

Siti Hasmah makes good as career woman, wife and mother

A portrait of a successful career woman, loving mother and devoted wife . . . a report by REMEDIOS E. RULLAN, a lecturer at the University of Philippines, Baguio, who is at present doing a course in Malay Language Studies at the University of Malaya.



The doctor behind Mahathir's success

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I HOPE he will remain healthy and that God will give him strength and courage to carry on with his new responsibilities; I hope, too, that the support given to him, before and now will continue to be given to him so that he can achieve what we all want for a united, peaceful, and prosperous Malaysia.

The speaker is Dr. Siti Hasmah binti Mohamed Ali, wife of Deputy Premier Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad.

For this lovely and charming, fair-complexioned and soft-spoken woman who holds the distinction of being the second Malay woman doctor of Malay-

religious and conservative couple, the late Haji Mohamed Ali bin Taib and the late Hajjah Khatijah binti Ahmad.

The seven boys and three girls that make up the Mohamed Ali household were a noisy but disciplined lot, brought up with love, discipline and without favouritism.

Honesty, respect for elders, and the values of education were stressed, and the importance of religion taught consistently by personal example and practice.

Moreover, although there were cooks and amahs in the house, the Ali children divided chores among them. The three girls took turns in cooking and in cleaning the house.

The Ali children are bound together by a camaraderie and closeness, which have remained unimpaired by

moments in the serious discussions.

And, mixing with her among her colleagues, students, and friends is getting to know the reason for the personal affection and respect with which she is regarded by those who have known her—a total lack of vanity in her husband's position, along with a quiet firmness and unaffected friendliness.

Royal award

Almost 20 years of dedicated service has more than prepared Dr. Siti Hasmah for her present work. From a doctor in the medical, maternity and outpatient wards, she became the medical officer in charge, and then the first acting medical superintendent of the General Hospital, Kedah, the first Malay woman to be appointed.

ning Board.

For all of these and more she was honoured by the Sultan of Kedah when she was awarded the Setia Mahkota Kedah (S.M.K.) in 1971, an event which she considers one of the happiest in her life.

Looking at Dr. Siti Hasmah's active life as a doctor now, one finds it difficult to imagine her past as the most timid of the Ali girls, afraid of the dark, easily scared of centipedes and the vaguest signs of death.

Moreover, one would consider it unlikely for her to have pursued medicine, with only biology for a science subject in school. But medicine became a challenge to her as formidable as her childhood fear of a piece of cloth used to drape a coffin.

The very sight of this

thir, who was her good friend and tutor.

It is this same seriousness of purpose and undeviating pursuit of one's ambition that Dr. Siti Hasmah has sought to instil, among other things, not only in her students, but more so in her five children, Marina, 18, Mirzan, 17; Melinda (Aishah), 16; Mokhzani, 15, and Mukhriz, 11.

Influenced by her own parents, Dr. Siti Hasmah has brought up her own children with affection and strictness. Not allowing her job to come between her and her family, she seeks to be with them as much as possible, attending, among other things, to their education and emotional needs.

Good rapport between her and them is evident

intimacy which has not failed to impress anyone who calls on them.

Being with the Mahathir family is no different from being with a typically close-knit and happy family. Breakfasts and dinners are usually taken by the whole family, especially when the two abroad are home for the holidays.

Dinner usually means a jolly time together, with the oldest in the family, Dr. Mahathir, leading the fun with endless jokes. Dinner is usually taken leisurely while watching TV.

joys watching musical programmes, like Bakat TV.

Happy home

The Mahathir family gatherings are like democratic caucuses, during which varied issues are discussed, dissent freely aired and seriously considered. Once Dr. Siti Hasmah suggested that since all the children's names start with an "M", the girls' names should at least end in "H", thus "Marinah" and "Melindah".

Marina objected saying

with a happy and aesthetically satisfying home, she is even more valuable in her intimate role as helpmate, friend, and companion.

No doubt her sensitivity and practicality have contributed much to their harmonious relationship which permeates with a quiet grace which is evident to anyone who has been with them.

