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S'pore-Rafidah  
RAFIDAH THROWS A CHALLENGE AT THE MEDIA

SINGAPORE, Nov 28 (Bernama) -- Wanita Umno Malaysia Chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz last night challenged the media to ask Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad how they balanced their time and energy between career and family.

Speaking at the Women Inspire Awards 2002 and Charity Ball Dinner here, the Malaysian Minister of International Trade and Industry said regardless of what the woman had achieved in her own right, questions were still directed at successful women as to what they were doing outside the family.

"It is as though there is something amiss. She is successful I wonder what she is doing outside of the family."

Rafidah said women in particular were applied a different and clearly discriminatory criteria and yardstick to measure their success.

"And yet, no one ever asks a man, whether a politician, an entrepreneur, or a social worker, how he manages to balance his personal interests with his role as husband and father or brother," said Rafidah.

At the same time, Rafidah said, there was always the danger that society believed that role models were infallible almost perfect, and therefore, could not make mistakes.

However, she stressed that with the dawning of the new millennium, the nature of competition left no room for gender-sensitisation, "and survival is simply of the fittest."

"New developments dictate that women must be prepared to acquire new knowledge and skills and to be benchmarked against the most stringent of standards, she said.

For example, in the area of trade and industry, regional and global development were opening up a range of opportunities, which with the right strategies, could be optimally exploited, and women entrepreneurs must subscribe to whatever it took, to compete successfully, she added.

"The world today can be said to revolve around one word, namely competition. It is not only business, it is simply that everyone, everywhere, has to compete with something."

Rafidah said that women who pursued careers and interests, outside of the family and home parameters, must prove to society that any woman could be the best possible wife, mother and family member, while striving for excellence in her personal pursuit of choice.

In fact, she said, a woman must have the right priorities in life, just as a man should so that personal success does not have to come with a high opportunity cost, and that such success can be a shared success, adding value to the family and society at large.

"Perhaps it is not that easy to be role models who inspire others, because like the certification of an ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) standard, there is always the need to consistently sustain and maintain the high standards already achieved, and more importantly to continue to improve," Rafidah stressed.

Last night, five of 15 finalists emerged winners of the Women Inspire Awards 2002 that recognises and honours inspiring contributions made by women in the Asia Pacific region.

The winners are: Suong Ngoc Tran of Vietnam (Business Category), Preeyapun Sridhavat of Thailand (Arts), Leonarda N. Camacho of the Philippines (Community), Shanti Lasminingsih Poesposoetjlpoto of Indonesia (Information Technology) and Se Ri Pak of South Korea (Sports).

A special award -Women Inspire Beacon of Light Award - was also given to internationally-renowned singer and composer Anggun, for her achievements as a role model for many young women in Asia. Based in Paris, Indonesian-born Anggun, accompanied by her band, belted some of her old and latest hits, for the audience last night.

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