

The Mahathir family

Dr. Hasmah

and Mirzan, Mokzani, Mukhriz
and Marinah and Ayesha

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ALOR STAR: "Mahathir is the one who canes the children," says Dr. Hasmah. She laughed and shuddered in mock horror. "I can't do it."

Dr. Mahathir had gone for Friday prayers, and during the hour he was away his wife chatted good-humouredly of life with him. She is a small, fair woman with quiet manners and charming tact.

The children came tumbling into the lounge to join us. There were the three brown bright-eyed, precocious little boys — Mirzan, 13, Mokzani, 11 and Mukhriz, seven.

They were all in long pants and

**PART TWO of the
personality profile**

By Leung Thong Ping

Mokzani and Mukhriz had connived to wear identical orange wet-look shirts, much to their mother's amusement.

There was quiet Ayesha, the Mahathirs' 12-year-old adopted daughter. Only 14-year-old Marinah, their eldest, was missing. She is studying at the Tengku Khursiah College in Seremban.

Dr. Hasmah told me they miss Marina very much, for they are a close family. Though the children are brought up less strictly than Dr. Mahathir himself was, there are some inflexible rules. The boys must be home by six in the evening.

Dr. Mahathir is a fair father. He hears grouses, regulates allowances fairly (two dollars a week if they are in secondary school and 20 cents a day in primary) and conducts "meshuarats" for decisions involving everybody. The children love these sessions. "Mukhriz," says his mother, "is the one who vetoes everything whether he understands them or not. He's the most talkative."

The children giggled while handsome Mukhriz rolled his lovely eyes, the best pair in the family, according to his envious sisters.

Dr. Hasmah herself had a fairly liberal childhood that resulted in her later prominence as the country's second Malay woman doctor.

Her father was Mohamed Ali bin Taib, a member of the Federal Public Services Commission. She grew up in Kuala Lumpur, the sixth in a brilliant family of 10.

Jalopies

The eldest, Ismail, was a Queen's Scholar. He is now Governor of Bank Negara. The youngest Zainal Abidin, an architect, is working on the Sabah National Mosque.

Hasmah played the violin and the piano and, together with her sisters Saleha and Jameah, performed over Radio Malaysia as the "Three Ali Sisters." The war interrupted her education.

When it was over, Hasmah, the most timid of the Ali girls, chose to do medicine. Handicapped by an arts background, she slogged through the course at the University of Singapore and graduated two years behind her batch.

By then, Mahathir who had courted her on the campus in a succession of old jalopies that included a Fiat and a Mayflower besides the BSA 250, was a medical officer with the Kedah Government.

They were very much in love. But Hasmah, a determined lass, first did her housemanship at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital.

Homely

They were married at 29 and lived in a two-room government flat in Alor Star. When the children started coming, they moved to a bigger house.

For three years life was predictable. They started work at eight and came home at four.

Hasmah's placidity was ruffled when he resigned to start his own practice. "I thought our security would be shaken."

The second jolt came when he decided to run for Parliament, and a third with the letter to the Tengku.

"I dreaded for his arrest. I was shocked, for he didn't tell me. But I trusted he would see himself out."

She stroked the cushion on her lap. "I have not thought of entering politics myself. I'm homely."