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`Women must take part in all levels of policy-making'

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KUANTAN, Tues. - Women's representation should be at all levels of policy-making, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said the participation of women was evident in meetings to determine policy, which was a departure from earlier times.

"It is interesting that women's high achievements in this country are based on their own efforts and abilities and not because there were women quotas. They succeeded on their merits," he said.

Speaking at the launch of the National Women's Day 1999, Abdullah said he fully supported empowerment of women and women leaders were quite proficient now in promoting their careers.

He said many women were now doctors, engineers, architects and accountants and that the teaching profession was monopolised by women.

"Statistics for 1998 show that female students registered at pre-university level were 65.3 per cent while 54.5 per cent of 79,014 students at public institutions of higher learning were women," Abdullah said.

Of the female students, 61.2 per cent were pursuing law, economics, management and accountancy.

Abdullah was representing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the launch.

Also present were Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Adnan Yaakob, National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Abdullah also said the principles of morality and values must be upheld in educating children, teaching them respect for elders and discharging parental duties.

"Our success must not be based on high economic growth alone; we cannot be proud if there are family-related social problems, to the extent that women and children do not receive proper attention," he said.

Abdullah said women who chose to be full-time housewives should not be looked down upon as it was a noble but difficult task to perform in modern times.

"What is important is that every encouragement must be given to women to succeed in whatever field they choose."

Meanwhile, Zaleha said modernisation and development of the community, complemented by the sophisticated technology and communication system, has changed the family institution in areas like family values, attitude and practices.

"This changing trend is one of the challenges in our attempt to create a caring society which also has some implications to women, especially in issues such as caring for and educating children, old folks and family members who are sick," she said.

Zaleha said the theme for this year's celebration, "Women - Base For a Happy Family" (Wanita Asas Keluarga Bahagia) was in line with the fact that women, as a wife or a mother was like a pulse in a family.

She added that in the Government's attempt to further strengthen the family institution, it had allocated RM20 million under the Women's Development Action Plan. She hoped that with the plan, women would be able to create a new generation of leaders in facing the transition.

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