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Dr M, wife awarded honorary doctorates

SINTOK, Thurs. - Former First Lady Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali today thanked the Sultan and the State of Kedah for having sent "a certain someone from Seberang Perak, Alor Star, to Singapore in 1947".

She told an audience at Universiti Utara Malaysia she would not have come to Kedah to settle down and raise a family had the Government not sent Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to medical school in Singapore.

Dr Siti Hasmah and Dr Mahathir were at UUM to receive honorary doctorates at a special convocation ceremony.

Dr Mahathir was awarded an honorary doctorate in Management Development, while Dr Siti Hasmah received hers in Social Work Management from UUM Chancellor, the Sultan of Kedah, Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah.

While Dr Mahathir's acceptance speech proffered advice on good management, his wife's was leavened with humorous vignettes on how she, as a young urban doctor from Klang, Selangor, adapted to the rural life in Kedah.

Dr Siti Hasmah spoke of her initial confusion over the "thick and incomprehensible" northern dialect and the many ways she used to win over kampung folk who were suspicious of modern medicine, including attending village gatherings even if it meant taking rides with strangers.

"I was once forced to hitch a ride with a village headman on his motorcycle to deliver a health lecture at his village, and along the way the bike hit a rut and we were flung into a padi field. The whole village was agog with the story of how the headman and a female doctor rolled into the field.

"Imagine if it had happened today, it would have been exploited by Pas' Harakah!

"My husband, my children and I will never forget the happy memories and the love that was shown to us by the people here," she said.

In his speech, the Sultan said the awards were in recognition of the former First Couple's contributions to the development of Kedah and the country during Dr Mahathir's 22-year tenure as Prime Minister, not forgetting their service as government doctors in the State.

Sultan Abdul Halim credited Dr Mahathir as the main driving force behind the setting-up of UUM, the sixth public university in the country, designated to be the leading research institution in management studies.

"The rakyat of Kedah and I are very proud that the idea for UUM came from a native son," the Sultan said.

"Dr Mahathir's contributions during his 22 years as Prime Minister are many, and all the honour and accolades accorded to him would not compare to all that he did for this country.

"Looking back at all that he had given to Kedah and the country, I am personally proud of his wisdom and contributions," he said.

The Sultan also spoke glowingly of Dr Siti Hasmah's social and charitable work as a medical doctor in Kedah and as the wife of the Prime Minister.

The couple later cut a birthday cake, a surprise gift from UUM. Both Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah celebrated their 79th birthday on July 10 and July 12 respectively.

Present were UUM vice-chancellor Datuk Dr Ahmad Fawzi Basri and Bukit Kayu Hitam State Assemblyman Khalidah Adibah Ayob, who represented Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

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