

Marina:, Debunk *STAR 19. 7. 2003* 'beast' perception

BY SUSAN TAM

KUALA LUMPUR: The perception that men are uncontrollable "wild beasts looking for prey" should be debunked as there are loving, kind and gentle men who strongly protest violence against women, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said.

Such a perception, raised by a Muslim think tank last week, excuses men from spousal abuse, incest, rape and murder on grounds that it was "in their inner nature and that they could not help themselves", she said.

"Men should take violent crimes more seriously and learn to care as these crimes are happening to their own womenfolk and their own people. Do they really like us women to think of them as beasts? I am not married to a beast nor have a beast for a father.

"Perhaps, the difference between men who are decent and those who abuse needs examining. What is it that makes a man want to do something so awful to a woman, that another man wouldn't," she said in her keynote address at the "Lest We Forget -Canny Ong Memorial" at Help Institute yesterday.

She said if men were to be

defined as beasts, it implied then that non-violent men were "not men" or manly enough, and this put them under pressure.

"The first thing they need to change is the image they themselves have perpetuated that they are beasts by nature. They must show that they are human, capable of being kind and gentle. There is nothing unmanly about that - it is human," she said.

Marina, who is also Malaysian AIDS Council president, said that men and women must set a good example to children and educate them that bullying, whether at home or at school, was not acceptable.

"We need to teach our sons and daughters about respect for each other, gender equality and re-define what it is that makes a person successful. It is not physical superiority or material wealth. It is how a person treats another, with respect, dignity and humility," she said.

Earlier, the two-hour memorial, held to commemorate the life of Canny Ong and other victims of sexual assault, featured a video clip of her school days and several tributes by her close friends.

The memorial, organised by "Friends of Canny Ong", saw the

participation of about 100 people, including several women members of non-governmental groups.

It was part of a three-day campaign against rape and violence themed "Citizens Against Rape: Make Public Places Safe - Towards a Violence-Free Community".

Its aim is to educate the public on the need for commitment in eradicating violence against women. The campaign was sparked by Ong's abduction and brutal murder last month.

A purple and a white ribbon campaign was launched to respectively symbolise the protest against violence towards women and men's pledges to participate in these anti-violence movements.

This event was one of two memorials held simultaneously in conjunction with Ong's 29th birthday. The other memorial took place in the United States.

Bruce Toh, who led the white ribbon pledge, said it was to garner men's support in addressing the problem.

"If we can have more men taking part in such movements to protect women, we can hopefully raise awareness and reduce such violent crime," he said, adding that a large number of men have a wrong perception of women.