

The Star Online

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Weaker sex to get stronger role in public sector

A SPECIAL committee is to be formed to implement gender sensitisation programmes in the public sector to increase the representation of women in key decision-making positions.

The committee will hold programmes on recruitment, career development and succession planning to enable more women to hold top posts in Parliament, state legislative assemblies, the judiciary and in ministries.

The committee will be chaired by the Women, Family and Community Development Minister.

To encourage greater women participation in the workforce, the Social Welfare Department will increase its efforts to register more community-based nurseries and day-care centres.

This is because many women quit from their jobs due to family commitments although they outnumber men in the enrolment for first degree and Masters degree courses in public higher learning institutions in 2008 - women account for 62.3% in the enrolment for first degrees and 52.7% for Masters degree courses.

Under the 10th Malaysia Plan (10MP), corporate social responsibility programmes to sponsor the establishment of licensed day-care centres in partnership with NGOs will be actively promoted.

The government will continue to promote flexible working hours and policies enabling women to work from home in both the public and private sectors to encourage a more family-friendly workplace.

Empower executive director Maria Chin Abdullah (*pic*) said the government should also look into promoting the role of women in “making decisions in the family.”

“It is not all about advancing women’s careers by pushing for the 30% quota but women should also be given equality in the decision-making process in their families,” she said when contacted.

She said NGOs should also be included in the proposed special committee to monitor its progress.

The Malaysian Insider

Lawyers say questioning Empower chief an act of intimidation

By Melissa Chi and Lisa J. Ariffin

July 05, 2011

PETALING JAYA, July 5 — Lawyers representing women’s rights group Empower chief Maria Chin Abdullah said her questioning today by the police is purely to intimidate and harass the Bersih movement.

Lawyers Fadhiah Nadwa Fikir and Honey Tan, who are representing Maria, told reporters that police informed them that they were investigating Maria under the Societies Act.

“It has nothing to do with the Societies Act and they are using this to intimidate and to harass the Bersih movement,” said Fadhiah.



Maria (centre) speaking to reporters outside the Petaling Jaya police headquarters after her questioning today, July 5, 2011. — Picture by Choo Choy May

Empower is a member of Bersih 2.0, a coalition of NGOs which has come under intense pressure to call off the July 9 rally in support of electoral reform.

The Empower office in Section 4 here was raided on June 29 and, according to Maria, the police turned up without a warrant.

The police seized Bersih T-shirts and banners during the noon raid carried out by some 20 policemen, at least one of whom was armed with an assault rifle.

Maria said among other things, the police asked about her background, Empower, and in whose names the office water and electric bills were.

“Based on the questioning, it is really ridiculous; why do you need to know whose name is on the bills?” said Fadiah.

Fadiah also said the police wanted to take both her and Tan’s statement during the questioning.

“That is interference with lawyers’ duty and a breach under the Article 5 of the Federal Constitution and under section 28a of Criminal Procedure Code.

“They have no right to interfere with Maria’s right to have a lawyer with her during the questioning,” she said.

Maria said the seven people detained at the Empower office on June 29 have also been called for questioning at the police station tomorrow.

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Sunday August 1, 2010

Rape, a growing statistic

By HARIATI AZIZAN

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Rape is on the rise nationwide and needs to be curbed immediately.

THE horror stories are enough for any parent to lock up their daughters and throw away the key so that they will be safe.

A short ride home from school became a ride of terror for a Year Four pupil when the driver stopped the van to strip her in front of her friends and schoolmates before forcing himself on her.

The police believe that many more schoolchildren could have been raped by him in his van over the last few months.

Last week, two men were arrested for stalking and raping more than five teenaged girls living in their neighbourhood.

And only last month, a 54-year-old taxi driver was charged with raping and molesting several secondary schoolgirls aged between 15 and 17. He also video taped the crime and used the incriminating clips to blackmail the victims for further sexual exploitation.

According to the police, sexual crimes have escalated nationwide in the last few years, and rape tops these offences.

In 2003, 1,479 police reports were lodged by rape victims. The figure doubled to 3,098 in 2007.

