

## **A six-decade Hasmah-Mahathir love story**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**July 12, 2015**

INTERVIEW It must not be easy to maintain a six-decade marriage, especially when the couple is under the glare of 30 million Malaysians.

But, after 59 years together, former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali have proven that it is not that tough, if you find the right way.

In an exclusive interview in Putrajaya last Monday, Hasmah revealed that as a couple, they would opt for the 'silent' treatment when they had differences or when they 'fought' with each other.

"When he is not happy, he would give you the silent treatment - not even a greeting - and then only you find out what was happening.

"And then out of the blue, he would say, 'Hello, are you okay?'," Hasmah (photo) said with a smile.

Moreover, she described how the man - her senior at King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore (which later merged with Raffles College to form University of Malaya) - behaved when he wasn't pleased.

"Oh, just like a child!" she said spontaneously, which invited laughter and enlivened the atmosphere.

Malaysiakini interviewed Hasmah at the Perdana Leadership Foundation, in which Mahathir holds office as its honorary president.

Even without expressing the magic word, their affection for each other is evident in the photographs and portraits hung up on the walls.

Pictures of her, Mahathir, and their children were neatly displayed on the cabinet. These images projected a strong bond, evoking even a sense of romance, despite views of Mahathir as a fierce, strict, and disciplined person.

"He is not that tough. He has to look tough just because of his position.

"He told me some even trembled and are unable to speak when they meet him at the office. He knew the reason.

"I told him that he should smile like a deer, as he looked so fierce. He said, 'I am not a tiger'," she said, adding her husband would have to resort to calming them down before a discussion could take place.

## **From tuition to romance**

But then, is the tough-looking statesman a romantic person at heart? The answer is a 'yes' - when the young Mahathir was courting her back in the 1950s in Singapore.

"(Back then) I had failed in my first year and scored only a distinction for English. He, however, got three. The others scored eight or nine.

"The others said, 'balik kampung (go home)', you will not survive.

Siti Hasmah said Mahathir (photo) then took the first step and offered to be her tutor.

Mahathir's unselfishness particularly touched a soft spot in the heart of the young Hasmah.

"Back then, he was this very sincere person, determined to make you do well. He was not selfish; he liked to see other people do well in their studies," she said, responding to the question on what attracted her to Mahathir back then.

"I was attracted to know the man who wanted to see another girl do well," she said.

Mahathir not only read many textbooks and novels to keep up with his studies, but he read them repeatedly to understand them better, she disclosed.

Still, as much as the young Hasmah looked up to her senior, sometimes she would get mad at him.

She still remembered once when she was scolded by Mahathir, who, being a smart person, couldn't understand that others weren't as smart as he was.

"I once said (in frustration) that there is no need for tuition. But eventually, we got to know each other better, and we went out for dinner dates," she said.

Marine Parade in Singapore was the venue which witnessed their relationship evolve from college mates to friends to sweethearts, Hasmah also revealed.

## **On jealousy**

She was asked if she ever felt jealous as her husband was well-liked by all and he has many female fans. Her answer was in the negative, adding she has been asked this question many times before.

"There was one instance when I followed him; his fans ignored me. I don't know if they recognised me or not.

"Then, someone observed what happened from the escalator and asked if I was jealous," she said.

She explained he has lots of friends, females...even males. She sometimes pitied him as everywhere he went, like at a Ramadan bazaar, they want to take selfies with him.

That's why I don't want to follow him around," she said.

On the contrary, she said it was Mahathir who was once jealous over her friendship with others.

Siti Hasmah grew up with seven brothers and being a 'tomboy', she said friendship with boys came easily, which Mahathir did not approve of.

"I was a tomboy then. I played kites, I climbed trees to track down spiders and put them in a box to make them fight," she said.

He became possessive and even a little bit jealous, and had objected to her being friends with others, especially with the guys, she revealed.

The 88-year-old had never imagined that her husband would one day become a prime minister.

"I (thought I) married the boy from the 'rice bowl' state and returned as a doctor's wife. It never crossed my mind (that I would become the wife of a prime minister)," she said.

"I knew then he was interested in politics, but how far, it never entered my mind," she explained.

"We were in a hurry to start a family after we graduated because I was 29," she said.

Hasmah also shared her recipe for a lasting marriage.

"You must renew your vows, express your love for each other. It can be in different ways; young couples can be very romantic.

"You can express your love in other ways to ensure you still love him and he still loves you," she said.

Mahathir has met all sorts of outstanding men and women, but since their relationship is based on trust, it made things smoother.

"I trust my husband and he trusts me," she noted.

Another advice she offered was not to prolong any misunderstanding.

"You should settle your problems swiftly. Don't keep it for two, three days without talking to each other.

"In Islam, it is a sin if you do not speak with each other. You need to negotiate so that there is no fighting between both of you," she said.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source : <http://www.malysiakini.com/news/304882>