



(From left) Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) former students Associate Professor Dr Datin Zuriati Zakaria, Professor Dr Asiah Sarji, Dr Datin Rukayah Aman and Dr Ramli Jaya at the UKM campus in Bangi, yesterday. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD



Pioneer student Professor Dr Koh Aik Khoon holding a photograph of students. PIC BY ASYRAF HAMZAH

DOWN MEMORY LANE

UKM PIONEERS PROUD OF GROWTH

Ex-students mark university's 47th anniversary

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THERE was a time many people did not have faith in the newly established university. Some, in 1970, had even mocked the idea of a national university.

But today, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) marks its 47th anniversary with many remarkable academic and co-curricular achievements.

In a bid to commemorate the celebration, the *New Straits Times* caught up with a few of UKM's pioneer batch of students in 1970, boasting in its ranks, among others, the first Malaysian woman chemist, Associate Pro-

fessor Dr Datin Zuriati Zakaria, to share their early university experiences.

These veterans got together last week at UKM for a stroll down memory lane, as well as a catch-up session.

A prominent expert in the field of physics, Associate Professor Dr Koh Aik Khoon is not only a UKM pioneer, but also someone who has devoted his entire career to the university, lecturing on physics up to his retirement.

Recalling his first day at the Lembah Pantai campus on May 18, 1970, Koh said he entered with mixed feelings as UKM was an unfamiliar name to most.

"I am glad to note today that, what began with only 192 students and three faculties (Science, Arts and Islamic Studies) has since grown to over 20,000 students, 13 faculties and 14 research centres in Bangi," said Koh, who completed his Bachelor in Science majoring in Physics in 1974.

Koh was sponsored to continue his master's in University of Bath and subsequently obtained his doctorate in University of New South Wales. He then returned to UKM to become a physics lecturer from 1982 until 2012.

UKM was established a year after the May 13 incident, and many students were worried that the friction among the three main races would be brought into UKM.

"Surprisingly though, there was a time when I was invited to join the prayer at the surau."

As for Zuriati, she said although all of them had taken different paths, she was happy that they all still kept in touch.

The mother of three, who is married to fellow UKM pioneer Professor Datuk Sukiman Sarmani, said the university had gone through massive transformation from the time she studied.

Zuriati, who was also sponsored by UKM to complete her master's and doctorate abroad,

served in UKM upon completing her PhD and married Sukiman, a nuclear science expert and colleague.

"At that time, there were only two universities around – Universiti Malaya and Universiti Sains Malaysia, and both were using the English medium until later."

Zuriati noted that as a proactive measure to overcome shortage, the university decided to provide scholarships for students who graduated with excellent results to go overseas for further studies before being employed by the university.

Current Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Liew Tiong Lai, she said, was also a UKM Alumni.

Other pioneers who made a name for themselves are poet Adjunct Professor for Media and Communication Studies Asia E-University Professor Dr Asiah Sarji, Optoelectronics physics expert Dr Ramli Jaya, and writer and botanic expert Dr Datin Rukayah Aman.