

Honouring women

A CELEBRATION: In conjunction with International Women's Day on Tuesday, Suzanna Pillay speaks to four women making waves in their fields



Associate Professor Dr Zainura Zainon Noor

Working towards a greener Malaysia

ACHIEVING a greener Malaysia is high on Associate Professor Dr Zainura Zainon Noor's list. As a researcher with the Research Institute of Sustainable Environment at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, she hoped that her work would benefit society and the environment.

"Sustainability touches many aspects of life, including socially, economically and environmentally. My focus is on methods to track product sustainability. This is done by looking at carbon footprints, water footprints and ecological footprints to measure the biocapacity of the environment in coping with rapid development."

What interests her most is finding out how sustainable we truly are and whether we are a burden to the environment.

"It's pretty much about trying to find balance in achieving sustainable development."

"Water, for instance, is always taken for granted. But the fact is that our freshwater ecosystem, locally and globally, is under increasing pressure."

"There is less to go around than ever before. We have failed to protect our rivers, lakes and streams." She said the global water crisis should be a wake-up call for all.

"Understanding the water stewardship concept is imperative. This is when businesses understand pollution and scarcity issues and take action to ensure water is managed well as a shared, public resource."

She said a sustainable method of waste water treatment that adopts green initiatives should also be looked into.

"I have looked into a greener process of treating waste water by using membrane bioreactors (MBR). I have developed different types of MBRs that can treat waste water of various characteristics effectively."

She said an advanced version of MBRs could produce high-quality treated effluents that could be reused.

"One of my MBRs is being filed for a patent to be commercialised," she said.

A full-time research fellow at the research centre, Zainura has worked with government and private agencies in research and consultancy projects relating to tracking environmental performance and improving processes to minimise public health and environmental impacts.

"Knowledge mobilisation and utilisation are my main personal goals. Universities and higher learning institutes are warehouses of knowledge."

"People in academia have valuable resources, namely, knowledge, wisdom and experience gained from years of formal learning, conducting research, interacting and networking. All these should be translated and reflected in society for use."

As for sources of inspiration, Zainura credited her parents, for their patience and perseverance, as well as Academy Award-winning actress Angelina Jolie.

"Bravery, elegance, generosity and poise; Mrs Pitt is an incredible woman!"

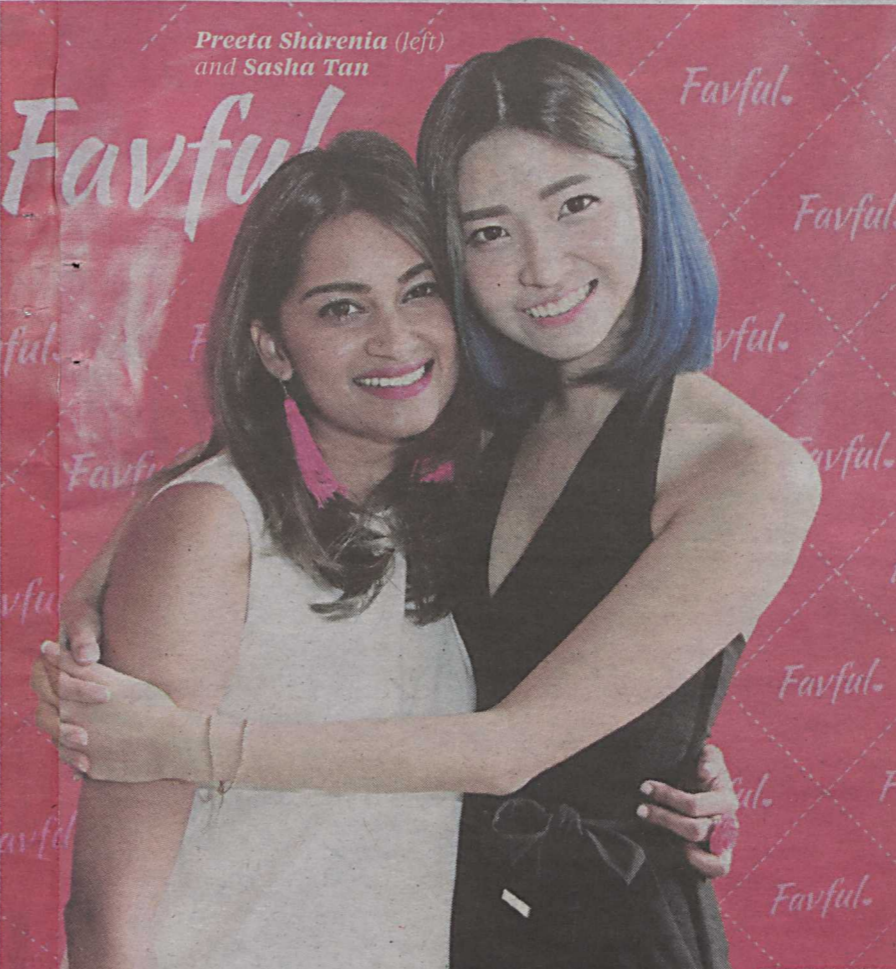
"As a woman who is almost the same age as Jolie, I believe she is a role model for people, regardless of gender and age. She has proven that women can have families and successful careers while making a difference in the world."

