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Economy-Women

ECONOMIC TURBULENCE: TIME FOR WOMEN TO ACT

A news focus

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 14 (Bernama) -- Suddenly, women are to be the nation's saviour. They are told that their decisions on daily household spending would go a long way in easing the country's battered economy the impact of which is being felt by people from all walks of life.

The question is how?

In a television interview last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spelt out how housewives' decisions could have a bearing on the economy.

With the ringgit depreciating steeply against the US dollar, housewives should, among other things, should substitute normally-used imported items with local products.

" Like opting for margarine instead of butter. As for items with no substitutes like cheese, the people can do without it... after all we will not die without cheese," the prime minister said.

Besides this, what other measures can the womenfolk take as the family's financial controllers?

In badly-hit South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia, women are working hand-in-hand with their governments to seek solutions to their countries' economic woes.

South Korean women have surrendered their jewellery to be turned into gold bullions to help the country repay its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) totalling US\$57 billion.

In Thailand, a "Thais Help Thais" campaign has been launched to collect public contributions in the form of gold and foreign currencies to be converted into bahts.

While in Indonesia, President Suharto's daughter Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana has initiated a campaign to convert US dollars to rupiahs.

In Malaysia, many may have forgotten that Malaysians too had one time given money and gold to support the struggle for independence from the British.

In recalling the past, veteran politician Tan Sri Aishah Abdul Ghani, 74, said the people then, including women, had strong spirit of patriotism.

" At that time, our leaders led by Tunku Abdul Rahman wanted to go to London to hold negotiations for independence but they faced financial problems. Hence, the people came forward to chip in.

" The women also wanted to contribute their bit but they did not have money then unlike now. What they had was only jewellery...and they donated that," she said.

Aishah joined the political fight for national independence as early as 1945 as leader of Sedar, the women's wing of the Malay National Party before joining Umno four years later.

Citing past economic slowdowns, Aishah, who was former Welfare Services Minister, said women should be taught to manage household expenses wisely.

Women organisations then held activities related to family economy like cooking competitions and healthy baby contests to impart knowledge to women on ways to manage family finances efficiently.

Through cooking competitions, housewives were taught to prepare delicious and nutritious recipes using ingredients sourced locally, she said.

Aishah, who is now Wanita Umno permanent chairman, said: " We have to

revert to old times. Housewives should go back to sewing, at least to patch up torn clothings instead of buying new ones."

Other cost-saving measures proposed by Aishah are:

- + reducing the practice of taking the family out for dinners particularly to expensive restaurants;
  - + controlling use of credit cards for shopping;
  - + encouraging children to save;
  - + keeping aside some amount for saving from the kitchen expenses given by husbands;
  - + saving cooking oil, soap, water and electricity;
  - + reducing use of foreign branded goods; and
  - + switching to vegetable farming from planting flowers. -- BERNAMA
- RAZ TS