

31 JAN 2003

Mahathir-Biography

DR M: AUTHORS OF BIOGRAPHY BOOKS IMPORTANT FOR M'SIA'S HISTORY

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31 (Bernama) -- The writing of biography books about people who struggled for the country's independence is very important and is needed as a guide for the younger generation to know and to learn the history of Malaysia's independence, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said what was done by the freedom fighters, especially when the country was about to attain independence from the British, must be recorded so that it could serve as a guide to the future generation.

"We must remember that what is happening today will become a history in future but many of us think that what is happening today does not have any meaning or something valuable.

"Actually, in the history of a country, what is happening today should be noted down and recorded for future reference because at that time, many will want to know what has happened before," he said when launching a biography book on Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim, the first woman to be appointed as a minister in Malaysia.

The book titled "Tan Sri Fatimah: Potret Seorang Pemimpin" jointly authored by Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Nik Safiah Karim and Dr Rokiah Talib gives an account of how Fatimah became a role model for women as she was successful in her career, especially in politics, without sacrificing her family.

Dr Mahathir said the government encouraged initiatives to write such books and efforts made towards that end.

Recollecting the role played by Fatimah, he said, the Kaum Ibu Umno chief played a crucial role with Malaysia's first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, to pursue Umno's struggles and the country's independence.

Dr Mahathir said only by coincidence that Fatimah, who hails from Muar, Johor, contested for a seat in Kedah.

"Nowadays, such things (outsiders contesting in other constituencies) is a bit difficult. The locals always want candidates from their village, if not from their house, at least from their village, if a bit further than that, the candidate is unacceptable," he said.

Recounting the selection of candidates to contest in an election before, he said the hopefuls would not jostle for candidacy like now.

Dr Mahathir said he could still clearly remember that many of the leaders those days, who were educated only till Standard Five from Malay Schools, a high level of education then, often apologised for rejecting offers to become candidates because they considered themselves not qualified to become elected representatives.

He said there was no protest at all to accept Fatimah as the candidate in Jitra for three elections and each time she won with a thumping majority.

Dr Mahathir said the parochialism feelings then were not that strong.

"This is good because we must give a place for someone who is capable of struggling (for the country)," he said.

He said the appointment of Fatimah as the first woman minister in Malaysia holding the portfolio as the Social Welfare Minister was accurate because the country needs to galvanise the women folks who formed 50 per cent of the country's population.

Fatimah's success in politics rekindled interest among Malay women to join politics which had become more widespread now.

"If women are not given opportunities to join certain fields, then our energy will be reduced by 50 per cent and in Malaysia, women played a very big role in politics and this had impressed many countries," he said.

Following the success of women in Umno politics, he said, the number of women interested to play a role in the party had increased and this was a good contribution to the country because women force cannot be ignored totally.

Dr Mahathir expressed sadness that there are still situations where women are totally ignored, including to receive education, and in fact, regulations are imposed on them for clothings which was actually an oppression.

The Prime Minister congratulated and appreciated the services of Fatimah, whose contributions as a woman leader must be emulated by the women folks in the country.

At the function, Dr Mahathir presented the books to representatives of Datin Fatimah Primary School in Kedah, Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Religious School in Johor, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia and National Library of Malaysia.

Born on Dec 25, 1924 at Kampung Parit Keroma, Muar, Fatimah was appointed the Social Welfare Minister on May 24, 1969.

Also present at the book launch were Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and cabinet ministers.

-- BERNAMA

HS HS TS