

26/12/2002

A very good year for women

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IT'S been a positive year for women in terms of achievement. On the local scene, women's groups made their voices heard at every turn. One such example was the outcry against the proposed Terengganu hudud Bill and its discriminatory clauses.

Elsewhere, they were persevering in terms of their efforts to stamp out domestic violence.

The Ministry of Women and Family Development too has achieved much this year by addressing gender-based issues and matters pertaining to single mothers.

Here are the highlights of events in 2002 pertaining to women:-

Jan 21: Puteri Umno launches Wanita Alaf Baru (Women of the New Millennium) or WABA, a three-month long campaign aimed at creating awareness of women's rights and violence against women.

Jan 31: In an effort to combat gender discrimination in Parliament, several women's groups announce their plans to monitor debates in the Dewan Rakyat and to compile sexist remarks and comments if and when made by MPs.

Jan 31: Carol Selvarajah, fondly known to Malaysians as the "Mother of Microwave Cooking", is given the honour of playing celebrity chef on board the vessel Queen Elizabeth II as part of its 2002 World Cruise Voyage of Exploration.

Feb 7: Local women's television show 3R (Respect, Relax and Respond) celebrates International Women's Day on a grand scale by organising 3R Day, a celebration of the joys of womanhood with the theme "Stop Violence Against Women" at KLCC Esplanade, Kuala Lumpur.

Feb 11: The All Women's Action Society and Women's Development Collective call on the Government to speed up tabling a Bill on sexual harassment and get the Sexual Harassment Act in place. The current Malaysian Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace is proving ineffective.

March 7: The Ministry of Women and Family Development opens its newly-renovated office to the public. Unlike other Government offices, the building features an elegantly designed interior which exudes a cosy ambience.

April 04: Birthright, a shelter for pregnant single women with no place to go is launched by Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir at Grace Community Centre in Taman SEA, Petaling Jaya.

April 10: Bowler Shalin Zulkifli is crowned the 2001 Sportswoman of the Year in Subang, Selangor. She is presented with a trophy and RM10,000 by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail.

April 12: Gerak Wanis, the women's wing of the 4B Youth Movement mobilises its machinery in all states to help disseminate information on incest and rape among young women.

May 7: New guidelines to strengthen Malaysia's proposed Bill on sexual harassment are announced. The guidelines are finalised at the end of the Roundtable Meeting on Sexual Harassment Legislation and Processes.

May 17: Local singer-cum-actress Amy Mastura is chosen to be the ambassador for Lux products.

May 20: To promote awareness among Malaysians on the existence of the Domestic Violence Act, the National Unity and Social Development Ministry announces that it will be using the media, especially the electronic

media, to help women know of the protection afforded by the Act.

May 24: The Women and Family Development Ministry conducts a study on the additional costs to be borne by employers and the country if the 60-day maternity leave is extended by another 30 days.

May 24: The police announces its plans to set up one-stop centres for violent and sexual victims in all states. The centres would handle sexual and abuse-related cases, especially cases of traumatic rape victims.

May 27: Progressive women's group Sisters In Islam denounces the proposed Terengganu Bill, accusing it of being a gross violation of the principles of justice and equality in Islam. Under this Bill, a woman who reports she has been raped will be charged with qazaf (slandering accusation) and given 80 lashes if she is unable to prove the rape.

May 29: The Women and Family Development Ministry officially takes a stand against certain provisions in Terengganu's Hudud Bill. Concern is expressed over the Bill's discriminatory clauses against women.

June 1: The Malaysian Navy announces that women navy personnel will be able to serve on board ships by 2008 as it expects to receive new vessels which have quarters for women. Women are now restricted to shore duties as existing ships do not have the necessary facilities.

June 3: Malaysia plays host to the Asia Regional Workshop on Strengthening Partnerships for Eliminating Gender-Based Violence. Organised by the Ministry of Women and Family Development in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, the workshop is held to combat the scourge of violence against women.

