

Interview with the Director of the Development Division Dr. Rustam Khairi Bin Zahari, International Islamic University Malaysia

Numan: Could you please share the history behind the construction of the SHAS Mosque? Who was the original architect of the SHAS Mosque?

Dr. Rustam: The planning stage, before you construct you have to plan design and all that. The design was done before 1991 or 1992. The architect in charge of the design of our Masjid in Gombak is well-known architect in Malaysia, the company name Hajeedar and Associates Sdn. If you are familiar with Tabung Haji Tower on between Jalan Ampang and Jalan Ismail, that one also designed by Hajeedar and Associates Sdn. So, we started the construction of the Mosque with infrastructure, meaning piling. Normally, you build a house or building, everything is done by one contractor. But, for the Masjid some reason (when it was done) it was split into two. The infrastructure was done by one contractor and the building of the Masjid itself was done in another contract. So, the infrastructure and piling to enable the building to build later on was done first and that cost about 1.5m Ringgit Just for the foundation and that was in 1993. It quite a big sum. The name of the contractor that was awarded this contract was called Sunissa Sdn Bhd. The contract started in August 1993 for the infrastructure and it took about (originally the contract supposed to runs about 3 months for the foundation to be completed). And then of course Hajeedar is being held by other consultant, if you are familiar with the construction in Malaysia, you have the architect, engineers civil and structural, mechanical and electrical and quantity surveyor who do the measurement and calculation in terms of the money as well as the material.

Move on to the building structure itself, after the foundation has done in 1993 the contract for the building was awarded in September 1994. The expected completion from start to finish is about 15 months and the contract sum was about 14.3m Ringgit. As I mentioned just now, the original date of completion was supposed to be on 14th of December 1995, exactly after 15 months of starting the project. But of course, on site you have issues this and that. So, the actual date of completion was on 31st May 1997, more that one year of delay in terms of the project. The contractor that was awarded the building is called Ahmad Zaki Sdn Bhd. They also build our Kulliyah of Engineering later on. Recently in 2016, IIUM Hospital in Kuantan was also build by same contractor. But that one was done by PFI method, meaning the financial fund comes from them and we pay them monthly. The second package for the Masjid building also consultant by Hajeedar in terms of architecture.

If you compare our campus to the other university campuses, the Masjid is outside of the campus. There are some in the middle, some in the outside of the campus. UPM for example, the Masjid is outside and few other universities as well. But for us, the Masjid is in the center and it is in the valley. If you look at the Mahallahs, all the Mahallahs on the hill-top especially for the female Mahallahs are even higher than the male Mahallahs, although they are still on the elevated points and then the Mosque is in the valley. So, basically this is the master plan for Gombak campus and it is trying to emulate Masjidul Haram. Because Masjidul Haram is in the valley and the surrounding area is all mountain area.

And next to the Masjid we have the library and all that. At that time, there was no internet. If you want to borrow or read a book you have to go to the library. So, the planning was for students to come in the morning from Mahallah, stay in the library, classroom, Masjid and the afternoon going back to their respective Mahallah. So, that is the design element regards to the central court where we have the admin building, the mosque, the library and these are the main features of our campus.

One interesting point I want to highlight also, how many Minarats we have now? Two, right? If you look at the original masterplan design, we supposed to have four Minarats. Just like the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, and also Shah Alam Mosque. Most of them have four Minarats. But when we come to defend the budget, the government cut 50% of the Minarat badget. So, instead of four Minarats we ended up with only two Minarats. But they still can function well, you know when there is Azan you can clearly hear it from far. So, as for the Masjid whenever you come through the gate 1, you can clearly see there is a Masjid in the middle because of the Minarat and Qubah.

Numan: In terms of architecture, SHAS Mosque is one of the beautiful mosques in Malaysia. What was the inspiration behind the architecture of the SHAS Mosque?

Dr. Rustam: You can see there is no full wall surrounding the Masjid, it is open ended from the front and the side. In the Qubah, actually that is one big fan that you cannot see from below, there is one fan for the ventilation purposes. With the fan on, I am not sure whether it is working or not, it supposed to suck air coming from the side to ventilate the main hall. The capacity of the mosque is about 8000 at the one time. I do not think we have ever used it for 8000 to fill up all the three levels.

Numan: SHAS Mosque has unique type of pencil shape Minarat, which is the different from the Minarat in Arab world that usually have crescent on the top. So, is there any distinct reason for that?

Dr. Rustam: As I alluded before that Blue Mosque in Istanbul, during the Othmani Khilafat (if I am not mistaken) one of their prominent architect's name Sinan. So, that is they call it Anatolian design. Most of the mosques in Turkey and what do we have similar the Masjid Shah Alam from the same design concept. There is many traditional Arab design Minarat in many places in Malaysia, but ours in Gombak it is more on Sinan Turkish influence design.

Numan: Would you tell us something about beautiful Islamic calligraphy that we observe inside the SHAS Mosque and where has it taken from if any?

