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Document freedom struggles, says PM

P. Sharmini

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The struggles and experiences of those who fought for the nation's independence should be documented as it would provide the younger generation with a clearer picture of the country's history and independence, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said there was a need for more biographies of freedom fighters to be written, especially on those who were involved in the fight for independence.

These biographies, he said, would be a guide for the present and future generations.

"We must remember that what we do today will become history in the future.

"In a country's history, there is a need to document and record what is happening today for future reference," he added.

He also said the Government welcomed and encouraged the writing of these books.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the launch of a biography on Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim, titled Tan Sri Fatimah: Potret Seorang Pemimpin written by Professor Emeritus Datuk Dr Nik Safiah Karim and Dr Rokiah Talib, which relates Fatimah's experiences - her lifelong history and political struggles.

Dr Mahathir said Fatimah played an important part in the fight for independence alongside other great leaders, notably the country's first Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman.

In relating her story, he said, Fatimah, who hails from Johor had contested for a seat in Jitra, Kedah.

"There were no complaints then, she was well accepted even though she came from Johor and she won the seat three times in a row," he said.

He said this showed that parochialism then was not as strong as it was now, and only qualified candidates who could struggle for the country were given the opportunity to contest.

"These days people want candidates from their own house. If not, then it would be someone from the same kampung. Any further and they would not be accepted."

Dr Mahathir also said that candidates at that time were a humble lot, and did not go all out to vie for candidacy.

Dr Mahathir said Fatimah, 79, who was the country's first woman minister, was an example to other women at the time.

Fatimah was elected as the leader of Kaum Ibu Umno (now known as Wanita Umno) in 1956, and served as president of the National Council of Women's Organisations for 26 years.

Her successes had inspired other women at a time when there were not many women leaders in the country.

She also spurred other Malay women to dabble in politics and fight for independence.

He said her appointment, as Welfare Minister, reflected the importance of women who made up 50 per cent of the nation's workforce.

"Women also play an important political role in this country, as proven by the presence of three ministers in Cabinet," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was sad to see women in some countries who were subjected to discrimination because of their gender.

"In Malaysia we have no problem seeing women in politics. They play an

important role and contribute greatly to the nation's development," he added.

Copies of the book were also distributed to several schools and universities. The Prime Minister handed over some copies to the principals of SR Datin Fatimah, Kedah and the SA Tan Sri Abdul Kadir, Johor and representatives from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia and the National Library.

Also present at the function today were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other Cabinet Ministers.