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How they started in politics

Anita Anandarajah

"IT was a trip to Malacca in 1956 when I was 11 that got me started. My dad, eldest brother and I were going to welcome Tuanku Abdul Rahman who had just returned from London after successful negotiations with the British for independence.

"Dad put me on his shoulders so I could see Tuanku past the crowd. I had no idea what was going on!

"I was also at Stadium Merdeka in 1957 when Tuanku proclaimed independence. Those two historical events had a great impact on me.

"Also, my parents were both actively involved in Umno, and party leaders from MIC and MCA were always coming to our house. I would listen in to their conversations. - Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, Umno vice-president

"I began attending public rallies in 1969, when I was only in Remove class. I was fired up more by what I felt and by what I saw as unjust policies of the Government.

"Later on, when I was studying in Australia, my conviction in the democratic ideals of freedom and equality was strengthened. I wanted to see a just and progressive Malaysia." - Kerk Kim Hock, DAP secretary-general

"I loved history in school. I would devour biographies of leaders, both good guys and weird guys (Hitler), because they all had a point to prove. Hitler could evoke tears and laughter in a speech. Sukarno was charismatic. (But hey, I'm not encouraging socialism or communism here!)

"This led me to a conclusion: you have to be charismatic and you must believe in what you do.

"In upper secondary I would collect pictures of great leaders and keep them in a box. My parents used to laugh at me! But I always knew I would become a politician.

"In university I had to decide between law and political science. Dr Mahathir was a medical doctor first. I chose to do the same. I could see the similarity between law and politics; we fight for equality and justice."

"But before anything else, you must first register as voters so that you can exercise your rights. You should also be exposed to our history and current events." - Azalina Othman, Puteri Umno pro-tem chief

"Those were interesting times. I was about 15 or 16 years old, a young student in Batu Pahat. People were fighting for independence. I would listen to speeches by Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Datuk Onn Jaafar, and the like.

"What made me decide to enter politics was three men - Ahmad Boestaman, Ishak Haji Mohamad and Dr Burhanuddin Helmi - genuine nationalists.

"I joined Parti Rakyat Malaysia in university, and have remained here since." - Dr Syed Husin Ali, Parti Rakyat Malaysia president

"It was 1959, and I was a student at an Arabic school in Alor Setar. My 20-year-old friend was contesting in the very first Malaysian general election.

"I was encouraged by the environment at that time. We had just achieved independence, and everyone was talking about politics. It was just like the World Cup fever!

"I felt that the Government wasn't paying much attention to the poor 'backward' people in Alor Star. So I became a supporter in the 1964 elections (Pas was called PMIP then).

"The political movement in the Middle East was also a great influence on

me when I was studying at the Al-Azhar university. My interest was piqued further as a law student in London, where I was exposed to so many political groups." - Azizan Abdul Razak, Pas information chief

"When I was in university, I learnt that instead of voicing my opinions to the Press, I could get involved in the process to effect change. At least that way I stood a chance to implement changes in society" - Datuk Fong Chan Onn, MCA Vice-President, Minister of Human Resources

"A friend signed me up as a MIC member when I was working as a broadcaster with RTM. She worked with leprosy patients, and I would accompany her sometimes. I learnt that service above self gives so much satisfaction.

"I also discovered that a lot of women were not aware of their rights, and the opportunities available. I developed a special interest in women's issues and legal issues. I thought I was in a position to help, especially since I grew up in a rubber estate, and my parents worked as tappers. - Senator Jaya Partiban, Wanita MIC chief