

More female politicians needed  
Malaysianmirror.com  
15 December 2010

FEATURE When singer Helen Reddy bleated out her song, "I can do anything, I am strong, I am invincible, I am woman" in the 70s, a large number of women in Sarawak were still confined to the duty of a housewife and mother.

Thirty years down the road, women are helping to contribute double-income for the family, and to ease their spouses' burden to put bread and butter on the table.

Women who joined politics are said to have a louder voice when it comes to debate. A male chauvinist politician who shared his view once said: Women are "louder" because they have been trained to nag and shout at husbands at home.

Sarcasm aside, one cannot deny that modern women possess more power than their predecessors. There are women prime ministers and it has become common to have females in what used to be called as male-dominated jobs. No hurdle is impossible to cross.

The Sarawak scenario

violet\_yong\_2However, in the Sarawak political arena, women are still facing a lot of setbacks due to gender discrimination. Important to note is that the trend is evolving, albeit slow, with strong-minded women coming out to the forefront to speak their mind.

In the Borneo state, there are four female politicians who can show what it is like to be in a man's world. They have been working hard to mobilise other females to get active and be involve in decision-making policies that have impacts in their lives.

State assemblywoman for Pending, Violet Yong, is one woman who does not wear her pants. Always feminine-dressed, Violet is said to be a giant killer when she ousted SUPP strong man, an Assistant Minister and the Secretary General by a majority of 4, 372 votes, the highest majority win in Kuching city.

A practicing lawyer, Violet believes that women should play a major role in the decision-making process as a lot of policies involve the well-being of women and children.

"As women, we are honest, compassionate, and meticulous. We tend to look at things from a bigger perspective. We are concerned with details that men failed to see," she said.

Violet believe that politics should not be considered solely as a man's role.

"Malaysia has more than 50 percent of women so we must understand that women's voice is very important in both side of the political divide," she said.

The DAP, one of Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) component party, had filled in three female candidates in the last state election.

Although Malaysia targeted for 30 percent of female participation in politics, Violet said it was quite shameful that not even five percent was reached.

"It is time for the top country leaders to think of making it (the 30 percent target) possible," she said.

Time to see more female representation

cheng\_yi\_.jpg Cheng Yi is a Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, and the Sarawak United People Party (SUPP) Woman Chief in Batu Lintang constituency.

Also a practicing lawyer, Cheng Yi said women in SUPP tend to take a back seat. She said the two women candidates in the last state election failed to make it because Wong Zee Yeng in Meradong was said to be too young, while Lily Yong in Padungan was too mature.

In Cheng Yi's opinion, SUPP, as a party that has been around for 51 years, should be more prepared to have women candidates.

She said chances of fielding a women in the coming state election are slim, considering that SUPP had lost eight seats previously.

"The top leaders tend to have a 'kiasu' attitude and want to put in winnable candidates. To them, female doesn't win," she reasoned.

"We have to admit that generally, women in Sarawak have not been forthright in their involvement in politics. There is major differences if compared with their involvement in business, finance and educational institutions.

"Although we do have some women of candidate material in the political parties, the ratio is comparably low with the number of capable women in the community," she said.

Cheng Yi said although Lily Wong lost in Meradong in the last state election, SUPP must be committed to put her up again as she is a qualified candidate.

"Look at DAP, they field in young candidates who can stand initial defeats and toughen them to face latter challenges. That strategy has proven to be successful," she reasoned.

Cheng Yi said politics is not about showing support to SUPP, Barisan Nasional or to the DAP, Pakatan Rakyat. "It's about good government policies to be implemented for the people", she said.

According to her, women not only preoccupied with bread and butter issues. They have adequate knowledge on issues of health, education, employment and business opportunities, equality, justice and rule of law.

"In Semenanjung Malaysia, it's gratifying to see that there are many impressive women leaders in politics. But in Sarawak, we have to admit that DAP has done well in having 2 young female ADUN," she pointed out.

Sarawak United Bumiputera Heritage Party (PBB) has also done well as it has 4 women ADUN, 1 MP and 1 Senator, she added.

"All of them had a professional career and have managed to balance their public lives and family commitment.

"There is no question that women are more committed to what they do – it's our trait. Another trait is that we can balance our roles between family and community service,"

Cheng Yi said.

The challenge now, she said, is to convince women that public life is worthwhile.

"But even before we talk about public life, we must be aware that women are already involved and are in fact taking leading roles. The main point is that We need them to share their passions with the community. That is politics," Cheng Yi said.

Capabilities to see both sides

CHIEW\_YEN\_CHEWChiew Yen Chew is into her third term as a Wanita Chief of Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP). Despite her experience in the political field following her politician father around in her young days, Yen Chew felt that politics is still very much in a man's hand.

Hoping to see more assertive and confident women in the political arena, Yen Chew is also positive to have more female leaders in various key government sectors.

Pointing out that SPDP has only one female state assemblywoman who is Rosey Yunos, Yen Chew is looking forward to see more female candidates in the next state elections.

"We have so many potential women who are capable, committed and hardworking. Rosey has set a fine example for many women," she said.

Yen Chew dismissed male chauvinist claims that women have to juggle between home and work, thus making them bad politicians. She said it has been proven that women could do both excellently well.

"Don't be surprised there are so many examples out there. Women can actually adapt into situations better than men. Their motherly instinct is an added value which enables them to cope and deal with problems in a more humane way," she said.

She has a strong belief that women are partner contributors to our nation's political development and progress.

"It is more challenging for women to be equally successful or better than the males as we have to juggle and balance family life with a demanding career," she added.

Women to step forward for a better change

voon\_shiak\_niNational Woman Vice-Chief, Voon Shiak Ni said PKR is trying to introduce a policy of having 30 percent of women represented in the election. She noted that if there will not be enough women to take on the duties, they would do with at least 10 percent.

In a meeting with National Woman Chief Zuraida Kamarudin, Voon said PKR emphasises on party loyalty and not the need to recruit as many women as they can to be candidates.

"What we want is a woman who is able to deliver the best for the people and possesses good leadership qualities," she said.

She said they have good numbers of women leaders who have already set good examples, including Zuraida, Elizabeth Wong and Gan Tei Nei.

Voon said instead of thinking about self-interests, PKR is looking to get women who have priorities on serving others rather than those who pursue personal gains.

"We need a climate of change in the political scenario for the sake of the future generation and that calls for a lot of sacrifice from each individual," she added.

Calling for more women to come forward, she said all must work towards a change in government for the betterment of all.

After all is said and done, women leaders have performed well in our modern history chapter. The Indian continent is one good example, and Europe, where liberalism is more practiced, does not fall short of women leaders too.

Judging from the better performance of female students in our higher learning institutions, there shouldn't be any shortage of academically qualified women who will do no less better than their male counterparts.

Bringing these women into politics will just be one step forward to give them a chance to excel in what has been seen as a male bastion.

Copyright © 2009 [www.malaysiamirror.com](http://www.malaysiamirror.com)

Source :<http://www.malaysianmirror.com/media-buzz-detail/6-nation/51107>