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A devoted wife and mother at heart

THE mother in Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali gets quite sentimental when speaking of her children.

Her three daughters and four sons - Marina, Mirzan, Melinda, Mokhzani, Mukhriz, Maizura and Mazhar - bring out her deepest maternal instincts.

"I am very proud of them. In fact, I should be more than thankful."

And like a mother hen, her feathers get all ruffled if she feels her children - or even their father - are unfairly treated or thought of.

"Even now, people accuse him (Dr Mahathir) of doing what he has done, just because of our son (Mirzan) ... that he is favouring the children in business. I feel very sad because I know how hard they work.

"Sometimes I can feel their disappointment when they go to their father and he says `Don't do it'. There are certain businesses they want to get into, but he says `No, don't'.

"Not only that, he sends circulars to the ministry ... if his children's names appear on the tender, reject it. So, our children are victimised and quite unfairly.

"As my husband said in Parliament, they can't be government servants ... if they are promoted to KSU (Chief Secretary), people will say it is favouritism. And I feel very sorry for my husband because he has to cope with this.

The children, she insists, understand their father's position and "they don't to use their father's name".

"It is a kind of penalty for them.

"Even in school, I tell the headmaster ... my children will be treated like everyone else. No special privileges, otherwise they will be so stuck-up, with all those airs."

Apparently, Mokhzani and Mukhriz used to play down their family background when studying in the United States.

Mukhriz's flatmate only found out when the US Secret Service called to run routine checks prior to a visit by the couple.

"His flatmate, being from Colombo, had a nasty shock with the Secret Service. He only calmed down when they told him the Prime Minister of Malaysia was coming. He really gave it to Mukhriz. By the time we had dinner, Mukhriz had to give him something for his headache."

Likewise, students on the campus where Mokhzani was studying only knew who his parents were when they visited him. "They were all hanging out of their windows to look at us."

Her eldest, Marina, perhaps best demonstrates what she has been trying to say. Marina was returning to school in England shortly before her father's appointment as a Minister. Her mother left a note in her luggage, telling her that by the time she read it, her father would already be Education Minister.

According to her mother, Marina's response was: "Big deal!"

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