Statistics compiled also show that sexual crimes against the young have jumped, especially rape involving girls aged 16 and below.

According to DSP Zaiton Che Lah; head of the Sexual Crimes Unit under the Sexual Crimes and Children Investigation Division (D11), about 50% of the total number of rape cases each year involve victims aged 16 and below.

A check with various women's groups, however, reveals that this is far from new and may very well be a conservative figure.

As Women's Centre for Change (WCC) Penang executive director Loh Cheng Kooi highlights, although the number of rape cases reported has increased, there are many cases that are still unreported.

One reason for this, she says, is because about 80% of sex offenders are either close or known to the victims, such as family members, relatives, neighbours or school bus drivers.

And as these sexual predators hide behind unassuming personas or keep a low profile among the adults in the community, many parents are caught unawares when they "attack" their targeted victims.

This, says Loh, makes it difficult for the young victims to come forward for help as they worry that they will not be believed.

Loh believes the crux of the problem is the lack of communication between parents and children.

"Most parents now are too busy working and don't spend enough time talking or just listening to their children. When there is no rapport between them, how can there be trust?" she says.

Abby de Vries, programme officer at the All Women's Action Society (Awam) warns that we should be worried about this phenomenon.

"Usually, the younger they are, the more difficult it is for them to convince the adults that they were raped or sexually abused. Why is this happening? Why do they feel like they cannot tell anyone?"

Most sexual offenders are not only familiar to the targeted victims but they are also good at manipulating them.

Befriending the victim and luring her with gifts or money are classic tactics among sexual predators, she says. However, combined with the inherent culture of shame in our society, it only leads to victims' reluctance to seek help.

"The tool of guilt and shame is very common for victims of sexual crime

"It is a strong barrier preventing them from seeking help and it is a powerful weapon to keep them quiet. Especially if they took money like in the recent cases in Ampang, they will probably think – 'Who will believe me because I took money from this guy?' "

Social works manager with Women's Aid Organisation, Wong Su Zane argues that whether the victims have received a gift or money from the perpetrator is irrelevant.

The issue is whether a crime has been committed against them, she says, or whether the victims have been forced to perform a sexual act without their consent.

“If a person gave you a gift, or asked you out, or bought you a meal or a drink, it doesn’t mean that you have to have sex with the person. If you don’t give your consent for sex but the other person forces himself on you, then it is a crime.”

She believes the fear to report is deeply entrenched in victims due to the lack of a system that is supportive of them.

“Whenever a rape happens, the police will ask the victims about what they have done or what they didn’t do to lead to the crime. So the first thing that comes to the mind of most victims is that it is their fault and they could have done something to prevent it.”

The fear is further exacerbated by the advent of technology, she shares.

“Now, when I advise those who seek help from WAO to lodge a police report, their reaction is always: ‘If we do that, the whole world will know!’ They say reporters will be there or someone will blog about it.”

Loh agrees that living in the age of the Internet and mobile technology has created new challenges in the fight against rape.

“The same cases of rape may have been happening before but in different permutations. I feel that people are definitely getting more violent – in shopping malls, at school or at clubs – there is danger everywhere, you can get drugged and raped anywhere and anytime.”

At the same time, she opines, the constraints and pressures of the world that are forcing parents to spend most of their time working are also boosting this rising violence.

“The world’s situation is no longer simple – it has become more dangerous. There are many different types of abuse and violation too because of this development.

But most parents either don’t know how to prepare their children to deal with these changes or have no time to prepare their children.”

Sophisticated methods

De Vries agrees that sexual offenders have indeed moved on to new technologically sophisticated *modus operandi* to trap and force victims into sexual submission.

Like the taxi driver “uncle” case in Ampang, she points out, pictures and video clips were used to force the victims to continue the sexually abusive “relationship”.

“The victims already felt ashamed after being raped and then they found out that the perpetrators have embarrassing evidence to use against them.”

Worse, she adds, the growth of mobile technology and social media network have made it so ubiquitous in our daily life that many young people are unaware of the risks.

“Now, more and more sexual offenders are using the internet as a way to prey on victims but many young people are unaware of the dangers.

