

# Dr M: We know the worth of women power

30 SEP 1999

By CHARLES CHAN

NEW YORK: You don't need to convince Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that women power is the answer to Malaysia's problem of labour shortage.

The Prime Minister says he is all for throwing open the doors at all levels of employment for women who make up 50% of the workforce.

"I would like to see more women at work," he said at a meeting with about 200 Malaysians in New York where a woman urged him to consider an affirmative action programme for women in the workplace.

Dr Mahathir took a dig at Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat who recently caused an uproar with his controversial statement that women, particularly the pretty ones, should not be allowed in the workplace.

"I think he has very little control over himself," he said.

He said women were already making much progress.

"In the legal profession, we are seeing more and more women while the men are busy demonstrating," he said, adding that female students were performing better than their male counterparts.

"Our legal department is full of women. That's why whether we like it or not we had to have women judges.

"The Solicitor-General is a woman and it could be that even the 'A-G will

eventually be a woman."

Considering that many women in Malaysia were Muslims, the Prime Minister said Malaysia was perhaps the only Muslim country to have women fighter pilots. One was recently given an award.

"That is how far we have progressed (in expanding the role of women) but I agree we need to do more. As we are short-handed, we think women should be trained. They have the capacity to learn and absorb new knowledge. In IT, for example, they have been doing very well. Eventually we will reach our target."

In view of the labour shortage, Dr Mahathir said it was not in Malaysia's interest to kick out migrant workers, including illegals, because of the criminal activities by some of these workers.

"They are doing good work, they work very hard. Unfortunately, there is a belief that they are part-time workers and part-time criminals — if they have a chance to rob, they will rob. If they have a chance to kill, they will kill."

Some of these criminals had been caught, tried and punished accordingly, he said.

Dr Mahathir took the opportunity to brief the Malaysians about the Government's use of selective exchange controls to stabilise the ringgit, the dismissal of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and other related developments.