

Training leaders in a quiet enclave

By CHIA YAN MIN

SERIOUS corporate brainstorming is about to unfold in a cluster of quaint colonial-era black-and-white bungalows nestled in a quiet Buona Vista enclave.

The bungalows and a glass-fronted modern building house a new €50 million (S\$83 million) global leadership development centre built by global consumer products giant Unilever.

The facility, opened yesterday, will train Unilever's senior staff from across the globe and identify new leaders as it penetrates deeper into emerging markets, most notably in Asia.

It is Unilever's second institute globally. The first was set up in London in the 1950s. Like its British counterpart, the one here is called Four Acres. The 2.7ha site at Nepal Hill, resembling a university campus, is near Insead, Fusionopolis and Rochester Park.

Unilever sells a vast array of food, personal care and other brands such as Dove soap, Lipton tea and Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Sales in about 190 countries last year topped €50 billion.

The centres, which will have identical curricula, will be able to train about 2,800 of its senior management. More



The black-and-white bungalows in Buona Vista are part of Unilever's leadership development centre, Four Acres. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

than half will be trained in Singapore.

The new facility has accommodation for up to 55 delegates, and will run programmes lasting four to five days.

Unilever chief operating officer Harish Manwani said developing markets are its growth engine – 57 per cent of its total business. Emerging Asia has the lion's share at almost 40 per cent.

"The location in Singapore reflects the importance of developing markets

in Unilever's global strategy, and the confidence in Singapore as an ideal hub in Asia. It is a sweet spot between developed and high-growth emerging markets," he told The Straits Times. "We have set up a centre here so that people can live and breathe how business gets done in the developing world."

The centre's academic programmes have been developed in partnership with institutions such as Insead, Har-

vard Business School and Singapore Management University.

Unilever's chief executive Paul Polman said: "Unilever has set out an audacious goal to double our turnover, whilst decoupling that from our environmental impacts and increasing our positive social impacts... To achieve this, we will need leaders with a strong sense of conscience."

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