Dr. Rustam: There was one group they came from Morocco, in fact some of them still around. I met one of them last year in Ulu Klang. So, the calligraphy made from plaster of Paris, the one that they use for bandage to fix broken bone. They mold paster of Paris and curve it, when it is dry, they place it on the wall and then they color it. Near the Imam place you can see slightly different in term of color, in very small area. Actually, that one was the testing area. At that time, the rector was Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman. Every week, we have meeting with him, talking about project for the Gombak campus including the Masjid. So, he would come, and these Moroccan calligraphers put the color as if it is acceptable or not. When this chosen, they color the

whole thing. The interior wall of Masjid KLCC done by same team as well, after they finished with our mosque in Gombak. Of course, the KLCC mosque own by Petronas, and it is fully air-conditioned unlike ours which is fresh cool open air. And then speaking of carving, the Mimbar is carve on wood. That was from a prominent wood carver from Terengganu Besut. His father is being awarded an National Figure award for wood carving and he himself was a Master wood carver and Malay based wood carving teacher. Alhamdulillah, we visited his place in Terengganu, if you are not familiar Besut is near the border of Terengganu and Kelantan. So, when we fly there we use Kota Bahru Kelantan Airport and then we travel to Besut just to have a look at their workshop as they have their own workshop. They also have various type of carving, and when we are there they are explaining to us the difference between Malay carving and Thailand and other style of carving. In our Cultural Centre, the background of the main stage is wooden carving background which is also designed by the same person.

Numan: Do you remember the name of the calligraphic team?

Dr. Rustam: No, I could not name them. But I know they are from Morocco. We did not deal with them directly, so we do not have record about them. Because they dealt with the contractor Ahmad Zaki and they are the who paid them. That is why we do not have their details.

Numan: What are the materials used to build the SHAS mosque and its Minarat? Is there any unique one?

Dr. Rustam: I think it is conventional concrete, mortar and bricks. And we have curving on the opening it is called GRC, meaning it is done in the factory and brought to the site and just installed it unlike the curving of the calligraphy which they did on the site, where the Imam office at the back there is where they did the calligraphy. Before completion of the Mosque, we already have students moving in, in 1996. The first Kulliyah to move in was Kulliyah of Law. So, at that time we did not have a mosque, so while the mosque was under construction, on Friday they do not work during Zuhr as we allow students and staffs to come in. Even though it is not completed, some part of main hall we used for Solat Jumah and Muslim construction workers also joined us for the prayer as well. So, we started to use the mosque and not waiting for it to be completed even during construction. Because the nearest Masjid is quite far away for the students and staffs to go to for their Jumah prayer.

Numan: The high-quality carpet that used in the SHAS mosque, is it imported? If so from where?

Dr. Rustam: Originally, the floor is Marble. Since we do not have air-condition the carpet on the marble floor is quite cooling, when there is no carpet, it is even cooler. For the carpet, we got sponsorship. It is easy of course, when you do Masjid, it is quite easy to get sponsorship. Of course, it is not local, it was imported. I do not have details from where, the original carpet was similar to the design they have in Masjid al-Haram. It was one piece and one piece and not end to end like it is now. So, when sponsored carpet came in it was piece by piece, let's say one carpet maybe five or six row.

Numan: What was the cost of the whole process of the carpet and where it's came from?

Dr. Rustam: I cannot say, because it was sponsored so we do not have the cost details. But for the present carpet, I think Masjid office has it. Because it was installed later on, and it was a separate contract not part of the original sponsorship.

Numan: Would you tell us the total cost of the construction of the SHAS Mosque and who was the sponsor?

Dr. Rustam: (Total cost is 15.8 million Ringgit as previously stated). The construction sponsored by the government of Malaysia. That is why I said earlier, we had to defend the budget and the Minarat budget was cut 50% off. So basically, during that time it was quite okay in term of budget availability compared to now. Now, there is a lot of cost cutting and budget limitation but at that time was quite okay in term of budget for development purposes and being IIUM, of course Islamic university, there has to be a Masjid by default comes with the budget.

Numan: Do you want to share anything else about the Mosque that I missed Dr?

Dr. Rustam: I think that cover most of it.

Numan: What is your recommendation for me to further this research, with whom should I communicate and interview to enrich this study?

Dr. Rustam: Maybe I will get back to you on that. The project manager for Masjid he already left IIUM, but I can check with him whether he is okay to be interviewed for any other interesting information during the construction. One thing I remember now, the main contractor Ahmad Zaki Sdn bhd whis is Muslim of course, but the chief worker on site was a Chinese guy, even though he is Chinese he is building Masjid and working for a Muslim company. I still remember his name, it was Ong. So, when we had a meeting, he was always there. If we have any comment or complain we always contacted him at the time, so he was the representer of the main contractor on the site.

Numan: That would be all. Jazakumullah khairan for your time.

Dr. Rustam: Barakallahu Fik.