

15 DEC 1999

Women

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 15 (Bernama) -- The Women's Institute of Management (WIM) has sent an open letter of appeal to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad calling on him to appoint more women in his cabinet.

WIM deputy chairman Datuk Dr Nellie Tan-Wong hoped this should happen before the end of this century or else Dec 31 would be the saddest day for Malaysian women.

At a press conference here, she said the government should not underestimate Malaysian women's leadership capabilities. The appeal letter was sent to Dr Mahathir yesterday.

Noting that 62 women candidates stood in the recent elections marking the most in the Malaysian history, she was however disappointed that women ministers had been reduced after the Nov 29 elections.

"I'm disappointed that despite the increase and statements made by government leaders on the confidence they have in women, the number of women ministers in the cabinet was in fact reduced from three to two," she said.

Nellie said there were many women winners in the election that could be slotted in the cabinet list, if not as minister at least as parliamentary secretaries.

One of them, which she did not mention by name, has all the credentials to fill up a ministerial post as she had previously held ministerial posts in at least three ministries, had never lost in her women party elections, and had the honour of making an address at a United Nations Assembly at New York.

If seniority was an argument then the appointment of the new Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad proved otherwise, she said.

"With the millennium just around the corner, it will create equal opportunities in which gender eventually will become a non-issue. Malaysia should encourage political awakening and not take 1,000 steps backwards in the area of advancement and equal opportunities for women," she added.

Dr. Nellie also emphasised that this was not a criticism but merely an appeal to point out that there are capable women candidates out there and there is still time to put things right.

-- BERNAMA

PK AO