SINGAPORE: Singapore's first city campus, the Singapore Management University, officially took over its premises on Thursday.

The sprawling 4.5 hectare site at Bras Basah is expected to add buzz to an already busy area, teeming with arts facilities, entertainment, business and commercial areas, when the university is fully operational by August.

The new campus, built at a cost of over $420 million, is linked by an air-conditioned walkway.

"One of the great things about being in the city is that we have all the resources and life at our doorstep. And we also give back to the city by having thousands of student and faculty mix and add life. The campus will also be open to Singaporeans from all over for lectures, exhibitions and continuing education." said Howard Hunter, President of SMU.

SMU said it is looking at renovating some low and medium-rise buildings as well as HDB flats in the Prinsep and Short Street areas as hostel spaces by 2006.

The aim is to have 25 per cent of its students in hostels.

"We talked to the government about getting sites and the government was very receptive to the idea. So we are renovating some space - primarily old buildings - those that have to be gazetted or of old historical value. This would add to the night life. It won't be dead at night. Students can study here and walk back to the hostels and the whole area will have a real buzz." said Ho Kwon Ping, Chairman, SMU.

The campus itself will also be inter-connected in other ways - to make movement easier not just between campus areas but also between the campus and surrounding areas.

All 5 blocks will be connected by air-conditioned underground passes.

For now, students will have to use City Hall MRT but there are provisions for a new MRT station of their own when the Circle Line Stage 1 is completed.

The URA have made provisions for a link by private developers all the way through to Dhoby Ghaut and therefore, the Orchard Road area and to Citilink Malls and then to Suntec City in their plans - CNA /dt