

18/05/2000

## Batik designer tells court of her humiliation

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A batik designer felt humiliated, degraded and insulted when an article in a Wanita magazine called the hand-drawn batik attire her company produced for the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit leaders, "ugly", the High Court heard today.

Datuk Paduka Sharifah Hishmah Shahabudin, the batik designer and managing director of Tjanting Handicraft Sdn, said: "When I delivered the finished batik shirts to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, they were overjoyed. The Press was in full praise of my creations.

"But this (the article) was totally the opposite. I felt numb in my throat. I couldn't believe it. I never expected a person to be so rude and unkind to me and my creations.

"It meant that my goods were ugly, hideous and repulsive and it was unbecoming of me and my company to present such an ugly and repulsive handicraft to our State guests.

" ... I was selected and recommended by the Prime Minister's Department and Miti to handle the project because I have handled similar projects successfully."

Sharifah Hishmah, a member of the Perlis royalty, said that if the batik attire had been so ugly, the ministry would not have accepted them and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would not have worn it.

Sharifah Hishmah was testifying in a defamation suit she filed against Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Bhd (publisher of Wanita), the then Wanita editor Wirda Adnan, its reporter Asiah Mion and Times Offset (M) Sdn Bhd (printer) over the article.

Tjanting and Sharifah Hishmah are suing the defendants for falsely and maliciously publishing and printing in an article headlined "Ragam" under the byline of "Bersama Asiah Mion" in the February issue of Wanita. They are seeking damages, costs and other relief.

Replying to a question by her counsel, Shamsul-Bahrain Ibrahim, Sharifah Hishmah said a statement in the article meant that she "was responsible for frustrating the campaign to boycott American and British goods".

Sharifah Hishmah said the article was written maliciously and that the writer was trying to be sarcastic.

She said the Apec leaders who wore her batik attire did not protest or disapprove of them.

She said Utusan Melayu had published on Nov 19, 1998, a picture of the leaders, commenting that they looked smart and stylish in their colourful batik attire, then three months later came up with the alleged defamatory article.

"It was an act of sensationalism solely motivated by a desire to boost the sale of their magazine and to live off our business. It was done to slander my goods and ruin my profession. I have suffered tremendously."

Cross-examined by counsel M. Reza Hassan, for all the defendants, Sharifah Hishmah said she had 16 years of experience in the batik industry.

She said the exclusive Apec batik attire made from "crepe satin jacquard silk" was sewn by a tailor recommended by her and approved by the Prime Minister's Department and Miti.

Hearing continues before Judge Datuk Dr R.K. Nathan on Friday.

(END)