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Reasons aplenty for Wanita's poor show in supreme council race

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THE shellshock was still reverberating in the PWTC as Wanita Umno members, upset and angry at the wipeout of Wanita candidates in the supreme council race, tried to rationalise the crushing collective defeat. Several delegates raised the matter during the debate on the president's speech, claiming women's contribution was unappreciated by the party.

They urged party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to use his prerogative to appoint a representative from the women's wing to sit in the supreme council.

But there are other, more sobering rationale that explained why the wing was totally rejected, like examining their weaknesses.

Why, despite the endless and countless demand for more seats made by the women's wing and the fact that women had contributed tremendously, until this day, were they not accorded due recognition?

Some delegates attributed this failure to various factors, mainly the internal bickering in the movement. A division chief pointed to the disunity over the past three years, leaving the male delegates fed up with the never-ending leadership infighting.

"They are just being their ownself ... too much drama, backstabbing, badmouthing and busy trying to outclass one another," the division chief said. "After some time, you tend to get tired of this childish behaviour. Why should I waste my vote on them?"

Wanita Tenggara chief Halimah Sadique had an even more sobering assessment - the wanita members themselves refused to support the candidates.

"They are divided into camps and each camp will only support candidates from their team although all of them are women candidates," she said.

"As it is, three of the candidates were aligned to a particular leader. So, there is a possibility that they failed to get full support from those who opposed their leader."

Affendi Zahari, a newly elected Youth exco member, said having five candidates from the movement led to a dilution of votes.

Had the number of aspirants been reduced to two or three, perhaps the delegates would be more united to give their votes to Wanita candidates as had happened in the past. Another reason, he said, was that of the five, four were also contesting for the Wanita exco post.

"Perhaps the delegates were of the opinion that the candidates should have only chosen one post - either the supreme council or wanita exco - as they might not be able to perform two duties effectively at the same time."

The other reason cited was the unwillingness of former Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman to endorse any of the candidates unlike in the past.

But again, this might not necessarily be true as Raja Roopiah Raja Abdullah opined that three of the candidates, including herself, were relatively unknown.

Raja Roopiah garnered 458 votes while incumbents Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail received 786 and 345 votes respectively. Newcomers Dr Norraesah Mohamad and Datuk Maznah Abdul Hamid obtained 763 and 605 votes respectively.

Maznah has an even stronger allegation - delegates boycotted the Wanita candidates.

"Some male delegates confessed that they will not vote for women candidates without giving any reasons," she claimed.

Zaleha felt the results reflected the male delegates' insensitivity towards the contributions by the women.

"They have failed to realise the importance of women in decision making," she claimed. "After all, the candidates have high qualifications and their experiences could have been utilised effectively."

Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob has another theory. The presence of Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz alone in the council by virtue of her designation was sufficient to represent the movement.

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