

DATE: 18/1/2010

Fatimah's winning ways for all women

• By Lydia Gomez
legomez@nst.com.my

PETALING JAYA: The late Tun Dr Fatimah Hashim's family had planned for her to make video recordings of her thoughts on her fight for independence and politics but she passed away before they could do it

Her youngest son, Abdul Karim Abdul Kadir, 59, said the family had discussed this option when Fatimah realised she was not fit enough to give lectures on the topic after receiving the 2009 Merdeka Award

"Unfortunately, it is something we cannot share. She has taken with her those moments."

Fatimah passed away on Jan 9 at the age of 85.

Aside from being a freedom fighter and a spearhead of women's development in the country, Fatimah was also a strict disciplinarian and dutiful mother at home.

Recalling memories of the woman who stood side-by-side with the luminaries of the country's independence and went on to become the first woman minister, her eldest son, Mohamed Shah, said it was hardly apparent to them that she had made such a profound impact on the nation.

"She was always at home for dinner. And if we did not have a bath and get dressed, we wouldn't get served," he said after a tribute to his mother organised by the National Council for Women's Organisations (NCWO), which she founded in 1963.

The two-hour tribute became a flashback of the life Fatimah led when she was alive. It was narrated by women leaders who had worked closely with her for the advancement of women.

Shah, 63, the second of Fatimah's six children, said his mother would religiously drive to school to pick up her children. "She always turned up in school."

In between sobs, NCWO president and Universal Kebangsaan Malaysia Vice-Chancellor Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin remembered Fatimah as an icon of national unity.

"We should all emulate her sense of national unity, which she admirably demonstrated in her public and private lives."



**I REMEMBER THE WAY SHE
FOUGHT FOR WOMEN OF ALL
RACES, EVEN FOR ALIMONY.
SHE WENT AROUND ALL THE
STATES TELLING WOMEN THERE
WAS NOTHING WRONG IN
TAKING LEGAL ACTION FOR
SOMETHING THAT WAS
RIGHTFULLY THEIRS. "**

— *Toh Puan Uma Sambanthan*
social activist

NCWO deputy president Datuk Ramani Gurusamy said Fatimah was an exceptional woman who paved the way for the laws and rights that protected women today.

"She was able to balance well a life of political commitments and family responsibilities."

Social activist Toh Puan Uma Sambanthan, wife of former MIC president the late Tun V.T Sambanthan, whose friendship with Fatimah went back to the early 1960s, said: "I remember the way she fought for women of all races, even for alimony.

"She went around all the states telling women there was nothing wrong in taking legal action for something that was rightfully theirs."

For Datuk Vinod Shekar, president and group chief executive of Petra Group, Fatimah's presence at the NCWO office where he spent most of his childhood days with his mother, made a strong impression on him.

"I remember barging in during one of the council meetings to look for a stapler and she told me off. She was a very firm lady. After she told me off, she got me the stapler."

Vinod said Fatimah had created a very different Malaysia.

"People say she was a Malay nationalist. I don't remember that, but I do remember her as a Malaysian nationalist. This was Fatimah's Malaysia," he said.

Also present at the tribute was Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, wife of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.