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Empowering rural women is theme of meeting

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Women from rural areas and the islands of Asia Pacific, when provided with knowledge, experience and empowerment, may contribute much towards their family, society and the nation's economy, even escaping from extreme poverty.

With this in mind, a group of first ladies, prominent women and wives of heads of government in Asia Pacific, had come up with the theme Rural and Island Women: Poverty and Empowerment for their second meeting in advocating poverty reduction among women of the region.

Rural women need to be given skills to be independent, to identify opportunities that may improve living conditions, to consider risks and to make rational decisions, said Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Dr Siti Hasmah, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and chairman of Regional Steering Committee for the Advancement of Rural and Island Women in Asia and the Pacific, said the group, who last met in 1996, would gather for four days from Monday to present papers and share experiences.

First ladies from Iran, India, Pakistan, Mongolia and Papua New Guinea are scheduled to attend and the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Tonga, Maldives and Indonesia are expected to send their special envoys to the meeting.

They would evaluate the progress of previous action plans, improve strategies towards advocating poverty eradication among rural women and discover ways to use resources and technical expertise more efficiently, Dr Siti Hasmah told a Press conference in Seri Perdana today.

Dr Siti Hasmah would be presenting a paper titled Armed Conflict and the Impact of War on Women while Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil will be speaking on empowering rural and island women.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir will present a paper on health and empowerment with regard to rural women.

The meeting, to be held at Mandarin Oriental Hotel, will include a visit to a women's development project in Banting.

Dr Siti Hasmah, whose second term as RSC-AP chairman will end at the close of 2001, said the meeting would decide the next president besides re-adopting the rules and regulations of RSC-AP.

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