

01/11/2003

Dr Siti Hasmah a model for women

M.K. Megan

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali has registered many firsts in her life, but perhaps the most memorable is the Darjah Yang Mulia Setia Mahkota Malaysia (First Class) conferred on her.

Wives of the country's former Prime Ministers were bestowed similars award after their husbands died, but Dr Siti Hasmah received it together with her husband Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today from Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin.

She is one of the first Malay woman doctors in Malaysia and the first woman to be a government medical officer in Kedah.

She was also one of the first Malay women to take up medicine at the King Edward VII College of Medicine, University of Malaya in Singapore after the war.

She graduated and joined the government health service in 1955.

She was appointed medical officer in the Maternal and Child Health Department - the first woman to the post - and in 1974 became the first woman to be appointed State Maternal and Child Health Officer.

In short, Dr Siti Hasmah has set an example of personal and professional achievement for all women in the country.

Since her husband became Prime Minister in 1981, she has used her position to campaign tirelessly for women's health, family planning, drug abuse control and adult literacy. The award is a recognition of 22 years of public service, voluntary work and leadership in various fields.

As president of Bakti (Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers), Dr Siti Hasmah has been especially active in efforts to educate young people about the dangers of drug abuse.

She is also active internationally in promoting the cause of rural women. In 1992, at the invitation of Queen Fabiola of Belgium, she attended the First Ladies Summit for the Economic Advancement of Rural Women in Geneva.

She was chosen as one of the six Core-Group Initiators of First Ladies representing the Asia-Pacific Region.

In 1985, at the invitation of First Lady Nancy Reagan, she attended the First Ladies' Conference on Drug Abuse in Washington. She also represented Malaysia at the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Vienna in 1987.

In February 1994, Dr Siti Hasmah attended the ISC Council Meeting in Brussels. Then, in September 1995, she was appointed Chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia Pacific Region. In November 1996, she took over its presidency.

On the local front, Dr Siti Hasmah held the position of president of the Malaysian Girl Guides Association, chairman of the Kedah Family Planning Association, president of the Malaysian Medical Association Foundation, president of the Association for the Rehabilitation of Handicapped Children, vice-president of the Federation of Family Planning Associations of Malaysia, patron of the Malaysian Association of Maternal Health and Neonate and patron of the Malaysian Pediatric Association.

She is the patron of the Badminton Association of Malaysia, affectionately known as "Bonda Badminton", and the country's No 1 badminton fan.

Apart from the Tun award she received today, Dr Siti Hasmah has received

many other honours from the Yang Di Pertuan Agong, the Sultan of Selangor and the Sultan of Kedah, such as Knight Grand Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of the Royal Household of Kedah (SSDK), Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Crown of Selangor (DPMS), Officer of the Most Distinguished Order of the Defender of the Realm Kedah (KMN), Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Crown of Kedah (SMK) and Distinguished Service Medal (PCK).

Dr Siti Hasmah is also the author of several articles on family medicine and the socio-economic factors associated with pregnancy and childbearing in Malaysia.

Besides accompanying her husband on domestic and foreign visits, Dr Siti Hasmah finds the time to be with her seven children and numerous grandchildren, besides pursuing her hobbies and other interests. On June 20, 1997 she was appointed Chancellor of the Multimedia University.