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Budget-Women

RM59 MILLION TO FINANCE PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- A sum of RM59 million has been allocated in next year's Budget to finance programmes specially for women as a mark of recognition of their role in national economic development, the Prime Minister said today.

Tabling the Budget 2002 in the Dewan Rakyat, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is also Finance Minister, said in recognition of women's role in economic development, the government had set up the Ministry of Women and Family Development.

"With the establishment of the ministry, issues and families will be given greater attention," he said.

In this regard Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution had been amended to include the word "gender" to ensure that laws and policies did not discriminate against women.

He said the allocation would be used to finance women's special programmes which were aimed at improving the quality of women's lives, particularly in rural areas, developing female entrepreneurs as well as eradicating the gender bias in all respects.

Dr Mahathir also announced that widows who remarry would continue to receive the pension of their late husband and not lose their pensions upon remarriage like at present.

"It is hoped that there will not be many who will take a second wife and leave their first wife because of this provision," he said to laughter from the MPs.

He said women in Malaysia were fortunate that the Government encouraged and provided equal opportunities in all fields of employment, unlike in certain states which did not encourage women to work.

The Government was aware that the female labour force participation rate at 44.5 per cent was lower than the 60 per cent level in developed countries.

"We must remember that Muslims make up only 60 per cent of Malaysia's population of which half is women. If women are not allowed to contribute to the development of the Muslim community, the Muslim workforce will be reduced by 30 per cent."

"If this happens, Muslims who are already weak will become even weaker," he added.

-- BERNAMA

SHI AHH AAM