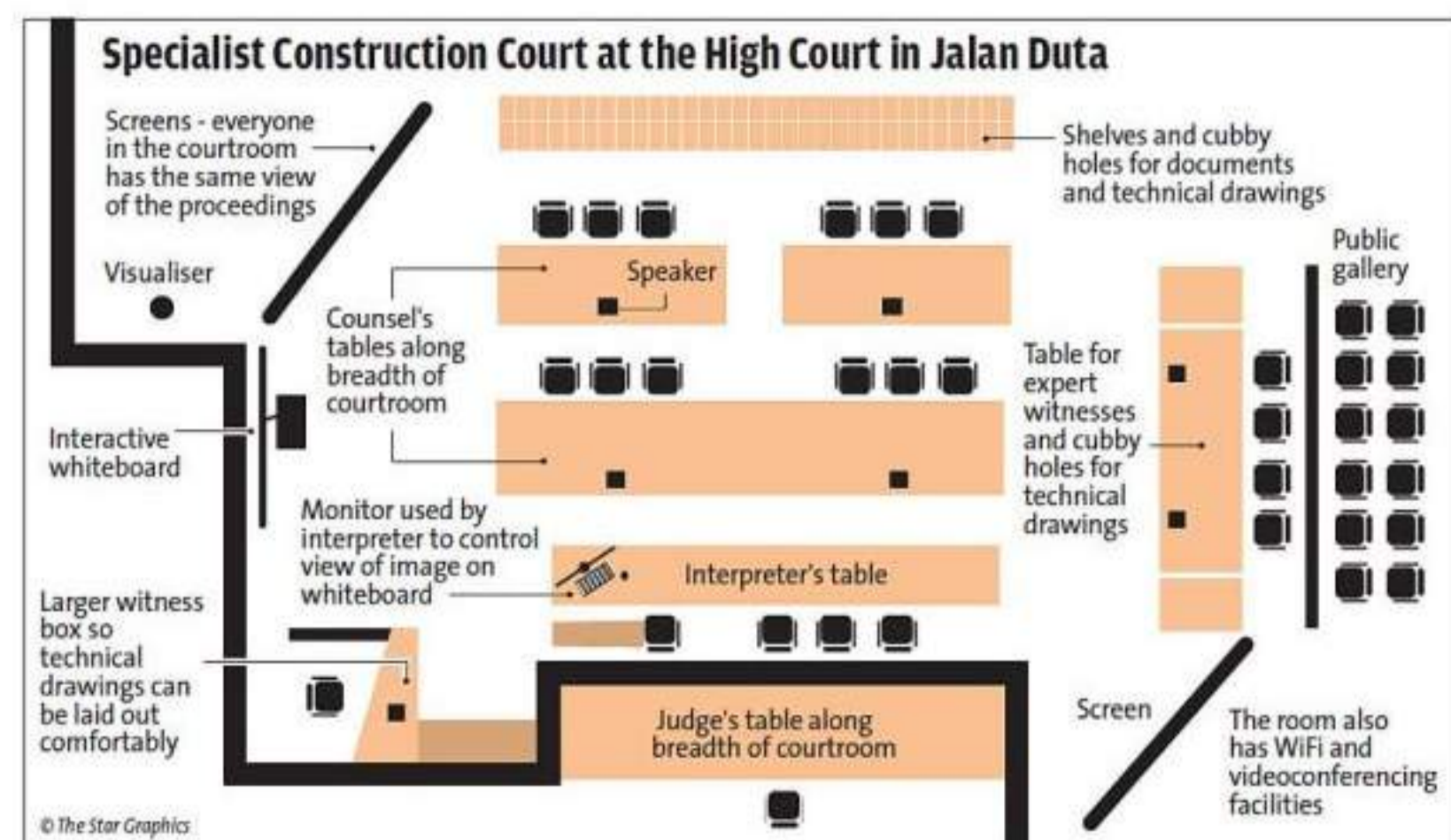


Gaining from going high-tech

BY SHAILA KOSHY

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KUALA LUMPUR: Technology is helping the construction court here to try cases with greater efficacy and transparency.