“Just go online and you will see many websites for young people to exchange pictures and post personal details. They don’t realize how this can be exploited by the unscrupulous out there.

“For them, when they post their sexy picture to share with their friends, it is just for fun. But for sexual predators, it is the weapon they have been waiting for,” she says.

We are to blame for the hike in the violence against women and young girls, says women’s rights activist and Empower executive director Maria Chin Abdullah.

As she sees it, Malaysian society has failed to respond to the new wired world where children have a wider accessibility and exposure to violence and sex.

“The adults are too shy to broach the subject, so we now face the consequences as a society because we kept quiet on the issue.”

She says it goes back to education. For one, she adds, no one is giving the girls the right education to protect themselves.

“We are either overprotecting and controlling them; restricting their movements and telling them that they need to stay home or cover up. We need to teach them self-respect and self-defence skills to empower them.”

Need to change mindset

She stresses, education is about changing the mindset and there is a need to change the mindset of young people about their relationship with each other – how to be mutually respectful – as well as how to defend themselves.

“We need to teach them about their rights and boundaries. If we fail to do that, then we will not be able to stop the violence,” she argues, adding that one measure is having sex education in schools.

“But you cannot have a piecemeal one like what we have at the moment. Sex education is a process and builds on the most basic information – good touch and bad touch for a five year old – up to a more complex and detailed knowledge of consequences and responsibilities of sex. It needs to be comprehensive and holistic,” she says.

DSP Zaiton is another who believes in going back to school.

“It starts from home and school. We can only monitor and curb the violence but young people need to be taught gender sensitivity and equality.

“For example, boys need to learn to respect the girls. If the boys respect the girls, they will not force themselves on the girls or pass them around among their friends. In most of the gang rape cases we get, we see how the boys hate or look down on the girls.”

The police are also keen to work with schools in raising students’ awareness of the crime, she adds.

“We don’t just want to arrest offenders. We can go to schools to give talks and counsel students. Prevention is always better.”

Most importantly, she urges parents and schools who suspect that something sexually insidious is happening to their children to come forward to seek help from the police.

“Don’t try to hide the problem. My advice is for the victims to report immediately. Don’t be scared. The longer you take to report a rape, the more difficult it is for us to help you,” she says.

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I do ... no, I don't

By RASHVINJEET S. BEDI and HARIATI AZIZAN

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There was a time when getting married at a certain age was part and parcel of life. Now, it seems, more Malaysians are delaying making their marriage vows for a variety of reasons.

YOU finish your SPM or STPM and get shipped off to college where you spend up to five years to get a degree. With that paper qualification in hand, clinching the right job is next on the to-do list.

Then it is time to purchase that dream car and dream house. Only when you feel secure enough do you start thinking of settling down and getting married, with the 2.5 children target as part of the package.

This is the path set for most Malaysians, to be achieved usually before they even turn 30.

However, going by the findings in a recent survey, many are falling off the track in their race to achieve it all, with the marriage bit of the “plan” taking a back seat to the other aspirations.

A survey by the National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) on population trends between 2000 and 2007 revealed that Malaysians are now marrying later, or not at all.



Reason for not marrying

	Peninsular Malaysia (%)		Sabah (%)		Sarawak (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Financial problem	44.7	14.0	38.4	7.0	35.4	4.2
No suitable candidate	19.3	40.0	21.4	38.0	24.4	49.3
Career advancement	12.8	8.4	11.3	14.0	7.3	7.6
Family commitments	6.3	7.2	10.1	11.0	5.5	9.0
Enjoying single life	3.5	8.4	4.4	9.0	10.4	8.3
Fear of commitment	3.5	2.8	5.0	10.0	7.3	9.0
Age	0.8	3.6	1.3	2.0	3.0	4.9
Health problems	1.6	1.6	1.9	2.0	1.2	2.1
Others*	7.4	14.0	6.3	7.0	5.5	5.6

* Includes still studying, long distance relationship, not ready

Source: LPPKN

The average age at first marriage for men and women rose from 25.5 and 22.0 years respectively in 1970 to 28.6 and 25.1 years in 2000.

