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Nik Aziz draws flak over statement on beautiful women

ALOR STAR, Tues. - Pas spiritual leader Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat's stand discouraging the recruitment of beautiful women in Kelantan government departments shows the kind of mentality the opposition party leaders have, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"It shows they are not caring, all they can think about is themselves...their own satisfaction, own comfort, own interests.

"They don't think about women's interests, they don't think about women finding themselves pretty through no fault of their own. They are very selfish people and selfish people cannot make good leaders."

The Prime Minister said with this kind of mentality, he was convinced Pas did not have suitable leaders.

He said it was important to have leaders who care for everyone and not the kind that are "fair to the ugly but unfair to the pretty. Their thinking is that I must be fair to the poor because it seems the poor will all go to heaven and unfair to the rich because they will all go to hell.

"How does he (Nik Aziz) know, you see this is the kind of mentality that Pas leaders have which convinces me they are not suitable leaders," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a Press conference at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport in Kepala Batas at the end of his two day official visit to Kedah.

He was asked to comment on newspaper reports quoting Nik Aziz, who is also Kelantan Menteri Besar, as saying he had "whispered" to his officers who conducted interviews to employ "less beautiful" women. He was replying to a question from Datuk Mohd Rozali Isohak (BN-Dabong) at the State Assembly who wanted to know the State Government's policy on working women.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfair to penalise women just because God made them beautiful. "Why must we discriminate them for something which is of no fault of theirs."

"If we don't like to look at them then don't...look down, maybe at their feet," he said, adding some people should do this if their minds start going haywire (tak tentu arah) just by looking at a beautiful face.

In Kuching, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Nik Aziz's statement only reinforces the notion that Pas was "anti-women".

He said Pas had come up with all sorts of merapu (nonsense).

"How can they prevent women from doing this and that or don't allow them to go out and work?"

He added that the proper thing to do should be to give women proper education so that wherever they go they will be safe and sound.

"Simply asking them to stay at home and not go to work is really anti-wanita. If women still want to support Pas (after knowing their true colours), they are free to do so," he said.

Abdullah said this at a Press conference held at the Kuching International Airport before flying off to Kuala Lumpur after a two-day visit to the state.

In Putrajaya, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali declined to comment on Nik Aziz's statement, saying: "that's his view."

"I have no comment. For us, what is important is to have people who can work."

Meanwhile, women's groups are up in arms against Nik Aziz's statement.

Social activist and member of Sisters In Islam Zainah Anwar said Pas has

to stop looking at women as nothing more than sex objects.

"One's beauty or lack of it should not be used as a basis for hiring or firing. This is discriminatory practice that has no place in a modern democratic society. Men who cannot control their desire at the sight of beautiful women should, as commanded by Allah, lower their gaze. If they still cannot do this, then it is they and not women, who should be shrouded and placed behind four walls."

"Why should women be held responsible and denied the right to public life and public space for the sins that might be committed by men, who are not able or have no desire to control their lust."

Pertiwi Women Service Centre Supervisor Mariam Abdul said as a learned and a religious man, Nik Aziz should not be encouraging something which is discriminatory. "Why the obsession with women? Why the nit-picking?"

"Beautiful or not shouldn't be an issue in hiring people. What is important is their capabilities, character and attitude."

All Women's Action Society (Awam) spokesperson Zaitun Mohamed Kasim said statements of such nature, even said in jest, belittled women and were completely unnecessary.

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