Fourteen-year-old campus in Rompin helps develop town

By ONG HAN SEAN

EVER since the Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah Campus was established in Muadzam Shah, the once-rundown area has undergone transformation into a vibrant campus town.

Set up in 2001 as a branch of UNITEN, the campus was developed based on the concept of a university town and was named Kampus Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah in 2003 by the Sultan of Pahang.

Its deputy vice-chancellor Prof Dr Salina Daat said the existence of UNITEN in Muadzam Shah had an impact on the economic and social development of the town.

“Over the years, we have seen a rapid growth in local businesses. The concentration of students in the town provided plenty of opportunities for goods and services providers.

“The social side of things, the university indirectly stimulates added value in the form of basic infrastructure such as a proper road system and scheduled garbage collection. Thirty years ago, there was no traffic lights in the town at all.

“UNITEN has also asked for ICT infrastructure such as broadband facilities to be upgraded for the students’ sake but the reality is that everyone benefits from it,” she said when met here.

Prof Salina said the university town concept also allowed the local community to interact with the university in many matters and programmes.

“The university is not just an ivory tower separated from the community. There are many programmes and activities conducted jointly with the community by our management and students.

“This also provided a platform for UNITEN students to interact with the local folk during their time here, which can be a useful experience when they are in the job market later,” she added.

She added that there were currently 5,934 students enrolled at the university.

Rompin District Officer Datuk Fadzillah Salih said the number of housing and business premises had increased in Muadzam Shah since the establishment of UNITEN.

“The number of businesses has increased from 196 to 556 since UNITEN was established. I believe it is linked to UNITEN’s continued presence in Muadzam Shah. We can really feel the town growing constantly,” he said.

For the locals, the campus has become the lifeblood of Muadzam Shah with many wanting it to continue operating in the town.

Datuk Shamsiah Anhad said the high demand for facilities had resulted in physical expansion of the town to the benefit of the community.

“The growing population of Muadzam Shah encourages the entry of various facilities such as supermarkets, banks and fast-food chains like KFC and Pizza Hut,” she said.

UNITEN student Mohamad Eridaus Che Ismail, 23, said he was initially disappointed when he first set foot in Muadzam Shah but had since come to appreciate the opportunities to make a difference in the close-knit community.

“The name of the town sounded good but when I arrived, all I saw was dried grass. That was my first impression but during my first semester, I have already been exposed to the practical aspects of business through my participation in our campus’ Enactus Club.

“I have interacted with the orang asli and went to Palau Tioman to help improve Kampung Makut’s honey business. If I had not picked UNITEN, I would have never gained this kind of experience,” said the final-year international business student.

Accounting student K. Saravnya, 21, said the campus environment was conducive for studying as there was very little distraction in the town.

Her fellow accounting student Tan Huei Lin, 21, said students here knew each other very well since they were all staying in one town.

Ahmad Syahman Ahmad Tamin, 20, said Muadzam Shah would not be bustling without UNITEN.

“The campus has influenced the town’s growth and become a source of income for the locals. Not all things can be found here though, but this taught us students to be independent and utilise survival skills with the limited resources,” said the accounting student.

He added that the courses offered at UNITEN were recognised with graduates having a reported 97% employability rate.

“I do not see any disadvantages in studying here. I would definitely recommend UNITEN as a choice for school-leavers seeking to further their studies,” said Ahmad Syahman.