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First Queen, Siti Hasmah among four honoured

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JOHOR BARU, Mon. - Malaysia's first Queen, and the Prime Minister's wife were among four women who were honoured with the Tokoh Wanita award by the Sultanah of Johor, for their outstanding contributions to the nation.

Tunku Puan Besar Kurshiah Almarhum Tunku Besar Burhanuddin, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, veteran politician and the nation's first woman Cabinet Minister Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim and a former leading member of the St John's Ambulance movement Toh Puan Sadiyah Sardon were presented the awards on the occasion of Hari Mawar or Johor Women's Day.

However, the 87-year-old Tunku Puan Besar Kurshiah and Dr Siti Hasmah were unable to attend the presentation ceremony at the Mawar Hall.

Born in May 1911 in Negri Sembilan, Tunku Puan Besar Kurshiah was married at age 18 to Tunku Abdul Rahman Tunku Muhammad Shah.

Four years later in 1933, she became the Tunku Ampuan of Negri Sembilan.

When Malaysia achieved Independence in August 1957, the couple ascended the throne as the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong and Raja Permaisuri Agong.

Tunku Puan Besar Kurshiah was honoured for her outstanding work in the field of welfare.

She was also active in promoting education and the status of Malay women, primarily through the establishment of the Malaysian Islamic Women's Welfare Board in 1961. She still heads the organisation.

She has two daughters - the Sultanah of Kedah Tuanku Bahiyah and the consort of the late Tunku Bendahara of Johor Tunku Shahariah.

Dr Siti Hasmah was honoured for her work in promoting women's and family health care.

After her husband Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's appointment as Prime Minister, she continued to work tirelessly to promote women's health, family planning and literacy. She is also among the country's leading crusaders against drug abuse.

Sadiyah has had a long and illustrious association with the St John's Ambulance and the Malaysian Council of Chesire Homes movements.

She was also one of the country's earliest and most enthusiastic promoters of women's football, and led the Malaysian women's football team to the Asian Cup Women's Football tournaments in Japan and Hong Kong.

This still-glamorous looking 74-year-old is the wife of former Minister and diplomat, the late Tun Saadon Zubir.

Fatimah was a leading light of the Wanita Umno movement from the days of the founding of Umno.

In 1969, she was elected Member of Parliament for Jitra Padang Terap in Kedah. That same year, she became the first woman Cabinet Minister when she was appointed Minister for Welfare, a post she held till 1973.

In her speech, Sultanah Zanariah pledged to continue Mawar's charitable work in spite of the difficult economic situation in the country.

She said Mawar would continue to reach out and help the needy "as much as it is able to", and urged its members to support the Government's efforts at economic recovery.

In conjunction with Hari Mawar, Sultanah Zanariah donated RM15,000 to the Tabung Dana Negara on behalf of Mawar.

A further RM265,000 was donated by Mawar to a string of charitable causes across the eight districts in Johor.

Mawar, or Johor Women's Council, was founded 16 years ago and is headed by Sultanah Zanariah.

The organisation has in the past donated millions of ringgit for charitable and welfare causes in Johor.

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