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We've come a long way ...

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JAN 1 - Datuk Ainum Mohamed Saaid, deputy chief executive of the Securities Commission, takes over as the new Attorney-General. She is the first woman to hold the post.

Jan 12 - The national women taekwondo exponents are invited to compete in the prestigious World Gold Cup meet in Vietnam. It was Malaysia's first ever participation in the competition, which featured the world's finest exponents by invitation only.

Jan 13 - Tengku Nor Azura Tengku Awang does the country proud as the first Malaysian model to be chosen as Asia's face for Christian Dior.

Jan 18 - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad creates a new ministry to handle women's affairs and appoints Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil as its head. The ministry, officially named the Women And Family Development Ministry on Feb 17, will concentrate on laws and regulations, policies and their implementation; advocacy and awareness programmes especially for women in the rural areas, and women's development programmes, including training programmes and providing input for other ministries and government agencies.

Jan 24 - Datuk Siti Norma Yaakob, 61, becomes the first and only woman in the country to be appointed as a Federal Court judge. She was also the first woman to be appointed a High Court judge and was the only woman judge in the country from 1983 until the mid-1990s.

Jan 24 - A milestone agreement to gather information on the status of rural women in Sabah is signed between the State's Women Affairs Unit (HAWA) and Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Under the agreement, specific programmes would be planned and implemented for women, once basic data is gathered by June under the "Women and Development" research project.

Jan 30 - A group of 11 women (G11) led by Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the wife of the Prime Minister, who visited Iraq in March 2000, urges the Government to continue pressuring the United Nations to lift the embargo on the country. Dr Siti Hasmah said the call was made in the name of humanity and was not politically motivated.

Feb 5 - Reny Rachel Vargis, 23, becomes the first Malaysian chosen to fly the Johnson Space Centre's KC-135A reduced-gravity aircraft under the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) Reduced Gravity Student Flight Opportunities programme.

Feb 5 - Former Miss Malaysia/World 89/90 Erra Fazira becomes the new face of Avon. Described as a "complete woman", she was chosen for her poise, posture and personality.

Feb 8 - The Girls make a name for themselves as the first Tamil girl group in Malaysia. The group, comprising three Malay women and two Indian women, join forces to cut a Tamil album.

Feb 9 - TV3 sportcaster Ras Adiba Radzi becomes the first female commentator for the first leg of the United International Motonautique Formula One World Powerboat Championship 2001. The 32-year-old provided up-to-the-second commentary to about 60,000 spectators who watched the action live around the course at the Tebrau Straits in Johor.

Feb 11 - The formation of Puteri Umno is approved by the Umno Supreme Council. (It was officially launched on Aug 3). Aimed at attracting younger women into the party, Bumiputera women who are 35 or below are eligible to join.

Feb 19 - The Selangor Wives Welfare and Charity Body (Balkis) announces

that it will build Rumah Balkis to provide shelter and help to troubled women. The shelter will provide women with skills so that they can lead normal and independent lives.

March 11 - An information kit on rape management is launched by the All Women's Action Society (Awam). The kit, which contains a 40-page booklet and four leaflets in Bahasa Malaysia and English, was based on the report of a national research on rape undertaken in 1999.

April 1 - Supreme council member Azalina Othman Said is appointed Puteri Umno chief. The appointment was made by the supreme council during its meeting, chaired by party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Puteri's membership is open to women below 35 years of age, though its leader can be up to 40 years old.

April 6 - Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil comes to the defence of a remisier who was declined service by an Immigration Department staff who claimed that she was not "covered". In the incident, the mother of a 10-year-old girl wore a sleeveless blouse. "There is no law in this country prohibiting sleeveless blouses. Such an outfit is normal in our multi-racial and multi-cultural society."

April 6 - The Women and Family Development Ministry takes over functions and staff of the Women's Affairs Department (Hawa), which was previously under the National Unity and Social Development Ministry. The National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) also comes under the ministry's purview.

April 13 - The Malaysian Hockey Federation (Women's Section) is awarded the International Olympic Council's 2001 IOC Women and Sport Trophy for Asia for its outstanding contribution to the promotion of women in sport.

April 23 - Wanita MCA takes on the additional role of matchmaker with the setting up of "Cupid Club" in an effort to boost the Chinese population. The club provides a platform for single men and women to interact and look for partners through social and recreational activities.

April 24 - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad unveils the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) which addresses women-related issues such as increasing female participation in the labour market and providing more education and training opportunities for women. Laws and regulations that inhibit the advancement of women will also be reviewed and women can look forward to more nurseries, kindergartens and opportunities to work from home in the future.

May 3 - Wanita MCA launches a hotline service for Klang Valley residents facing social and urban services problems. The hotline has seven volunteers comprising lawyers, teachers and professional counsellors. The free service is available on Thursdays for two hours between 8pm and 10pm.

May 14 - Datuk Mohaiyani Shamsudin, managing director of Mohaiyani Securities Sdn Bhd and deputy chairman of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, is chosen as one of The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World for 2001. She is the second Malaysian to receive this award.

June 1 - Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam Malaysia sets up a crisis centre called Pusat Khidmat Wanita as an avenue for Muslim women to air their problems. The centre has a team of 40 counsellors/advisors, with two manning the centre daily. It also has a team of syariah lawyers who advise on legal matters.