Meanwhile, the number of those who had never been married between the ages of 25 and 29 years had more than doubled for women from 13% to 29.8%, while for men it rose from 32% to 54.9%.

The survey also indicated that the average marrying age of Malaysians would increase to 33 years by 2015.

This, according to the LPPKN, is causing a decline in the fertility rate of Malaysians, which will have an impact on the country's population growth and workforce in the long run.

The findings, not surprisingly, caused some commotion on both sides of the fence.

Some factions implied "choosiness" and "over-ambition" among single women as the root of the "problem".

Others like Abby de Vries, programme officer at the All Women's Action Society (Awam), objected to the fuss.

"This sounds a lot like that tired, shoe-worn scare tactic deployed against women, warning them that infertility and spinsterhood await them if they continue on this 'self-centred' and 'choosy' path of work and career advancement.

"Isn't it curious that although the study showed that men too are marrying later, it was posited as a women's problem? The sub-text is that if you're a woman, your education and career aren't as important as getting married and making babies," she points out.

Empower executive director Maria Chin Abdullah concurs.

“This indirectly reinforces the notion that woman’s natural inclination is towards making a home for her children and husband. In their eyes, a woman’s ability to maintain a home while pursuing a career threatens the family structure as it means fewer babies,” she says.

Career comes first

This phenomenon, however, is not confined to Malaysia alone. Various reports indicate that all around the world, people are getting married much later.

Consultant psychologist Valerie Jacques does not believe that Malaysians are delaying marriage on purpose.

She thinks that most people are busy focusing on a career, which leaves them very little time for building relationships.

“With little time to build a relationship and share, people are not certain about their family life. So family life and marriage end up being something in the mind or at the back of the mind as the worklife balance is affected,” she says, adding that marriage decisions and relationships take a longer time to develop.

Prof Dr Rohany Nasir, a lecturer in counselling psychology at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), agrees with Jacques and believes that people are generally becoming more focused on their careers.

“Careers are more demanding these days and the new grads would like to prove themselves in the working world,” she says.

At 38 and still single, Raja Azwa Petra is already far beyond the average age at which Malaysians are expected to get married.

“When I first started working, what was more important was that I was in a job I believed in, not just one that paid a salary at the end of the month,” says this human rights officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner who is now based in Geneva, Switzerland.

“So I focused all my effort into finding the area that I wanted to work in.”

Marriage is still in her sights, she adds, but it will be on her terms.

“For me, marriage is a case of meeting the right person. I do not have a plan to get married at a particular age. If you meet the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, you should be able to do so at any age.”

Filmmaker and actor Mien Ly, who is 29 and also still single, feels that the findings should be celebrated as it shows how women are getting better educated and having wider horizons.

“It is a sign that Malaysia is heading towards a more civilised society. Women are getting more empowered to decide on issues pertaining to their lives and their bodies, which is a basic right for any human being, regardless of gender, sexuality, educational background, and abilities. It should not be treated like bad news,” she says.

Counselling lecturer Assoc Prof Dr Saedah Abdul Ghani of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia believes that the higher ratio of women than men getting university education (an average of 65:35) is making it hard for women to find someone who is compatible with them.

The situation causes unwillingness among women to marry down or for men to marry up, says Assoc Prof Dr Rumaya Juhari of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

“For women, marrying someone with a lower social economic status is not appealing enough, while men fear losing the title ‘King of the household’ due to social stigma,” she says.

And she is right: according to the survey, the main reason quoted by women for marrying late is the lack of the right candidate (40%).

However, as Raja Azwa points out, getting married is a question of choice.

“What is more important is doing it for the right reason. You should not be forced into it or think it is the only option you have. It is more dangerous if you marry the wrong person and have children. More importantly, marriage is not only for having children. You can still decide not to have children when you are married,” she shares.

The right person for her, she adds, is someone whom she can trust and love.

“It depends on compatibility. It should be someone who can get me, appreciate me and accept me for me. Other factors are secondary.”

Economic worries

Then there is the simple yet important factor of economics. As the survey shows, financial problem is the main reason men marry late or don’t marry at all. This is exacerbated by the rising costs of living and raising a family.

“A lot of people want to be stable before taking the plunge into marriage,” Dr Saedah highlights.

