

Political opponents cross paths on Women's Day

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In commemorating International Women's Day, two Selayang-based politicians went all out to woo constituents by handing out goodies and calling on women to take on bigger roles in ensuring gender quality.

The political opponents - Rawang PKR assemblyperson Gan Pei Nei and Selayang MCA Belawanis chief Jessie Ooi - made the rounds in the district, handing out flowers and fruits to the constituents.

Considering that almost half of Malaysia's population is made up of women, Gan (right in photo) said that it is about time women exhibit keenness in governance and administration.

Though the metaphorical glass ceiling may not be bulletproof in Malaysia, not many women are keen on actively participating in politics, said Gan citing surveys conducted by the United Nations Development Programme.

A long-time student activist and later a human rights advocate, Gan was nominated to contest under the PKR ticket in Rawang in the 2008 general election.

"My wish today is we want women to come and join in policymaking roles. For instance, we have five executive councillors in the state government, which makes up to 40 percent but as far as the (state) assembly is concerned there are only seven elected representatives out of 56.

"Women need to be empowered to safeguard their rights and that's why we need to push for stronger participation from the grassroots and community," said Gan, who is also the PKR women's wing vice-president.

"There are still a lot of challenges, due to the patriarchal system that is still dominant in this country," she added.

Survey on women's attitude toward politics

As Malaysia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Gan urged the government to urgently impose anti-discriminatory policies to ensure equality is meted out in all levels of the administration.

Gan today distributed 500 stalks of artificial flowers and sweets at the morning market located in the heart of the town and greeted constituents, particularly women, thanking them for their support.

Her presence had triggered some buzz as several took the opportunity to convey their problems faced in the residential areas.

Asked on her chances of winning the seat in the coming polls, with Ooi being touted to contest against her, Gan said: "It is true when people say that women candidates are more popular, but today it is not just about gender. Voters want to know how the candidate can contribute to the community."

Gan's visit also kicked off PKR's pilot project, a perception study among women to gauge their aptitude towards politics.

"The survey will be conducted until April and the results will be announced in May. We are aiming for 1,000 respondents from the age of 21 to 65," she said.

Meanwhile, Gan's BN counterpart Ooi (right in photo) said women are well suited in supporting the roles of male leaders.

"Women are more careful, so we can support men in leadership roles and complement them. I believe us women can contribute to the nation," the Selayang parliamentary coordinator told Malaysiakini while making the rounds at government clinics.

However, she also said women could take on leadership roles depending on the field, and expressed hope that more women would join politics.

Ooi, who gained popularity after the historic MCA-DAP debate last month, said she would campaign for improved transportation if she were nominated as an election candidate.

"Because women often have to rely on their husbands to drive them around... especially those with poor families who (otherwise) have to use buses, taxis, trains, etc," she reasoned, also pledging to improve the financial independence of women.

Ooi visited five government clinics giving away fruits wrapped in colourful hampers to female patients and staff. An additional 100 hampers in paper bags were also hastily prepared as the initial 300 hampers ran out.

"During Mother's Day last year I gave flowers. Pregnant women wish to be healthy, so I am giving fruits," she said.

Ooi, accompanied by local BN leaders, were greeted by the medical staff before being shown around the clinics in Selayang Baru and Rawang, delighting the staff and patients with presents.

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