Dr. Siti Hasmah at home is the efficient administrator, either packing Dr. Mahathir's bag when he has to travel or when they go together, collecting all the news-

papers and spontaneity was that of Dr. Siti Hasmah during last year's Hari Raya Haji.

This picture, caught not by a camera but one's own eyes can only be inadequately described in words. Nevertheless it perfectly demonstrates all that have been said so far about Dr. Siti Hasmah.

With beads of perspiration on her forehead and on the tip of her nose, Dr. Siti Hasmah alternately sat, knelt, and stood with other women under the high and willow bamboo that cluster around the backyard of

the Mahathir's "pondok" in Kedah, silently and busily cooking and supervising the preparations for a luncheon for some 100 people.

At half past twelve, when the food was ready, the men gathered to one side, talking with Dr. Mahathir, the women to one side with Melinda joining them, and the children at another place with Mokhzani and Mukhriz sitting with them.

Dr. Siti Hasmah remained where the pots and pans were and served until every one had eaten. It was only then that she scooped rice for herself and ate with the other cooks.

At no time is Dr. Mahathir more quiet than when he is featured in the news, after which Dr. Siti Hasmah and the children would comment not only on his speech but also on his posture and paunch.

Once or twice, Dr. Mahathir would declare in defence: "I am 50 years old, but my paunch is flat." Then he would stretch himself to a military posture in his chair and tapping his belly twice for emphasis.

In turn, Dr. Siti Hasmah gets "nasty" remarks for any unsightly bulge she puts on. Most often she is reminded at dinner about this by a tender, but firm announcement from the head of the table: "enough rice for mummy."

Dr. Siti Hasmah shares the love of music with her musical-minded family, each of whom can play a musical instrument.

Marina, Mirzan and Mukhriz play the piano, while Melinda the Hammond organ. Mokhzani plays the drum and Dr. Mahathir the flute.

Though out of practice now, Dr. Siti Hasmah used to play the violin and was once featured with her two sisters over Radio Kuala Lumpur.

that her name would not only sound masculine and ugly but might be understood to mean something else, while Melinda simply said she did not like the idea.

Dr. Mahathir entered the discussion by saying: "Mummy, there is objection there (pointing to where Marina was) and there (pointing to where Melinda sat) so?"

That Dr. Siti Hasmah has profoundly influenced Dr. Mahathir's life and work is certain. Over

paper clippings on the family since 1964, or in tidying up Dr. Mahathir's study table.

She does housekeeping on weekdays, cooks special dishes for the family on the big occasions, and shops for family needs and household items.

Sincerity

A scene so touching in its rustic simplicity and most appealing in its

Hussein puts his faith in Mahathir

By K. Das

Kuala Lumpur: "I have made my choice and can only pray and hope that the choice is a correct one and that he will be accepted and supported by the country generally" — Prime Minister Hussein Onn announcing Dr Mahathir Mohamed as Deputy Prime Minister.

There was a gasp in the audience of pressmen and the applause that began before the anticipated announcement scattered and died. Searching glances around the Prime Minister's office filled the short, surprised silence. The Prime Minister himself closed his secret file and secured the red tape around it. He looked tense. His aides, including the Information Minister, Taib Mahmud, looked as surprised as the rest of the audience.

It then dawned on all present why the Premier had indeed launched his Deputy on a hope and a prayer. The choice of Dr Mahathir as a potential successor must have been Prime Minister Hussein Onn's most difficult decision since he took office.

In choosing Mahathir — author of the *Malay Dilemma*, a book which is still banned here for its highly provocative statement of Malay grievances and arguments for special treatment for the *bumiputras* (sons of the soil) — as Deputy Premier of a multiracial country in which the Chinese make up 35% of the population and the Indians 10%, Datuk Hussein Onn ended nearly two months of speculation but set in motion another talking point for Malaysia's minorities.

The agonising issue: Will Dr Mahathir, conventionally regarded as an inflexible Malay-firster, undergo a transformation that will win him trust and confidence, especially of the Chinese?

Some of his recent statements lead observers to believe that he has such a transformation in mind. His national language policy, too, must see some changes since it is yet another issue that preoccupies the non-Malays, who feel that speed is not of the essence in making Malay the sole official and social language.

