

**Siti Hasmah: No need to compete with hubby**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**July 9, 2015**

INTERVIEW During his 22-year reign as prime minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, while respected as a statesperson, also collected his fair share of brickbats as head of the country's administration.

On the flip side, his wife Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, 89, has always been admired by friends and foes alike for her gentle and motherly nature.

Unlike her husband, she has never been caught up in any controversy, political or otherwise.

She is instead more known for her philanthropic efforts through the Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti), her deep interest in badminton as well as being an inspiration as the first Malay woman to qualify as medical doctor.

Many people have been curious as to the secrets of being the wife to the top man of this country.

Asking for no comparisons with anyone, Siti Hasmah shared her 'tips' with Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview on Monday.

"As the prime minister's wife, do not compare (yourself with anyone). Generally, you have to support your husband, you have to be knowledgeable, you have to know what is happening around you and you have to make sure that you are together with your husband to meet with the people.

"People like to know that this is the PM's wife and that they are together, they are family-oriented. So you have to support your husband, definitely. But don't compete with him," she advised.

Mahathir became the fourth and the longest-serving prime minister in Malaysian history, taking office in 1981. After he retired in 2003, he still wielded a huge influence in determining the trajectory of the country's politics.

**'Make no promises'**

He even played a major role in the downfall of his own hand-picked successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In fact, Mahathir is still actively pressuring current Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's administration, which is mired in controversies surrounding the troubled state fund 1MDB.

Siti Hasmah said a prime minister's wife has to be the middle person between her husband

and the common people, but she cautioned against making easy promises.

"They (the people) cannot see the PM. So, they want to see the wife, and then for no reason, they will ask for anything. Never promise anything, or say that you will convey the message to your husband to consider.

"You have no part in telling people that 'yes, I will make sure you get this, you get that, you get the contract'.

"No, my husband was very particular and as a PM, my husband never allowed even his children to bother him in politics. I am a member of Umno, but never held any position in Umno," she said.

Even when mingling with the people, Siti Hasmah said, one must respect one's husband, because "...not only is he your husband, he is also your prime minister, just like any other".

### **Lessons from the poor**

With her gentle and self-effacing nature, Siti Hasmah also reminded wives of the country's leaders to always be humble.

"You may be a doctor or you maybe a minister's wife but if you are arrogant, they (the people) won't accept you," she said.

She said this was a lesson she learned when she was stationed in Kedah as the first female Malay doctor, where she got to know the poor.

"They taught me how to be humble, how to be nice, and how to talk to them properly," she said, recalling her time in Kedah, when Mahathir was still known as 'Doctor Umno'.

Now, in her ninth decade of life, Siti Hasmah is still loyally accompanying her husband wherever he goes.

In fact, even 12 years after his retirement, Mahathir is still an important factor in the world of Malaysian politics.

At the age of 90, who would have thought Mahathir would still be robust enough to tackle the challenges of politics, head-on?

But surely, none of this would have been easy for him without the loyal and loving Siti Hasmah always by his side.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/304542>