

# Four special mums

MEERA MURUGESAN attended an event that awarded four women beloved for their roles as mothers, successful career women and pillars of community.

**S**TRIKING a balance between a career and a family is a struggle most women can relate to.

Four women have done it successfully, boasting of families they are proud of as well as outstanding career achievements.

Datuk F.R. Bhupalan, Datuk Maznah Hamid, Datuk Dr Nor Ashikin Ahmad Mokhtar and Tan Tong Leng were honoured for their feat last Friday by Avon Malaysia in a Mother's Day celebration called *My Mother My Inspiration* at the Kuala Lumpur Hilton.

The ceremony, graced by the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Nur Zahirah, saw the four women receive special awards for their efforts in successfully balancing their home and professional lives.

At the event, their children paid moving tributes to their mothers for being committed to their families while pursuing their dreams in the marketplace.

Bhupalan, who received the *Mother of Community* award for her involvement

in the nation's struggle for independence and her contribution to women's rights, credited her success to a stable home life and a supportive husband.

The former teacher and principal was the founder president of the Women Teachers Union of Malaya and was instrumental in gaining equal pay for women teachers.

"When I was very busy with my union work, my husband, despite his busy schedule, remained the anchor of our family and the children knew they could always turn to Daddy when Mummy was away or busy," she said.

Active in social and voluntary work and passionate about causes involving women, Bhupalan also made it a point to get her children involved in this aspect of her activities.

"I wanted my children to be connected to my work. I didn't want them to feel distant from what I was doing."

A lot of her paperwork was

done late at night so that she could spend quality time with her three children during the day.

Theirs was a family that "prayed together and laughed together".

Bhupalan made an effort to know her children's friends and cultivated an environment in which her children felt comfortable enough to ask her any question, no matter how difficult.

"As parents, you teach by example and your children's experiences must become a priority for you. My husband and I were able to do this despite the demands of work because we supported one another. He was also very understanding of my community work."

For Dr Nor Ashikin (who was awarded *Mother of Careers*), a successful marriage meant she was able to raise five children while pursuing a career as a

consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist in which she promoted awareness about women's health.

She is executive chairman and founder of the medical centre, PrimaNora Women's Wellness Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Nor Ashikin met her husband when they were both medical students and had her first child while still in university.

"I refused to just hand over the responsibility of caring for my baby to anyone, even to my mother or mother-in-law. At the same time, I managed to pursue my dream of becoming a doctor."

Dr Nor Ashikin hopes other women will emulate her in this respect.

"There is no need to sacrifice family life in order to have a career," she said.

"Women can have both if they remain focused on their goals and are committed to what they are

doing," she added.

Maznah, the executive chairman of the Securiforce Group of Companies, (who received the *Mother of Entrepreneurs* award) said women shouldn't feel guilty about wanting to pursue their dreams.

"Once women earn the respect of their husband and children, they will find their families to be the staunchest supporters," she said.

"I speak from experience because I dared to enter a man's world and confront the challenges. My husband and children were able to appreciate my abilities and desire to succeed in my chosen field."

Maznah built up Securiforce, which was nearly bankrupt to the successful enterprise it is today, supplying everything from armed guards and cash-in-transit services to high-tech cargo management and armoured



They managed to raise successful families while pursuing rewarding careers. From left: Tan, Maznah, Dr Nor Ashikin and Bhupalan.

trucking haulage services.

Her husband and business partner had always appreciated her strong character. Believe it or not, Maznah managed to have five children while being the driving force of a company in an industry dominated by men.

"You must show your family members that you can do it and once you gain their confidence, everything else is easy. Women can be even more successful than men in a man's world."

For Tan Tong Leng, an Avon dealer and the recipient of the *Mother of Inspiration* award, the need to strike a balance between family and career, led her to join Avon 13 years ago and she has never looked back since.

The mother of two daughters, who is now a member of Avon's Golden Circle, is a success story of a small town woman who found her niche in sales and has seen her life and that of her family's change for the better.

Tan, who was working in a bookstore in Malacca and facing the dilemma of how to care for her two children while holding down a full-time job, decided

to give up her job and try direct selling instead.

Her husband was fully supportive of the move as it would benefit their two daughters to have their mother around.

The family moved to Klang where Tan actively engaged in door-to-door selling of Avon products.

"It was the best decision I ever made because I found the perfect balance — a job that gave me a good income and the chance to spend time with my daughters," said Tan.

Her daughters are now aged 22 and 27 and have both finished university. As an Avon dealer, a whole new world also opened up for Tan.

She developed a strong desire to learn new things and a confidence that eventually made her a top dealer.

"My secret is simple. When you love the products you are selling and you understand the difference they can make, you speak from the heart when you talk to customers. And this, people understand very well."



Maznah (second from left) with her husband Shaheen Mirza Habib and daughters Nurul Shameem (left), Nursharmila and Mazreen Shanim (right).



Dr Nor Ashikin with her supportive husband Professor Datuk Dr Aminuddin Ahmad.



Bhupalan with her son Dr Anand Bhupalan.