If the naming of the controversial Education Minister was a surprise, another surprise distracted the newsmen almost at once, and the Prime Minister was asked questions — very obliquely in the name of politeness — why the most senior Vice-President of the United

Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Agriculture Minister Ghafar Baba, was dropped from the Cabinet. Only the day before, newspapers had headlined Ghafar on "tip-offs" as Datuk Hussein's choice for Deputy.

The Prime Minister answered with equal politeness and equal obliqueness, and very much to the point as the question was framed, that the Agriculture post would be filled in due course.

On analysis, the Cabinet reshuffle turned out to be a good exercise in balancing power, meeting some expectations of the various component parties in the ruling National Front, checking the powerful lobbies within UMNO, calming some fears of foreign investors and returning some confidence to the multiracial population vis-à-vis any ultra

Malay nationalism. While there have been privately-voiced reservations about the appointments of Dr Mahathir as Deputy Premier and Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah as Finance Minister, the innovation that has balanced the worry is the appointment of three full ministers without portfolio to assist the Prime Minister.

The new ministers include an Indian and a Chinese, who will assist Datuk Hussein in matters of law and economics. The two, Datuk Athi Nahappan and Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan, having served as deputy ministers of law and finance, are seen by the ordinary Chinese and Indians as "deputy prime ministers"; and the fact that a third full minister, former deputy home minister

...also assists the Premier in matters which seem to them not to be of great importance.

The initial gasp of surprise, it is thought, will be somewhat muted. The Premier, his powers will not be as embracing as those of the late Tun Dr Ismail, the late Tun Abdul Razak or Datuk Hussein himself when they were deputies. By appointing three ministers to assist him, the Prime Minister has in effect taken on the responsibility for Security, Law and Finance. He has also retained Defence, and as he announced soon after the Cabinet shuffle, his priority will be security.

In effect, the Deputy Premier will have to concentrate on Education, a portfolio fraught with enough problems, as became obvious last week when students in Kuala Lumpur took over the campus of the Mara Institute of Technology.

If the circumscribing of power by creating additional ministers calmed fears over any extreme resurgent Malay nationalism, the same action also poured some balm over the anxieties of foreign investors who were said to be worried about the consequences of Tunku Razaleigh's appointment as Finance Minister. The new Minister's name has for the past year been synonymous with the very unpopular Petronas Development (Amendment) Act (the amendments empowered, in effect, Petronas to take over the shares of foreign investors in the petroleum industry without the payment of compensation).

While enjoying the assistance of a Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) Deputy Minister, Tunku Razaleigh has also to reckon with the former deputy, Chong Hon Nyan, as a watchdog minister of finance attached to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has also retained Raja Tan Sri Mohar, Chairman of Malaysian Airlines System (MAS), as his special economics adviser.

The appointment of a full minister to

assist in matters pertaining to law reflects Datuk Hussein's concern over corruption in high places.

Reaction to the new Cabinet has been generally uninspiring and the newspapers have as usual played up the more positive views and ignored the meaningful silences. The Malaysian Chinese Association, however, has not shown any official enthusiasm. From its central headquarters there is no doubt that the Party has accepted the Premier's decision, but Dr Mahathir must be conscious that the indifferent reaction is a measure of the MCA's disappointment. The *Review* understands that he has in recent months actively worked to change his image among the Chinese Party as well as the predominantly Chinese Party Gerakan membership.

Support from Party Gerakan, expressed by the Penang Chief Minister, Dr Lim

Chong Eu, was lukewarm and phrased in terms that must make the new Deputy Premier realize that the road ahead promises to be rough. Dr Lim said that "Datuk Hussein has made his choice and the country must support him."

Another National Front partner, Partai Islam (PI), has also failed to register any enthusiasm for the choice of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The major political parties in Sabah and Sarawak have unreservedly welcomed the new Cabinet. Although the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) has remained silent, the leaders of both Berjaya, the opposition, and Tun Mustapha's USNO (United Sabah National Organisation) in Kota Kinabalu have gone out of the way to express their enthusiasm for Datuk Onn's Cabinet, heaping praise on the new leadership with something like