

03/07/2003

## Women groundbreakers

Sharifah Sakinah Aljunid

WANITA Umno's Galeri Jatiwanita, which featured the successes of about 200 Malay women of our time, was rated as one of the top exhibitions debuting at this year's Umno General Assembly in Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

The prime location notwithstanding, it was substance that won over form as condensed accounts of these exemplary women were displayed along with their photographs. Like most of the visitors there, one couldn't help but be inspired and feel proud. The women had been selected on merit, for their contributions towards society.

Unless one were living under a rock, most were household names. Other names one could not put a face to, but rang a bell nevertheless.

"So THAT'S what she looks like and THAT'S her real name," one woman remarked of novelist Salmi Manja, or rather Datin Saleha Abdul Rashid.

Another visitor, having heard of the 1901 hotdog chain of outlets, was pleased to find out that the proprietor, Tengku Rozidar Tengku Zainal, is a 30-something woman of the new millennium.

It was obvious that Galeri Jatiwanita's aim at giving recognition to these groundbreakers had been achieved.

Galeri Jatiwanita is the brainchild of Datuk Dr Norraesah Mohd, executive chairman of Compass Strategic Advisory Sdn Bhd.

The exhibition was put together in record time - a month and a half. Despite shortcomings in finances and resources, she managed to get it all together a day before the General Assembly started.

"Some of the women are known in their particular sectors but hardly acknowledged by society at large," said Norraesah, referring to the wide range of sectors represented by the personalities - politics, medical, legal, financial and agricultural.

There were different criteria for each sector. For example, to have qualified for mention in the retail category, the entrepreneur must own at least three outlets. Like most successful projects, putting everything together was no breeze.

She said: "We had to do extensive research, get the women to co-operate and also obtain information on them."

There was a problem getting those who are publicity-shy to agree to being featured.

"Some are just not interested in having their achievements highlighted," she added.

Co-ordinating it was tricky, she said, while executing the concept took two sleepless weeks.

Though the PWTC stint is over, the show goes on. The exhibition is going on a nationwide tour, starting with Terengganu. There, the state's more prominent women will be added to the ones already being featured. The main exhibition will see principal and prominent players but state-level representation will be broader and will comprise leading daughters of each state.

Galeri Jatiwanita will eventually include other races, said Norraesah, but since it is a Wanita Umno project, only Malays will be showcased for now.

In retrospect, she said the response was wonderful, adding that many people surprised her with their compliments and bouquets. She also received brickbats, she admits,- one could not please everybody, it seems.

Galeri Jatiwanita may well culminate in the setting up of a permanent gallery, going by the encouragement from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to keep the show going.

The gallery will most likely be in Putrajaya, as envisioned by Datuk Paduka Rafidah Aziz, the Minister of International Trade and Industry and Wanita Umno chief.

"Datuk Paduka (Rafidah) showed solid support throughout," said Norraesah, adding that there was also a lot of help in the setting up of Galeri Jatiwanita from Affin Merchant President and CEO Datin Zuraida Atan.

Funded mainly by Wanita Umno and to some extent by private contributors, Galeri Jatiwanita at the PWTC made mention of the following luminaries, among others:

- \* Datuk Zakiah Laidin, first woman assistant police commissioner who served in the police force for 36 years.
- \* The first Malay woman doctor, Tan Sri Dr Salma Ismail, who underwent training during World War II. Now a director of Mediklinik Sdn Bhd, Dr Salma opened her first clinic in Kampung Baru in KL. Once when serving in Kedah, she was the only woman medical officer.
- \* Former Attorney-General Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid.
- \* The first woman to hold the post of Bank Negara governor, Tan Sri Zeti Akhtar Aziz.
- \* Political activist, the late Hajah Zainun Sulaiman. The well-loved "Ibu Zain" excelled in journalism and politics, and was once a state assemblywoman in Johor. Ibu Zain was the power and brains behind the first Hari Wanita (Woman's Day) in 1945.
- \* Datuk Asiah Abu Samah, who started off as a teacher in 1961, went on to become principal of Tunku Kurshiah College and in 1991 became the first woman director-general of education.
- \* Director-general of the National Space Agency (the Malaysian equivalent of Nasa) and professor in astrophysics, Professor Datuk Dr Mazlan Othman.
- \* Datuk Siti Maslamah Osman, Accountant General of Malaysia.
- \* Mercy Malaysia's Datuk Dr Jemilah Mahmood, who was recently in Iraq at the height of the war on Iraq. She was caught in an ambush and shot in the thigh.
- \* Kuala Lumpur High Court judge, Datuk Zainun Ali.
- \* Sisters in Islam executive director, Zainah Anwar.
- \* Malaysian AIDS Council president, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.
- \* Datuk Maznah Hamid, group executive chairman of Securiforce Sdn Bhd.
- \* Helena Abdul Hamid of Retailworks Sdn Bhd (which runs toy store Twinkles), who represents the country's up-and-coming entrepreneurs.
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