

Raja Zarith Sofiah -A Modern-Day Princess

Yang Amat Mulia Raja Zarith Sofiah binti Sultan Idris is undoubtedly one of the country's accomplished royals.

The daughter of the late Sultan of Perak, consort of the Crown Prince of Johor and mother of the Raja Muda of Johor, Raja Zarith can, if she wishes, live a life of endless privilege, but the workaholic princess chooses instead to get up close and personal with a long list of charitable and voluntary bodies, zeroing in on the sick, the aged and orphans, and making them her "personal cases".

The people of Johor have come to regard the warm and friendly wife of their Tunku Mahkota as "the people's princess." They rush to welcome her to their homes when even she accompanies her husband to their kampung and are thrilled when she sits on the floor with them and asks them about their families.

When she's not visiting hospital wards or disaster areas, Raja Zarith attends international conferences, delivers keynote addresses and writes her fortnightly newspaper column.

A graduate of Chinese Studies from the University of Oxford in England, Raja Zarith is one of two Pro-Chancellors at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia; a Royal Fellow at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's School of Language Studies and Linguistics as well as patron of the Malaysian English Language Teachers' Association (MELTA).

Born on August 14, 1959 in Perak, Raja Zarith is the daughter of Sultan Idris Shah III who ruled Perak from 1963-1984. She received her primary education at Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan Datin Khadijah in Kuala Kangsar and went to Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan Raja Perempuan Kalsom for half of the school year before heading for England in 1972, at age 13.

The Princess studied at Cheltenham Ladies' College where she sat for her GCE O-Level examinations in 1975, and her GCE A-Level examinations in 1977.

Although she had originally wanted to study art and had already been accepted at an art college in London, her father persuaded her to try for a place at the University of Oxford. Raja Zarith then sat for the Oxbridge Entrance Examinations in November 1978 and was accepted to read Chinese Studies (a four-year undergraduate course) at Somerville College, University of Oxford. (Somerville College's alumni include Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher.)

She received her Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Oxford in 1983. A year before she completed her degree in 1983, Raja Zarith was engaged to the Crown Prince of Johor, Duli Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Ibrahim Ismail ibni Sultan Iskandar. They married in 1983 after Raja Zarith returned home from England. The couple have six children - five sons and a daughter.

Their eldest son, Tunku Ismail, is the Raja Muda of Johor. He is 24 years old and served with the 61st Cavalry of the Indian Army in Jaipur for 3 years, after having been commissioned as a Lieutenant from the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, India. He was the only non-Indian citizen to serve in the Indian army. He is now serving as an officer with the Johor Military Forces (JMF).

A devoted mother, Raja Zarith is close to her children and confesses to enjoying their company, even succumbing to watching reality television shows so that she can spend time with them.

As consort to the Crown Prince, Raja Zarith's royal duties include being the Deputy President of MAWAR or the Johor Ladies' Council, President of the Girl Guides of Johor, Royal Patron of the Spastics School of Johor Bahru, Royal Patron of the Rotary Club of Tebrau Foundation, and Patron of the Alumni of Sekolah Datin Isfah.

The indefatigable Princess is also a volunteer with the Rotary Club of Johor Bahru's Hospice programme. As Chairperson of Community Services Committee for the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, she sits on the National Executive Board of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society.

Known for her talent in painting, Raja Zarith has taken part in many exhibitions together with artists from Johor. Five of her works now form the permanent collection of paintings at the Cultural Foundation of Johor Art Gallery. In 2004, the Princess was also chosen to participate in an art exhibition organised by Maybank to honour three generations of Johor artists at its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

In 2005, her paintings were part of the "Sanctuary" charity art exhibition in Johor Bahru. This art exhibition was organised to raise funds for Intan Lifeline - a voluntary shelter for drug addicts who wished to begin new lives for themselves. An article Raja Zarith wrote in a local newspaper about Intan Lifeline caught the attention of charitable individuals and it now has the support from government hospitals as well as the Malaysian Aids Council.

Always eager to share what she sees and reads, Raja Zarith expresses her views and opinions through her writings. The Princess was invited to write a fortnightly column entitled "On Common Ground" that first appeared in the New Straits Times in 2000. She now helms a new column, "Mind Matters", for the Sunday Star.

Her writings have drawn a large following and have made her a popular figure in academic circles. Since then, the Princess has been invited to deliver keynote addresses at academic conferences. One such keynote address was entitled "The Emotional Power of Language" which she delivered at the "International Conference on Language and Empowerment" organized by the Malaysian Association of Modern Languages, Kuala Lumpur, in 2002.

In 2005 she delivered a powerful keynote address entitled "A Shared Reality, The Media & Us" at the international language conference "Worlds in Discourse: Representations of Realities" organized by the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. The following year she expounded the virtues of reading in "Reading, A Life-Long Habit & The Pursuit of Knowledge" at the College University Tun Hussein Onn in Johor.

In 2007, she presented a paper called "Winning Hearts & Minds, the Use of Language in Politics" at the international conference organized by the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, UKM. Earlier this year, she gave a public lecture at UKM entitled "Going Global: The Use of the English Language in 21st Century Malaysia."



The Princess spends any free time she has reading, painting, watching DVDs of films, as well as trying to improve her photographic skills. She loves music and is also, by her own admission, "a movie buff and Googles a lot."

For her valuable contributions, Raja Zarith was conferred an honorary Doctorate of Philosophy in Education by University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia at its seventh convocation ceremony on August 23, 2008.

APOLOGY

Referring to the Advertorial for University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, which appeared in The New Straits Times on August 23, 2008.

We would like to extend our deepest apologies to Duli Yang Amat Mulia Tunku Ibrahim Ismail ibni Sultan Iskandar Tunku Mahkota Johor and Yang Amat Mulia Raja Zarith Sofiah binti Almarhum Sultan Idris Al-Mutawakil Alallahi Shah on the publication of the erroneous article.

Any inconveniences or confusion caused directly or indirectly by the publication of the abovementioned advertorial is much regretted.

From:
The Management
University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia