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Girl Guides Chief's vision

Mary Chin



Zalillah displaying a sample of GGAM's bottled mineral water at Wisma Pandu Puteri, Sabah.

Mary Chin

KOTA KINABALU: The Girl Guides Association of Malaysia (GGAM) is in the midst of making the guiding movement more attractive to schoolgirls.

Chief Commissioner of Girl Guides, Datin Hj Zalillah Mohd Taib's vision is to make the association well-known and respected by society.

She came up with the idea of producing bottled mineral water when she took over the helm in June last year to boost the image of GGAM and attract more girls to join the movement.

"We are trying to kill three birds with one stone. When girl guides see this product, they are proud to be part of the association. At the same time, we want to generate income from its sale in the Malaysian market.

"This is my idea, my baby. I am trying to get big companies, supermarkets, to buy from us. So consumers are in a way donating to the association when they buy our mineral water," she told *Daily Express*.

Zalillah, who visited GGAM Sabah Branch recently, discussed with the President Datin Naomi Chong, the possibility of selling this bottled mineral water in Sabah.

"My objectives are to promote the name of *Pandu Puteri Malaysia* and also to give the opportunity to the various state branches to make money too.

The Chief Commissioner's other move is to reduce the number of courses and seminars for girl guides and guiding leaders to avoid boredom.

She is in favour of a few good ones in the interest of quality and cutting down costs.

"In this respect, I have briefed the Commissioner for Programme and Training. I don't want to have too many courses and seminars. If you have 10 in a year, the children will get so tired and cannot absorb the information given, so it will be a waste of time and money."

Having said this, Zalillah said the association cannot run away from leadership training for girls.

"We cannot change that. Of course, the main thing for us is to discipline and train them to be good leaders, good citizens."

She emphasised the need to introduce good courses so that more girl guides will attend. To mark World Thinking Day this year, GGAM organised two courses on HIV/AIDS awareness for teachers who are guiding leaders.

"We trained them and they would later hold such courses in their respective schools."

The Chief Commissioner wants leaders and girl guides to be open about the subject.

"Many dare not speak about it. We want to encourage girls to talk on a peer to peer level. Nothing to be shy about. Which means whenever there is any problem, we should be able to discuss it openly."

Zalillah advocates having good activities for the girls, saying the movement must always have something during the school hol-

idays, camps for example.

She is also trying to encourage more girl guides to attend international events organised by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and other countries.

"There are international camps and seminars, among other events, but sometimes, we don't get many Malaysian girls to take part because of financial difficulties. Very sad, you see, even in KL."

"Initially, before I became Chief Commissioner, I thought our message never reached them. Information about international programmes actually reached the girl guides. It's just that they do not have the money to go, so they lose the opportunity for international exposure," she lamented.

For this reason, GGAM decided to earmark some funds just to subsidise the overseas trips for girl guides.

"We started last year and managed to send two girls, one to Switzerland and the other to a seminar in Mexico at one of the four world centres of WAGGGS. We gave a thousand ringgit to each girl for the trip.

"It's just a beginning. If we can raise more money, we will set up a special fund for the purpose. At least a subsidy, we cannot pay 100 per cent," Zalillah explained.

At this juncture, she suggested that all three parties chip in in future - national body, state branch and the family - to reduce the financial burden so that more girls can participate in international activities.

On the large pool of ex-girl guides in the country, the Chief Commissioner said they can still be active in the girl guides movement in one way or another.

Meanwhile, she disclosed that the GGAM Headquarters in KL is undergoing massive renovation to improve its accommodation facilities and activity hall.

"We want to make it more livable for guiding leaders and girl guides who come from outstation areas for national-level activities. With the availability of rooms, those who come for our national executive board and chief commissioner meetings need not stay in hotels," she said.