

NEWS COMMENT

LADIES, HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN YOUR NARRATIVE?

Let there be a clash of ideas and let Aware members decide — that's the kind of maturity Singapore needs

P N BALJI

THE ladies at the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) do not seem to get it.

Instead of doing some soul-searching on how the old guard at the women's group got blindsided, out-foxed and out-numbered by a group of newbies at its annual general meeting three weeks ago, they are behaving like a group of sore losers.

Worse still, they are saying things which make you wonder what happened to their often-stated views, articulated both publicly and privately, championing the need for choices in a pluralistic society.

Two responses to the election swoop that saw nine of the 12 executive committee seats going to fresh faces which disappoint:

The insurgents should have been part of the system, working within it and waiting for their time to be anointed as a new generation of leaders. Sounds very familiar.

If you want things done differently, don't upset the apple cart but go and form your own group. Again, very familiar.

Both reactions are flawed.

Aware has come a long way. In the last 24 years, it has fought suspicions in some places about its beliefs and motives, struggled with the lack of resources and played catch-up with the need to find fresh talent at the top.

What is there to say that a new group from without won't be able to break new ground by professionalising the outfit even more?

And if they do not, there is the next annual general meeting to expose their shortfalls and make a push for change. Isn't that what elections are all about?

Yes, there was an element of stealth in how the Group of Nine planned their leadership swoop on March 28. There was a sudden surge in the number of members in the last three months, there was meticulous planning to take everyone by surprise and there was a surgical strike on that eventful day.

All these show that these women are not a motley group but a well-organised and well-orchestrated group who mean business.

The one missing piece of information is their real agenda. Are their beliefs and motives quite different from those of the old guard? If so, what are they?

Heavy hints are already being dropped

CAUGHT UNAWARES ...

We do not know who they are. It is very troubling ... Why can't they come in and be part of the process, and build it together and in a more evolutionary manner?

Former Aware president Braema Mathi

It was alarming. How could a new member who had just joined for a couple of months, and whom we knew nothing about, be picked over someone who has been with Aware for more than 15 years?

Former Aware president Dana Lam

What I would like to see is Aware's name and activities continue in the way it has been for the past 24 years. If people feel things should be done a different way, go form your own group.

Former Aware vice-president Margaret Thomas

in the media and in cyberspace about the religious inclinations and anti-gay stand of some of the members of the new group.

If that is what is upsetting the old team, then take them on, show why they are no good for the future of the women's movement in Singapore.

Let there be a clash of ideas and let the members decide which set they want.

If it is a case of being upset at the way leadership was seized from right under their noses, constitutionally mind you, then they should be magnanimous in defeat, lick their wounds and prepare to fight another day. Whether in politics or activism, it is that kind of maturity that Singapore needs.

A veteran journalist, P N Balji is now the director of the Asia Journalism Fellowship, a joint initiative by the Temasek Foundation and the Nanyang Technological University.

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