"To me, she is beautiful in many ways: smart, charismatic, worldly, a real game changer. She is also a humanitarian and educator who lives life by her own rules, something we can all learn from."

She encouraged Malaysian women to use their talents and pursue their dreams.

"As clichéd as it may sound, we need to believe in ourselves and believe that we can make a difference in this world in our own unique ways, no matter how small they may seem."

"So next time ladies, don't just ask yourself if you can fly, but also: how high?"



Preeta Sharenia (left) and Sasha Tan

Beauty site is tops in eyes of women

MEET Sasha Tan, 25, and Preeta Sharenia, 27, the faces of new online virtual beauty advisor site, stayfavful.com.

Stayfavful — an amalgamation of the words favourite, beautiful and faithful — aims to help women make informed decisions when it comes to beauty products.

With just a simple keyword search or barcode scan, users can find information on a product, such as ingredients, price, rating analysis based on skin type and suitability according to age group and skin colour. Some even include tutorials and videos.

According to Sasha, founder and chief executive officer of stayfavful, the idea came to her when she realised there was a dearth of accessible information on beauty products.

She said women wasted an average of 5,846 beauty products in their lifetime, with a vast majority using only 10 per cent of the beauty products they buy as they were

not suitable for them. "At stayfavful, we are passionate about users pairing beauty needs with the convenience of technology."

"This enables customers to find the right brands and empower them with information."

Stayfavful public relations and partnerships manager Preeta said the website was targeted at women who "aspired to be beautiful", and is geared towards women aged 15 to 25, as they engaged more on cyberspace than other group.

Sasha hoped the website would help women gain control over their physical wellbeing by making informed decision about beauty purchases.

The recently launched website coincided with the release of the Favful app on Google Play.

"The stayfavful app, Favful, is available on all Android platforms," said Sasha, who credited British actress Emma Watson and her best friend Chelsea Chang

with inspiring her. "Watson always tries to achieve perfection in what she does. She is also proactive when it comes to women's rights. My best friend Chelsea is always there for me, sharing her crazy ideas and believing in me."

Preeta credited her mother as her constant source of motivation. "She is the one who got me into the world of lifestyle and beauty. She is my go-to person for anything related to beauty."

"I'm also inspired by Sasha's courage."

Their message to women out there on International Women's Day?

"Don't ever let anyone tell you you can't do things that men can," said Sasha.

"We are definitely stronger than we think," she said, quoting author Diane Mariechild's words: "A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform."

Taking PR industry to new heights with IT

WITH no background in information technology, it was her burning desire to change the landscape of the public relations industry that prompted entrepreneur Manminder Kaur Dhillon to revolutionise how business is done.

The 37 year old now runs Supernewsroom, arguably the first crowdsourced global media relations platform where anyone or any organisation in the world can start a communications or media relations campaign via a single hub.

This means sending press releases and media invitations as well as making pitches to the media can now be done online, and a user can track and monitor the entire process.

Supernewsroom is regarded by PR practitioners as a useful Web app that could digitise an industry, which, thus far, relies heavily on traditional methods, such as phone calls and emails.

Manminder's journey in creating Supernewsroom began after she co-founded a PR and media training firm called Intelectasia Consultancy with her best friend in 2009.

Together, they handled clients in various fields, such as healthcare, property, education and pharmaceutical. It was then that she realised that there was no end to constant phone calls.

"The amount of phone calls was ridiculous," she said.

Back in 2011, while looking for a solution, she discovered how much the industry could benefit from going digital.

The idea slowly took shape three years later when she found the right team members for Supernewsroom.

"We are excited to see how far Supernewsroom can grow. We can't wait to digitise the global public relations industry."

The success of Supernewsroom was validated this year when it received the CIP 500 from Cradle Fund Sdn Bhd, which awarded the firm a RM500,000 grant to take the digital PR platform to the regional level.

For the former schoolteacher, the ability to think outside the box had allowed her to make big decisions in her life.

She had given up her nine-to-five job teaching biology and science to school children to pursue a career in broadcast journalism.

"It was something I had always found interesting, so I thought, why not give it a go?"

Manminder thrives on challenges, and was one of the first Malaysians to cover the devastating impact of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, which she regarded as one of the highlights of her career.

"My family members, especially my mother, are my rocks. Just ask any entrepreneur; it is the family that keeps you grounded."

Manminder made her entry into the PR world after obtaining her master's degree in corporate communications from Universiti Putra Malaysia.

"I went to a junk shop, bought a table, a chair, a printer and a phone. I was grateful to my good friend, who has continued to support me and believe in me. She has been there as my business partner from day one."

Within three years of operations, the company has won the Gold Award for Excellence in Public Relations and become a household name in the public relations training and consultancy industry.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Manminder Kaur Dhillon