

# A new era for information services

## State library and multi-media centre (Pustaka Negeri Sarawak) opens

A new era in library and information services began for Sarawak on 1 January 2000. The focal point of the millennium celebrations was the new \$30 million Pustaka Negeri Sarawak in Kuching, the capital of Malaysia's largest state. This new state library and multi-media centre was designed by Sydney-based library specialist architectural and interior design consultancy Stephenson & Turner International, an ALIA institutional member.

The brief, prepared by Dr David Jones of the State Library of New South Wales Building and Planning Advisory Service, called for a 13 500 square metre state-of-the-art facility to be the hub of Sarawak's library and information services.

It is designed to play a critical part in the IT infrastructure of the state, the regional capitals of which are already linked by the high capacity SarawakNet network. In due course, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak will co-ordinate access to digital resources throughout the evolving public library network and in government departments.

Dr Jones' brief also called for the building to showcase Sarawak's rich artistic heritage, indigenous crafts and a program of public art that will progressively adorn the building.

The Pustaka Negeri Sarawak is one of the largest multi-media centres in Asia. Every one of the hundreds of computer screens provided throughout the facility is a multi-media terminal with potential access to the full range of digital resources held locally, on the internet, and in offsite databanks.

Separate adult and children's 'Médiatheques' are provided. These are large informal spaces for multi-media browsing and are intended to free the main study and research spaces for quieter and more contemplative activities.

The building contains a 500 square metre exhibition area, a 300 seat auditorium as well as numerous other meeting spaces. All are equipped with data projection and video conferencing facilities providing a major conference centre for the city of Kuching.

The building has designed to be as hospitable as possible to people with disabilities — not only are all of its facilities accessible, but a range of equipment and software is available for users with special needs, including JAWS, Open Book, Naturally Speaking and Zoomtext software.

In addition to its reference and periodical collections, the Pustaka Negeri Sarawak houses a number of specialist collections on aspects of Borneo's history, culture, economy, resources and natural environment. The archives of the State's former colonial governments, including those of the 'White Rajahs', form part of the special collections. These documents, formerly housed at the Sarawak Museum, date back to the era of Sir James Brooke, the first 'White Rajah'.

A number of historical works have already been digitised and are on the Pustaka Negeri Sarawak web pages at <http://www.pustaka-sarawak.com>. Under a new ordinance, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak will be the depository for all library materials published in the State.

The building is set beside an artificial lake within an 80 hectare park which was master planned by Stephenson & Turner. When complete, the park will



The first floor foyer showing the glass staircase and entrance to the main library area

provide a picturesque setting for the Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, the existing State Mosque, as well as a planned Regional Science Centre and Archives Building. A long-day-care centre is provided within the complex for the children of staff and clients.

The project was commissioned, completed and opened on time and to budget at midnight on 31 December 1999 by the Chief Minister of Sarawak. Dr David Jones and Stephenson & Turner directors, Geoff Larking and Don Bergomi attended the opening as guests of the government.

The opening ceremony marked the end of an intensive six-year planning and construction process, chronicled in Dr David Jones' commemorative publication *Fountain of knowledge: the story of Pustaka Negeri Sarawak* (Kuching: Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, 1999). It was the end of a building project, but just the beginning for the library. So far user and staff reaction has been very positive. The potential of the new facility is practically limitless. As services for visitors and offsite users expand over the next few years, with specialised program for business and government already planned, Pustaka Negeri Sarawak will play a key part in the economic and social development of Sarawak. ■



Pustaka Negeri Sarawak