

# Inspiring the future, nurturing possibilities

## NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA:

Three alumni members share fond memories of their time at the tertiary institution and their hopes for it

THE National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM) has long been a playground for many renowned individuals who now hold key positions in the civil service, politics, business and corporate sector, academic field and showbiz.

Since its establishment almost 46 years ago, UKM has produced more than 170,000 graduates and continues to be one of the premier universities in the country.

Its alumni members have warm memories of their experience in UKM. UKM communications graduate Datuk Dr Rothiah Omar, who is now deputy secretary-general (development) at the Defence Ministry, said that she chose to study in the university as it was one of the only two tertiary institutions in the country which offered a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Honours and General) programme in 1976.

Rothiah enjoyed herself as not only did she study public relations, she was also exposed to various areas of specialisation in media and communications such as journalism, broadcasting and film production, as the university's unique programme allowed students to experience the different areas in mass communications.

"During my first year, I took courses which encompassed important areas of media and communication studies to get some hands-on knowledge on the different aspects of the field. It was later on that I developed an interest in public relations, journalism and broadcasting.

"However, we were only allowed to focus on one area of specialisation in the third year and I chose my first love, public relations," said Rothiah, who enrolled in the university when it was located on Jalan Pantai Baru in Kuala Lumpur.

Her batch was the first cohort to study at the Bangi campus in Selangor.

"During that time, there were a

lot of teething problems, including being unfamiliar with the nearest town, Kajang. The current students are lucky as Bangi is well-connected and has a good transportation system compared to the time when I was at university.

"Not only that, Bangi was still developing in the late 70s so it was quite difficult to eat out. Therefore, we were confined to hostel food most of the time.

"However, the lush greenery made up for all the shortcomings. I felt so at peace in the Bangi campus and this helped me to produce good assignments," added Rothiah.

Born and bred in Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Rothiah found it hard initially to adapt to UKM's policy of championing Bahasa Malaysia as she had studied in an English medium school.

"However, my Bahasa Malaysia improved, as everything, from research work to assignments, was in the language."

She remembers her lecturers including Professor Datuk Dr Syed Arabi Syed Abdullah Idid and Professor Dr Asiah Sarji. Syed Arabi, a public relations

expert who was her supervisor and it was under his tutelage that she learnt research methodology.

"I remember my first research project under Dr Syed Arabi on the media profile of the Hulu Langat community. If not for that research background, I would not know how to conduct research and analyse data, both of which are important skills. That was a good experience for me as an undergraduate student in UKM," she added.

Rothiah takes pride in the stature of UKM today, a reputable university renowned for research and development.

She has been working as an administrative and diplomatic officer in the civil service of Malaysia since 1981. Throughout her 35 years of service with the government, she has served in several ministries and departments including the Ministry of Finance, Public Service Depart-



Dewan Conselor Tun Abdul Razak at UKM in the 1970s.

ment, MAMPU, INTAN and Ministry of Information which is now known as Ministry of Communication and Multimedia.

Attached to the Defence Ministry since 2014, she is involved in the supply of assets such as purchasing aircraft, ships and tankers for the ministry which includes the Royal Malaysian Air Force, Royal Malaysian Navy and Malaysian Armed Forces.

She last visited UKM in 2015 and is still in touch with its School of Media and Communication Studies Alumni.

For Datuk Seri Mohd Hashim Abdullah, attending UKM for the first time as a mature age student was a much anticipated and exciting experience.

In fact, it was very memorable as he had the opportunity to get to know professors and lecturers of his own age and became friends with his younger course mates.

"I was a government servant when I joined UKM in 2001 at 47. I was pursuing a master's programme in political science at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at that time.

"My course mates were in their 20s and I was in my 40s, but we got on well as I regarded them as my younger brothers and sisters.

"Then I had experience in politics but I didn't have knowledge of politics. I thought if I combined my experience and knowledge, it would be perfect for me in political circles," said Mohd Hashim, adding that the friendships fostered were his fondest memories of studying at UKM.

Mohd Hashim, who is now Election Commission chairman, said everyone bonded through discussions and the sharing of experiences in class.

"We ate and worked on our assignments together, and I used to *belanja* them all the time as I was already working at that time," he said with a smile.

"I am very approachable and I did not put my age, experience and status as a barrier against my course

mates. It is important that everyone can debate and speak freely to each other without feeling intimidated."

As an alumni member of UKM, Mohd Hashim hopes that it will continue to strive and grow as a centre of excellence.

For renowned neurosurgeon Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Zubaidi Abdul Latif, making lifelong friendships with his cohort from the Faculty of Medicine, the challenges of orientation week and helping Juniors with their personal problems were among the most memorable experiences he had while studying at UKM.

"There are too many names of lecturers to mention but we salute their sacrifices and for instilling good manners and clinical acumen into medical students who came from all over the country — villages and cities, suburbs and *pekan*. We learnt so much from our exciting journeys as wide-eyed medical students at the university and its first clinical facility in Hospital Kuala Lumpur.

"As clinical students, we took turns to run Nadi Klinik for paediatric patients in the squatter area of Kampung Cubadak Sentul during the weekend and led Operasi Khidmat Masyarakat at inaccessible communities in far-flung corners of the country," said Dr Ahmad Zubaidi who is from Pekan Bukit Payung, Kuala Terengganu.

"I was also the Terengganu Students Society representative and commuted from the KL campus to Bangi on my dad's old scooter to attend meetings."

Dr Ahmad Zubaidi graduated in 1986 with a MD in Medicine from UKM and was appointed as Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin vice chancellor in February this year.

"UKM's global linkage with Ivy League universities, such as Harvard, and Oxford is proof that it is not only respected but also well-known as one of the most reputable tertiary institutions in Malaysia," he added.



Rothiah Omar



Dr Zubaidi Abdul Latif



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Mohd Hashim Abdullah, Election Commission chairman