

Women air views to PM

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By SHAHRIZA EMBI

PUTRAJAYA, Mon: Women's issues and their well-being dominated a closed-door dialogue between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and various women's organisations today.

The three-hour session at the PM's office was attended by almost 150 women from 90 organisations, mainly NGOs and university groups.

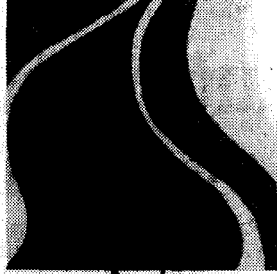
Deputy Minister in the PM's Department Datuk **Shahrizat Jalil** told the press that the dialogue was an initial move towards a more active role in advocating women's issues.

Among the main concerns of the dialogue, she said, was syariah law.

"A majority of the groups fear that certain quarters might not **want to** see Muslim women progress by resorting to using psychology or other methods," she added.

Shahrizat said the dialogue yielded positive response from Mahathir.

During a press conference earlier, the Prime Minister said the groups came up with many good ideas and the government will consider implementing some of them.



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He said the ideas, among others, involve the establishment of a fund for women in business, special treatment in the national budget, research centre on women's issues, and more efficient implementation of syariah law.

The dialogue, which is part of the preparation for Women's Day celebrations on Aug 25, will be followed by the Women's Conference 2000.

Shahrizat said the conference on Aug 17 will gather women from various aspects of life to obtain input for the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

"The women, among them

NGO and government representatives as well as academicians, will provide ideas that will ensure allocation for women in **all** chapters of the plan," she said.

A participant in the dialogue said such events will have a positive effect on women's issues in the long term and hopes that the government will increase efforts to ensure women's progress.

She, however, noted that some representatives did not take advantage of the rare opportunity with the Prime Minister, and instead wasted time by bringing up petty issues and personal opinions.