

Among the numerous awards that Choo had received were the Malaysia National Young Scientist Award by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (1989); Most Promising Scientist Award by Porim (1989); Merit Award at the Malaysian Invention and Design Competition (1989); and the International Federation of Inventors Association Cup for Outstanding Malaysian Woman Inventor (1993).

As for her future contributions to the country's development, Choo says she is working at developing new processes which are more environmentally friendly for the palm-based industry.

"I am also studying new constituents of significance in palm oil, the beneficial effects of natural anti-oxidants on degenerative diseases in man besides promoting awareness of inventions amongst women."

Choo was accompanied to the award presentation ceremony by her 70-year-old mother, youngest brother Dr Choo Kwong Foong and a few relatives. "I'm very proud of my sister," says Kwong Foong, 30, who is serving at the Ipoh General Hospital.

"But we also have our mother to thank for what we are today. My father died when I was only three and our mother single-handedly brought us up and saw to it that we had a good education.

"There are 11 of us and my sister is the ninth child. Perhaps I will continue serving the Government for many more years, just like my sister - berkhidmat untuk negara."

Khatijah is a respected figure in the corporate world. She founded the KAF Group in 1973 of which she is the chairman and managing director.

The KAF group is a financial services group which includes the largest discount house operating in Malaysia, a leading currency deposit and foreign exchange broker and a stockbroking company.

Khatijah obtained a B.Sc (Economics) honours degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science. From 1965 to 1971, she was executive secretary and planning economist of the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority, and from 1971 to 1973 she was director and secretary to the National Padi and Rice Board.

She is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Malaysian Institute of Economic Research and Malaysian Business Council, and adjunct professor of Universiti Utara Malaysia.

The recipient for the social services category, Ursula Goh, says "women should give some of their time and effort for the betterment of society. They can play an important role as agents of change and we are fortunate that the Government recognises our role."

She says it is because of the support the country gives to women that they should in return have an open attitude in accepting challenges and changes, while helping to preserve the traditional and positive values and contributing greatly towards family well-being.