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First Ladies

FIRST LADIES SHOULD LEND THEIR POSITION TO SOLVE WOMEN'S POVERTY

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- First Ladies should use their influence as wives of heads of government to help resolve the poverty problems of country women, Malaysia's First Lady Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali said tonight.

As spouses of the heads of government, First Ladies should bother to understand the problems faced by the people especially the fate of rural women, the Malaysian Prime Minister's wife said over the "Lidah Pengarang" programme of Astro's RIA channel tonight.

The topic of the weekly programme moderated by Azalina Othman Said was "Fate of Poor Country Women Set to be Resolved by 2005."

Three other panelists in the programme were member of the Lembaga Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) Idris Isa, AIM Founder and Universiti Sains Malaysia Lecturer Prof Sukor Kasim and Deputy Secretary-General of the Rural Development Ministry Rahmah Kassim.

Asked about the small loans or "micro credit" for rural women, she said country women had skills of their own such as in the area of tailoring and cooking but lacked capital to set up business and hence through such loans they could start small ventures.

On the setting up a fund by the 15-nation Rural Steering Committee of the Asia Pacific region (RSC-AP), Dr Siti Hasmah said the fund would facilitate governments, the private sector and international agencies to channel capital which in turn would be given to target groups.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad proposed the setting up of the fund when opening the meeting of the RSC-AP here on Monday to help uplift the status of rural women in member nations.

Unlike Malaysia which had the AIM, most of the Asia-Pacific nations did not have specific financial institutions which could act as channels of aid for rural women.

AIM, which provides assistance in the form of micro credit, has so far helped 47,000 poor families or half the number of poor households in Malaysia with loans totalling RM20 million.

Dr Siti Hasmah expressed the hope that the RSC-AP objective of reducing the total number of poor women in the region to 70 million by 2005 would be attained. -- BERNAMA

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