

26/09/2000

`Summit' of First Ladies

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Regional Steering Committee on the Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia-Pacific or RSC-AP will hold its second meeting tomorrow.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open the two-day meeting at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

Carrying the theme Rural and Island Women: Poverty and Empowerment, the meeting is a follow-up to the inaugural one in October 1997 which called for the provision of micro credit for poor women in an effort to alleviate poverty.

First Ladies from Iran, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Laos together with special envoys from the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Tonga, Maldives and Indonesia are expected to attend.

Four working papers focusing on strategies in empowering poor rural women will be presented. They are:

- \* resource mobilisation, access to productive resources and empowerment of rural women;
  - \* rural women, health and empowerment (with special focus on HIV/AIDS);
  - \* environment and poverty: empowering women for sustainable development;
- and,
- \* empowering rural and island women for power-sharing and decision-making positions.

On the first day of the meeting, two working papers will be presented by Thelma Kay of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

The next day, working papers will be delivered by Vanessa Griffin of the Asia and Pacific Development Centre and Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

A special paper on Armed Conflict and the Impact of War on Women will be delivered by RSC-AP chairman Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali the same day.

On the last day, delegates will make a field trip to a women's development project in Banting.

Dr Siti Hasmah, one of the co-initiators of RSC-AP, will end her second term as its chairman next year. The meeting will decide on the next chairman and the host country for the next meeting.

RSC-AP, made up of First Ladies and wives of heads of Governments, was set up on Sept 5, 1995, to monitor the Geneva Declaration at the Asia Pacific regional level.

The declaration, the result of the Rural Women General Summit held in Geneva in 1992, was organised by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. It underlines, among others, ways for the development of rural women worldwide.

The committee's secretariat is based at the Women's Affairs Department of the Prime Minister's Department.

An expert group meeting held here in 1996 produced an outline of programmes of action for RSC-AP, identifying three critical areas of concern for the Asia-Pacific region.

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