With prices of goods and services increasing all the time, starting a family can be an expensive affair. Even the marriage ceremonies alone cost a lot of money.

Faris Maswan, 31, for instance, wants to be financially stable before he marries his girlfriend of nine years. They had plans to get married a few years ago but postponed it because of financial concerns.

In fact, Faris does not see himself getting hitched within the next five years. He says he has just bought a house and there is not much money left for a wedding. He could take a loan for the wedding but he does not want to go down that road.

“When I get married, naturally I would want to start a family and I would want the best for the kids. I am barely surviving now, so it would be unfair to the kids,” he says.

Faris says that only about 20% of his friends are married while the rest are still bachelors.

“People are getting scared because of the economic situation,” he says.

No to marriage

There are also those who have closed the door completely on the institution.

Linda Tan*, 27, does not believe in marriage because of personal experience. Her parents are divorced, and she has seen the marriages of the parents of many friends break down. She says some of her friends’ parents are still together but they don’t sleep in the same room.

For Tan, marriage means that you are obligated to love someone for the rest of your life. And this obligation only takes out the sincerity of everything that you do, she says.

Tan has been dating her current boyfriend for nine years and says that things are fine the way they are.

“I don’t see how putting a contract will improve things. Love is not a contract,” she says, adding that having a child together would be the next step for her.

According to Dr Rumaya, people who prefer to be single don’t want to get married because they want to “enjoy” life.

In some cases it means travelling the world, while for others it would be the freedom to do anything with anyone at any time without strings attached.

Dr Rumaya says there are also the “push” factors which include fear of commitment, fear of marital failure and bad experiences in past relationships.

Hamid Husin*, 35, shares Tan’s cynical view as he has seen some of his close friends suffer after going through ugly divorces.

“I don’t want to be part of this. It’s more of a trap and your hands are cuffed. Most marriages end up in loveless shells,” he opines.

Hamid, however, believes that marriage is a beautiful thing but many people give up their dreams and ambitions because of it.

Women's group mails white gloves to YBs

[G Vinod](#)

| March 8, 2012

The Wanita Suara Perubahan will also hold a mass gathering come March 18 to get the government to fulfill its six demands, which includes eradicating corruption.



KUALA LUMPUR: About 30 members of the coalition “Wanita Suara Perubahan” gathered at Brickfields here today to call on the government to eradicate corruption and violence against women.

The group, which arrived at 10.30am despite the rain, sported purple attire and white gloves which symbolised women empowerment and clean government respectively.

Among the women's groups in support of the coalition were the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), Tenaganita, All Women's Action Society Malaysia (AWAM), Selangor Community Awareness Association (Empower) and Sisters in Islam (SIS).

Also present was DAP Bukit Mertajam MP Chong Eng.

Upon arriving, the group started shouting slogans such as “Hidup Wanita, Tolak Rasuah” (Long Live Women, Reject Corruption) which caught the attention of passers-by.

Some 30 minutes later, the group proceeded to walk to the Brickfields post office to mail white gloves to all 576 state assemblymen in Malaysia.

The police arrived at the scene at this point but helped to clear traffic near the post office.

Mass gathering on March 18

Speaking at a press conference later, Empower coordinator Maria Chin Abdullah announced that the coalition would conduct a mass gathering at the Taman Jaya park on March 18.

The gathering, Maria said, was an attempt to mobilise people especially women to get the government to fulfill their six demands.

Among their demands are for the government to weed out corruption, implement a minimum wage policy, eliminate all gender based violence and conduct free and fair elections.

“We will also give white gloves to MPs when the Parliament resumes next week,” said Maria.



On why the need for a rally, she said it was time the government gave serious thought to the demands made by Malaysian women.

“We have been making these demands for the past 20 years but nothing has come forth. So we have no choice but to have a gathering,” she added.

Chong Eng, on the other hand, said she had participated in the gathering in her capacity as a woman MP.

“We have 222 parliamentarians but only 23 of them are women. We need to educate Malaysian women to be involved in politics in order to get their voice out,” she added.

The crowd dispersed peacefully at 12.15pm.