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Nik Faizah achieves her mission to be a teacher

IPOH, Tues. - Considering she comes from a family of teachers - from her grandfather right down to her parents and even uncles, it was only expected that "Tokoh Guru 2000" Nik Faizah Mustapha made it her mission to become one.

Born in Kota Baru, Kelantan, Nik Faizah, 58, had her early education in the Government Girls English School in Kota Baru and later at the Malay Girls College and Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur.

She received her diploma and degree in education from Universiti Malaya and her Masters from Ohio University in the US. Her teaching career began in Sekolah Menengah Zainab, Kota Baru, in 1966.

Believing that every person is a "learner", Faizah said, a teacher's task was to make people want to learn, either the hard or the easy way.

"Depending on the situation, there is no straight-forward method in motivating or inspiring someone to learn.

"But I believe one cannot force someone into learning. It would be better to present him or her with choices," she said in an interview after receiving the "Tokoh Guru" award from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who opened the Hari Guru celebrations today.

Nik Faizah reached the pinnacle of her career when she was appointed the Chief Inspector of Schools in 1993, the first woman to ever hold the post.

"People tend to think I was appointed because I was a woman. But it is not a question of being a man and woman, but more of ability, skills and a good track record.

"I believe I was appointed because I had all the required qualities," she said.

Her most memorable experience during her time as inspector was the visits she made to rural schools in Sabah and Sarawak and to the Orang Asli schools in Kampung Titom and Lenjam in Pahang.

Nik Faizah who retired in 1997, is today a member of the Education Service Commission. She was among five teachers awarded the Tokoh Guru 2000 today.

The other four are Tawi Yaakub, 79, from Malacca; Cheong Yong Kwong, 64, from Penang; Abdul Ghani Wahab, 65, of Labuan, Sabah; and Dr Seenivasagam Muthukumar Ponniah, 73, of Penang.

The Teachers' Day celebrations also saw 12 schools receiving the Sekolah Harapan Negara 2000 awards, as well as the Innovative Award for Teachers, the Special Education Excellent Teacher's Award, Creative Writing Award in the Bahasa Malaysia and English Language categories and the Award for the Best Debating Teams among teachers.

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