June 6: Pas muslimat (women) leaders announce their plans to submit a protest to the party's central working committee for the numerous jokes about polygamy made by permanent chairman Abu Kassim Abdullah during a muktamar (general assembly).

June 6: Puteri Umno launches video compact discs (VCDs) on basic techniques in self-defence. Aimed at educating young girls and schoolchildren on how to defend themselves in the event of an attack, the VCDs were distributed to 9,000 secondary and primary schoolchildren nationwide.

June 10: Women from across the board got together to oppose the tabling of the hudud Bill by the Terengganu Government. Over 20 speakers representing various NGOs, Government agencies and political parties aired their views at the forum, organised by the Women and Family Development Ministry.

June 14: For the first time, women participate in a national-level weightlifting meet at the 2002 national championship. Six women are among the 65 people who entered the two-day competition.

June 24: Twenty months after its formation and a year after its launch, Puteri Umno is finally formalised and recognised as a fully-fledged separate wing of Umno following amendments made to Umno's constitution.

July 1: Pas' women's wing, Dewan Muslimat, proposes that a woman to contest the Pendang parliamentary seat. It was time for the party to gauge the capability and public acceptance of a Pas woman representative.

July 3: Statistics show that cases of domestic violence are on the decrease, partly due to various programmes organised by the Family and Women Development Ministry.

July 11: Squash queen Nicol David is chosen as a national goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Development Programme. She joins the ranks of actor Danny Glover, South African Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer and Japanese actress Misako Kono.

July 18: The Muslim Women's Welfare Association announces its plans to build a welfare centre for elderly women estimated to cost RM3 million.

The centre, to be called Teratak Warga Emas, aims to provide elderly women with a place to meet and conduct activities to fill their time.

July 20: The country's leading women scientists come to the fore at the "Woman in the World of Science and Technology" workshop and exhibition at National Science Centre, Kuala Lumpur. The scientists, who are from various disciplines, gave lectures and interactive sessions for students, parents, lecturers and teachers.

July 26: The Sultan of Selangor becomes the first royal ruler to draw attention to the problem of gender discrimination in the syariah courts when he announced that he had received complaints that Syariah Court judges were biased against women in their judgments and were too rigid in carrying out their duties.

July 26: The Government announces its plans to look into the possibility of amending the Penal Code to make existing laws more compassionate and "humane" towards women, including allowing abortion in rape and incest cases.

Aug 5: Siti Zalina Ahmad lives up to the expectations of the Olympic Council of Malaysia and the National Sports Council when she clinches the lawn bowls women's singles gold on the final day of the Commonwealth Games.

Aug 6: Top songstress Siti Nurhaliza emerges the overall Grand Prix winner at the International Song and Music Festival held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She receives US\$10,000 (RM38,000), a solid gold trophy and a certificate from the city mayor.

Aug 6: Wanita MIC spearheads efforts to get the Indian Single Mothers Association registered. This will ensure that Government assistance will be better distributed to these women.

Aug 8: The Entrepreneur Development Ministry formulates a comprehensive system for women entrepreneurs to gain access to funding. The system would enable women entrepreneurs to get a fair share.

Aug 8: The Breast Cancer Welfare Association of Malaysia organises the 1st Asia Pacific Reach to Recovery Breast Cancer Support Conference. It is the first regional forum on breast cancer of its kind to be held.

Aug 16: AWAM sets up the nation's first rape support group that will provide survivors with a solid support system.

Aug 27: The Human Resources Ministry announces that it will look into ways to increase women's participation in the economy, including having flexible working hours for them.

Aug 29: The Ministry of Women and Family Development celebrates National Women's Day by launching Nur, a women's magazine (in partnership with publishing house Karangkrak) and Nur Bikerz, an income-generating project for single mothers (in collaboration with The Bikerz, a company selling motorcycles).

Sep 9: The Negri Sembilan government forms a special Women and Family Affairs Committee to look into the problems and achievement of women in the State. The committee would be entrusted with the responsibility to manage the overall development and progress of women and families in the State.

