

No quota for women, says Rafidah

KUALA LUMPUR — Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz denounced feminism yesterday as she repeated her criticism of gender quotas.

The former international trade and industry minister during the Mahathir administration, known as Malaysia's "Iron Lady", claimed Malaysia has been doing more than other countries to promote women's development and told women to improve themselves.

"For God's sake, ban that word 'feminism' from the vocabulary. The men never talk about masculinism," Rafidah said in a talk at UCSI University here yesterday titled "Staying ahead in the competitive world: How Malaysia should align itself with the 21st century".

"I hate this 30 per cent quota. Women are not quota fillers. Don't degrade us just to fill quotas. Women should be considered for their competence and abilities," she said.

Rafidah also said women's performance should not be measured by the number of female MPs, CEOs or board directors.

"Why does it matter? A woman on the board can out-talk 10 men. That's important. Numbers don't matter, quality does," she said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced in 2011 the government would implement a 30 per cent quota for women in corporate boardrooms, but it has yet to be made law.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Rohani Abdul Karim said in 2013, a "persuasive"

approach would be more effective than enforcing gender quotas.

Rafidah advised youths to refrain from joining public demonstrations in misconceived notions of democracy.

She sought to reinforce her point by highlighting the much-vaunted "Arab Spring" uprisings that grew out of Middle Eastern discontent over the youth unemployment crisis five years ago.

"You need social stability, not go to social media and ask for demonstrations every day," she said.

"Arab Spring has become a long Arab Winter. Is it good? What was good has now been decimated. Let's not be copycats of newfangled ideas of democracy."

She stressed on the importance of English, saying that conversing in the *lingua franca* did not make her less nationalistic.

She gave an example of how poor civil servants' English comprehension was when she was in government service, with a typist spelling "warehouse" as "wherehouse" when dictated to.

"How do we interact with the private sector if we can't converse in English, let alone write?" she said.

"We should look at equipping the young as assets of the country. When they have full command of English, that can take them anywhere in the world; it doesn't make them less nationalistic.

"I'm speaking English to you; (it) doesn't mean I'm less nationalistic. Nationalistic means you love your country more, you'll do whatever it takes to make it grow and develop," she said.