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# The people know what they want

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I JOINED Umno in my early 20s. Before that I was already indirectly involved in politics, helping out with voter-registration.

The work was hard and there was no Internet back then to help spread the news. Even those who did not contest helped out.

I did the whole works. I rode on bicycles in villages. Many times I walked through rubber estates and padi fields, trying to get the women to register. I talked to the *makcik* and *nenek kampung*, informing them on where to vote and even how to vote.

It was a case of *kalau nenek suka kapal layar, pangkah kapal layar*.

We had to tell this to each of them and even show them samples of the ballots, asking them to put a cross next to the sailing ship symbol of the Alliance.

In spite of that, some of them still did it wrong. We went from house to house, and got chased away quite a few times, because people did not know much about the election or the voting process.

At that time, *rapat umum* (rallies) was the name of the game. You had to get the crowd to come out and listen to you. I remember doing this from the back of a lorry, speaking loudly to a crowd.

The best way to get the crowd out was to provide a *wayang sangam* which basically meant screening a Hindi film.

We would put up a huge screen to show the film, courtesy of the Information Ministry.



## SIDE VIEWS

By Tan Sri  
Aishah Ghani

Once in the early 1960s in Kelantan, we had a crowd of 40,000 people. I thought we were going to win for sure, but unfortunately that was not the case.

This taught me to realise that having big crowds at rallies doesn't mean a thing at the end of the day. People know what they want, Hindi film or no Hindi film.

And the posters were everywhere, so many that you could barely see anything else.

These days, I don't feel the same spirit any more. Perhaps the Internet has a lot to do with this. It's a great tool for spreading information, you can even use it to raise funds.

But it also means that people now do not need to come out of their houses at night to get information, they just sit in front of their computers.

Because of the Internet, they are much more informed, also a lot smarter, and this has resulted in them being less vocal. I feel the atmosphere these days is a lot more subdued.

Of course, the Internet is a double-edged sword. It provides a channel to spread lies and rumours. In the old days, the only thing we had to deal with was *surat layang* (poison-pen letters). It was a cleaner fight back then.

But we have certainly progressed in terms of the elec-

tion, of more women candidates compared to the days when I was the first woman senator in 1963.

Although I had no problems working with the men, people were a lot more prejudiced about women politicians back then.

I remember quite a few good women candidates in the early days who were not voted or nominated simply because they were women.

My advice to women politicians these days is to be more seriously involved — don't be a politician just because you want to rub shoulders with the right people.

There are very few women politicians these days who understand the realities of politics. Until this happens, we will not be seeing a female prime minister anytime soon.

Of course, we have a long way to go. Most of the female politicians these days seem content to be the right hand of their parties, which in itself is an important role.

The government has good policies but will need to work on the implementation process. In saying that, you also need a rakyat with the right attitude. By this I mean, think of this country as yours and do the right thing by it. — Interview by Nisha Sabanayagam

■ Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, 85, is still active in business. She joined Umno in 1949 and became Welfare Minister in 1973. She held the post for 11 years. Tan Sri Aishah is now permanent chairman of Wanita Umno