

13/03/2003

## Women power in Kuching

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THERE was generosity all around during the March 8 International Women's Day celebration in Kuching in a bid to enable, empower and enlighten more women in overcoming problems and issues related to the gender.

Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jali handed out an undisclosed amount to support programmes by Sarawak-based women NGOs, stating that the ministry had allocated slightly more than RM1 million last year for this cause.

Kuala Lumpur-based NGOs such as the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and the All Women's Action Society (AWAM) organised programmes to raise public concern on violence against women. Carrying the theme of "Find Out, Speak Out, Take Action", the celebration was supported by Sarawak NGOs with the Sarawak women for Women Society (SWWS).

Among activities organised were legal clinics, the airing of domestic violence survivor stories, the display of scrapbooks and banners and marching band and traditional music performances by students of Kuching schools.

The workshops on rape awareness took centrestage for two consecutive days, covering four schools and one teacher's training college.

Conducted by hosts of the popular youth programme on TV3, "Respek, Relaks, Respond" (3R), the workshops were carried out at SMK Bandar Kuching, SMK St Mary, SMK Semerah Padi and SMK Tun Abang Haji Openg as well as the Maktab Perguruan Kuching.

The workshops received tremendous response from students and 3R executive producer Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir presented the Sarawak Education Department with complimentary VCDs of the 3R TV series at the end of the two days.

On hand to receive the VCDs was the state assistant education director Maimunah Bujang.

Much of the IWD celebration was centred on the Kuching Waterfront. Shahrizat officiated the school cheerleading competition where nine teams from SMK St Mary and SMK St Theresa, both from Kuching, competed for the top three prizes of RM1,000, RM750 and RM500, sponsored by Kotex.

There were information and display booths manned by sponsor groups comprising the Legal Aid Bureau, Sarawak Women for Women Society, Biro Wanita, Sarawak Aids Concern Society, Sarawak Family Planning, Pro-Life Group, Sisters in Islam, Women and Health Association, Jabatan Buruh Sarawak, Hikmah, TV3, Cat's FM, Nestle, Maybelline, Ford and Demak Motor Corporation.

One of the main sponsors, Kimberly Clark, makers of Kotex sanitary products, also pledged an amount as yet to be tabulated, to WAO, AWAM and SWWS.

The sum will be derived from the total of RM1 pledges endorsed by each return to the company of one empty Kotex sanitary bag during a two-month promotion period.

In her opening speech, Shahrizat spoke on the need to make the young aware of women's rights as well as the biases women face in society.

In this regard, she congratulated Marina and her 3R programme for having successfully influenced young women's lives in a positive way.

Shahrizat also expressed her gratitude to, "all NGOs who have been helping the Ministry to ensure the peace and harmony of women and families."

The highlight of the weekend's activities was the concert and prize-giving ceremony of the cheerleading competition later that evening.

The concert started with ethnic percussion group Tuku Kame, an offshoot of the Sarawak Cultural Village. The group was a hit - it had home ground advantage as well the youthful attraction of its teenaged Djembe player.

Hazami, Kuala Lumpur's newest R&B recording artiste, sang, followed by Elyana.

Also receiving rave response from the young audience was R&B group VE, oozing with Don Juan smoothness. Sarawakian singer Deja Moss then took over the stage, drawing her audience with her local dialect.

Syafinaz capped the concert with her effortless and heartwarming "Somewhere Over the Rainbow".

The more thunderous response however came during the announcement of the cheerleading competition winners.

The Blazin Stars team from SMK St Theresa walked away with the top prize of RM1,000. In second place for RM750 was the Venus team from the same school while the team called Spritz of SMK St Mary was placed third, receiving RM500 for their effort. The prize money was put up by Kimberly Clark.

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