June 4 - A new chapter is created in Pas history when a woman member Dr Lo Lo Mohd Ghazali is elected as a central working committee member. Dr Lo Lo, also a Pas Muslimat committee member, polled 559 votes to clinch the ninth position in the 18-member committee.

June 13 - The Malaysian women's volleyball team scores its first ever victory at the Thanglong Cup 2001, an equivalent of the South-East Asian championship, in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The team defeated defending

Sea Games champions Thailand 3-2 in the semifinal and the Philippines 3-1 in the final.

July 2 - Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Malaysian AIDS Council President, reports at the Project Iceberg HIV/AIDS Awareness Programme that statistics revealed that women now made up 10 per cent of reported HIV/AIDS cases in Malaysia.

July 4 - The Government launched a RM20 million special fund for companies owned or managed by women under a special financial package for women entrepreneurs.

July 5 - Our squash ace, Nicol David, is accorded a World No.3 placing in the under 23 international rankings introduced by the Women International Squash Professional Association (WISPA).

July 7 - After a lapse of 20 years, the Women's section of the Malaysian Hockey Federation participated in the 10th Women's Hockey World Cup qualifiers in France from Sept 18 to 30.

July 12 - Datuk Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said under the Islamic Family Law Act, a Muslim man could only declare to divorce his wife before a judge in a Syariah Court and will have to face the Syariah Court if he makes a divorce declaration via the cellular phone's short message service (sms).

July 15 - Datuk Shahrizat, instructed the National Population and Family Development Board to immediately conduct a study to find out the causes of the recent violence against women.

July 23 - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the Government proposes to amend Article 8(2) of the Federal Constitution to enable women to enjoy equal rights as men and ensure they are not discriminated against.

July 29 - The Home Ministry has been asked to review the immigration laws relating to foreign men and women who marry locals and allow them to stay in the country. Datuk Shahrizat, said an automatic three-year visa or permanent residency status should be granted to foreign husbands and foreign women who are separated or divorced from local men.

Aug 4 - Wanita MCA's Cupid Club got off to a roaring start. The club aims to encourage healthy social activities as well as create opportunities for single, unmarried Chinese men and women to meet and get to know each other.

Aug 25 - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that foreign husbands of Malaysians will be granted permanent resident status as part of a move to provide for gender equality.

Aug 25 - National Women's Day celebration was celebrated at a grand dinner for 5,000 at the Palace of the Golden Horses which was hosted by Datuk Shahrizat. The guest of honour was Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. A conference on gender equality was held the next morning.

Sept 1 - A new immigration ruling was passed by the Home Ministry stating that foreign men married to Malaysian women can stay longer in the country and foreign wives, who are either estranged or divorced from Malaysian men, will also be given the same privilege.

Sept 8 - Puteri Umno taught more than 400 women and children the basics of how to protect themselves from attackers. The participants, from all over the country, learned basic martial art moves for four hours at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Sept 11 - Datuk Shahrizat, officially launched Malaysia's first men's health portal Menshealth.com.my.

Sept 17 - Datuk Seri Nazri Abdul Aziz, Entrepreneur Development Minister, revealed that priority will be given to single mothers who apply for loans from the 13 funds under the Entrepreneur Development Ministry in

order for them to become self-reliant.

Oct 7 - At a symposium on "Reducing The HIV Vulnerability Of Rural And Island Women In Asia And The Pacific" the Chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee-Asia Pacific (RSC-AP) said that out of the 45,152 cases of HIV/AIDS reported, 2,491 are women.

Oct 12 - The Women and Family Development Ministry launched the Afghan Trust Fund at its headquarters aimed at women to raise money for Afghan women and children and managed to collect RM118,500 in public contributions within 48 hours.

Oct 14 - Our super-bowlers, SEA Games gold medallists Shalin Zulkifli and Alex Liew, made it a double for Malaysia by winning the women's and men's PBAP International Classic titles, and prize money of RM8,000 and RM12,000 respectively at Pearl Bowl, Paranaque City, Manila.

Oct 19 - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad unveiled that under the new Budget, widows will continue to receive their late husband's pensions even if they remarry, a privilege they lose at present and that the Government has allocated RM59 million for improving the quality of women's lives, particularly those in the rural areas.

Nov 4 - Datuk Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman, the Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar, announced that the Kelantan government plans to build a sports complex for the exclusive use of women as soon as the State Government had enough funds for the project.

Nov 6 - According to the latest census report released by the Statistics Department, men continue to outnumber women in Malaysia except for Penang, Kedah and Perlis. Nov 15 - Four hundred inexperienced women entrepreneurs were given a chance to venture into business at the opening of the nationwide Ramadan Bazaar 2001 at Bukit Bintang Plaza by Datuk Rizalman Abdullah, Entrepreneur Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary.

Nov 25 - Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) Executive director Ivy Josiah said at the launch of its "16 days Activism Against Gender Violence" campaign that an improved Teledera hotline service to deal with child abuse, domestic violence, foreign domestic worker abuse and rape will be advocated soon.

Dec 3 - 3R (Respect, Relax and Respond), the innovative Malaysian TV programme tailored for young women was nominated in the Best Infotainment category for the Asian Television Awards 2001 to be held in Singapore on Nov 5.

Dec 6 - Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, the Malaysian Aids Council President, voiced at a public forum that a restriction on condom sales would result in more unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

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