor Edzan says.

UiTM employs its own customer satisfaction index and students actually rate the library's services. The onus is on the library staff to meet their expectations.

"Minus the pressure it puts on us, this rating system is good as we're able to evaluate how we're serving our students," says Haron with a laugh. "Thankfully, our quality of

service has not dipped below the four-out-of-five points so far."

Looking ahead

Haron, Abu Bakar and Dr Nor Edzan agree that technology will continue to change the library. More online features will be added and the e-collection of their respective universities can only increase.

However, they pour cold water on the possibility that the traditional library will see its role diminish – at least in the foreseeable future.

"Although we have gone online, more and more students are using the Tun Sri Lanang library," says Abu Bakar. "Also, copyright issues prevent entire research, journal or document collections to be hosted online, and this will always create a niche for traditional libraries."

Going further, Dr Nor Edzan stresses that traditional libraries will always have a role to play as long as books are published.

"The hybrid model where print and electronic data co-exist is the best way to describe academic libraries at the moment," she says. "Some people prefer browsing in the comfort of their homes while others will always opt for the feel of flipping pages.

"Ultimately, the role of libraries depends on the students' mindset and the education system, which, at the moment, is more reliant on textbooks. Perhaps, in future, when students read from a computer tablet, we will then see a decline in the importance of the library."

In it together

WHILE Universiti Malaya's (UM) library aims primarily to meet reading needs on campus, its bookshop, Pekan Buku, is an important partner in the effort.

Established in 1968, the bookshop is part of UM's cooperative, a business owned and controlled by those who utilise its services or who work at it.

"UM didn't have a bookshop in the early days and students and staff were at the mercy of outside vendors who would hike up book prices," says Cooperative Bookshop Universiti Malaysia Bhd chairman and former nuclear physics lecturer Mohd Said Mohd Kadis.

"Then vice-chancellor Ungku Abdul Aziz proposed the idea of a cooperative business model and the bookshop was set up as a first venture."

Thanks to its fair price policy, Pekan Buku became a popular haunt for book lovers, both on and off campus. In fact, a recent visit showed that more outsiders were using its services than students.

All books at Pekan Buku are

listed at 10% off the market price and the cooperative's members stand to benefit more from rebates that are dependent on Pekan Buku's profits after each financial year.

"We want to encourage staff and their children to read and book prizes are given to university staff whose children excel in exams from PMR level onwards," Mohd Said says.

Well stocked with more than 100,000 titles, Pekan Buku also organises book fairs during convocations and year-end sales that sees the prices of selected titles slashed by 20% to 60%.

"Our big discounts surprise people. Although we enjoy lower profit margins, the cooperative is viable based on the volume of sales.

"The cooperative has since expanded and it now runs a travel agency, a mini-market that stocks our own products, computer assembly services, and even our own catering chain where staff and students benefit from affordable pricing," he adds.

Going all out to attract users

ALTHOUGH the influx of technology has added new appeal to the library, internal improvements alone are not enough to draw in the masses.

A library which the students themselves dislike, for instance, is enough to turn some away.

"I don't like my university library as it looks so old," says one undergraduate. "I would definitely go more often if it was as impressive as the ones in overseas universities."

A strong indictment perhaps, but the sentiment reflects that a bulwark against the disorder of the outside world is not the hallmark of a good library for some.

"This new generation of students like a modern concept," says Haron Wee Ah Boo, Universiti Teknologi Mara's (UiTM) chief librarian.

"A modern-looking library attracts students and we considered this before deciding to give our Tun Abdul Razak 1 library (PTAR) a facelift."

Taking inspiration from the pyramids designed by I.M. Pei for the Louvre Museum in Paris, UiTM proceeded to erect a pyramidal structure of its own.

Named Galeri PTAR, the pyramid is situated in the middle of the library's wings and houses the many awards won by PTAR. Constructed entirely from glass segments, the pyramid is becoming a popular rendezvous for students.

"It has raised the library's profile but we're not stopping there," adds Haron. "PTAR was constructed in 1972 and it will be given a facelift to keep up with the increasing demands of students and the university's move to become a research university," Haron says.

PTAR's facelift will see it undergoing a metamorphosis that will ultimately result in a posh ambience, improved lighting and greater personal space for PhD students. It will be the first building in UiTM that is

fully equipped with air quality and bacterial control.

"We want to look after the wellbeing of our students. Besides, the books won't turn yellow as fast with such a system," he adds.

Haron's views are shared by Universiti Malaya associate professor Dr Nor Edzan Che Nasir, who has her own plans for UM's library.

"Libraries must project a friendly and welcoming atmosphere nowadays," she says. "I'd like to see a more open concept in UM's library – at least on the ground floor so visitors can come in freely and make use of our light reading and Astro viewing corners."

Adding that checkpoints, guards and automated barriers have negative connotations, Dr Nor Edzan proceeds to highlight the differences between local academic libraries and their overseas counterparts.

"A café greets visitors as they enter the National University of Singapore's library," she says. "This is very different from UM, where drinking and eating (finger food) is frowned upon.

"Also, another library in South Korea does not use the word 'Don't' on signboards. Instead of being told what they can't do, students are told what they can and are encouraged to do so. Freedom and encouragement may work better than prohibition."

Despite all this, not everyone is jumping on the bandwagon of change; some even see a facelift as a frivolous and self-indulgent process.

"The libraries at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge are old-fashioned buildings but they bring in the crowds," says a librarian. "They have unique appeal and this shows that not every library needs a facelift."

However, reality soon kicks in and he adds, "Well, I must admit that this university isn't Oxford or Cambridge."