The witness box and counsel's tables are now big enough to accommodate technical drawings and more than one expert witness can sit together and testify in what was the first row of the public gallery.

Even the courtroom at the Court Complex here has been re-oriented, said Construction Court judge Datuk Mary Lim,

Chief Justice Tun Arifin Zakaria agreed to move the room "on its axis".

"Instead of the usual lengthwise design this is oriented breadthwise. In terms of accountability, the public gets to see all the players and not just the judge's face.

"This way, the public can evaluate for themselves the mannerisms of counsel and not just one face," the High Court judge told The Star.

The visualiser is one of the high-tech players in the courtroom.



High Court deputy registrar Khairi Haron showing the two computers on the Construction Court judge's table - the one on the right shows the same image as that on the interactive white board at the back and the one on the left is for her to make her own notes. Just below the judge's table is interpreter Zamarullah Md Nur who controls the images on the white board as required during the examination and cross-examination of witnesses in the high-tech equipped courtroom at Jalan Duta.

"It is basically a camera that projects the image (of a document) onto an interactive white board. It can also be projected onto the other two screens in the court.

"Lawyers can plug their laptops into the system and see the same image on their own screens."

There is WiFi in the court as well as video-conferencing facilities.

She said the entire proceedings were recorded and with the camera panning to whoever is talking, everyone in the courtroom could view the same thing at the same time.

"We can all be looking at different monitors but we are all looking at the same thing. It avoids lawyers moving away from the table."

She said the previous layout had been inhibiting: "Lawyers were using the floor more than the table tops to lay their documents out.

"We've realigned everything to clean lines. Lawyers have shelf space and cubby holes for their drawings behind them.



New layout of the high-tech equipped Construction Court in the Jalan Duta High Court. The judge now sits along the breadth of the room. The two screens hanging from the ceiling project the same image on the interactive white board so everyone in the court can view the same thing at the same time. The two rows of tables for counsel facing the judge are also equipped with moveable lecterns, microphones and points to plug in laptops so they can view the same image on the white board on their personal computers. The front row of the public gallery has been converted into an area where more than one expert witness can testify using the microphones on the tables.

"There are extendable microphones and we also had lecterns specially commissioned."

As for evidence, she said all the parties in court often looked at huge drawings but only wanted a particular area and needed to get to it immediately so they do not lose momentum.

Now, it does not matter if the document is in hard copy or the item is a 3D object because the visualiser focuses on it and the image appears on the interactive white board.

"The interpreter or the witness himself can then zero in on the area in dispute and zoom it out as big as we need," Lim said.

She added the controls were generally left to a trained person instead of lawyers because the former could move the focus quickly to where it was needed.

"Previously, we had some lawyers mix up the copies and different people ended up with different documents but this doesn't happen now as we are all looking at the same thing.

"We ask lawyers to come in earlier so we can decide how they want to present the evidence - they can do a slide presentation, photos or even three-dimensional."

Lim said witnesses could point with their finger or use a "pen" to mark the specific area - by highlighting it in various colours or "drawing" a circle or triangle around it.

"If you wanted a witness to draw something, we all had to wait anxiously while he finished it and it was passed to the judge and parties, with the public left wondering what he had drawn.

"Now, he draws on the board with the pointer and all of us are looking as it progresses, and he can explain what he is drawing as well."

Another new feature is called "hot tubbing". "The idea is to return experts to their true function, which is to assist and not to be partisan," she said.

"They really should be assisting in finding the truth about the technicalities. Instead of just lawyers asking the questions, the experts and the judge too can do the same, assisting and probing."

"How it is run may not be the same in every case.

"The best way is to provide a suitable place for the experts to sit. So we converted the first bench of the public gallery for them, complete with microphones.

"In a case I have I can just turn to them throughout the proceedings to clarify points for us."

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