Sep 9: Wanita People's Progressive Party (PPP) urges the Education Ministry to consider introducing sex education in schools in view of the increasing number of incest and rape cases in the country.

Sep 11: The Women and Family Development Ministry updates its database to enable it to serve as a fully fledged reference centre. The database would contain details on women in the country in all aspects including health, education and career.

Sep 11: The Government looks into a proposal by the Wanita Barisan Nasional for Employees Provident Fund to make it compulsory for

contributors to name their spouses as the main beneficiary. There had been complaints from women that their husbands had named their parents or others as the beneficiaries.

Sep 12: An insurance plan for women only, covering fibroids, ovarian cysts and breast reconstructive surgery as a result of accidents or cancer, is introduced. Launched by Malaysia Assurance Alliance Bhd, it is the first plan in the country which insures women for such conditions, with a maximum coverage of RM50,000 each.

Sep 16: Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said takes her fight against gender discrimination to the international stage as a speaker at the Asia-Europe Dialogue in Tampere, Finland.

Sep 19: Established women's group Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) celebrates its 20th anniversary.

Sep 21: The 2003 Budget allocates RM99.1 million for the Women and Family Development Ministry. The bigger allocation was in line with the Government's recognition of the role of women in national economic and social development.

Sep 28: Wanita MCA calls for political parties to implement a gender quota system when allocating parliamentary and State seats to their members to increase female representation in national politics.

Oct 2: Teresa Kok (DAP-Seputeh) opposes the move to include marital status in MyKad as it discriminates against women. It could cause sexist remarks against widows and unmarried women when they apply for jobs and promotions.

Oct 4: Wendy Chai and Sarah Yap win Malaysia's first Asian Games gold medal in the women's bowling doubles at the Asiad Bowling Alley in Busan.

Oct 9: Our bowling queen Shalin Zulkifli clinches the women's Masters gold medal at the Asian Games.

Oct 10: National co-ordinator of Puteri MIC Datuk Anusha Santhirasthipam announces that the committee members of the newly established young Indian women's movement will be appointed by end of the year.

Oct 23: Malaysia's first ever Ladies' Golf Fair takes place at the Mid Valley Megamall Centre Court. In the last few years, more women are taking up golf and the local golf scene has ceased to be male-dominated.

Oct 26: Wanita DAP calls on the Government to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to combat the trafficking of women for prostitution. Many of these women come from Indonesia, Philippines, China, Cambodia, Vietnam and Russia.

Nov 7: After seven anguish-filled years of waiting, Aida Melly Tan Mutalib has a Press conference to announce that she has finally received her divorce certificate from the Selangor Religious Department. Her estranged husband responded by filing yet another appeal which was later dropped after much public protest.

Nov 1: The Pink Brigade troops into the Putra World Trade Centre for the inaugural general assembly of Puteri Umno. A total of 660 delegates from 165 divisions as well as 2,000 observers participate in the assembly. The movement's protem chief, Azalina Othman Said, and pro-tem secretary Noraini Ahmad win uncontested when divisional meetings conclude.

Nov 11: Regarded by many as a proponent for the development Malaysian batik, Datuk Seri Endon Mahmood launches a coffee-table book on the Nyonya kebaya.

Nov 16: The Puteri Umno public complaints bureau sets up branches in all States to help seek solutions to problems faced by the people. Its head is Noor Asmah Mohd Nawawi.

Nov 16: The Women and Family Development Ministry formulates guidelines and procedures to set up a proper system with the police and all relevant parties to handle cases of assault on women.

Nov 23: Premila Supramaniam puts local karate on the worldstage after becoming the first Malaysian to win a World Championships medal when she wins the women's kumite open bronze in Madrid, Spain.

Dec 11: Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil takes a stand against imposing the death penalty on child rapists. Instead, it proposes that life imprisonment and mandatory whipping be imposed on those who rape children or commit incest.