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PM: I will not tolerate bias against women

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KUALA LUMPUR: There will be no discrimination against women under Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's watch.

The prime minister made it clear yesterday that he would not brook any form of bias against the fairer sex as long as he headed the government.

He told Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil that there was no need to set a percentage for women in decision-making positions.

"Shahrizat, there is no need to make demands.

"You wait. It will happen. We don't need to set a percentage," he said in response to the minister's earlier call for more women politicians.

Launching the Women's Day 2007 celebrations at Stadium Putra, Bukit Jalil, he said women had

a great deal to contribute to the nation.

"There is only one thing we ask — that there be no discrimination. And there will be no discrimination as long as I am leading this country."

Abdullah said women had made phenomenal achievements over the years.

"It has been a major social transformation. The development of women was a silent revolution over the last 50 years and it has brought women to the stage they are at now."

"I envision that the country's development will see further enhancement as women develop. In another 50 years, we will see women achieving much more than what they have today," he said to thunderous applause.

Shahrizat had earlier urged menteriis besar and state assemblimen to increase the number of women politicians as a step towards achieving the target of 30

per cent women decision-makers.

Abdullah said women given top positions had yet to disappoint the nation.

He cited the example of Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz and vice-chancellors Datuk Rafiah Salim of the Universiti Malaya and Prof Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hassan Shahabudin of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Abdullah said those who began the struggle for independence more than 50 years, including early women politicians, should not be forgotten.

"We have to be grateful for the women leaders who have since passed on or retired.

"If not for them, the women's movement today would not have taken a strong and influential position."

At this point, he called on the crowd to observe a moment of silence in honour of the women leaders of yesteryear.

He hoped that the struggle for the development of women would continue even as women were empowering themselves.

At one point, Abdullah mentioned his late wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, who had stuck by him throughout his political career until he became prime minister.

"She gave me two good children. She used to say it was never easy being a politician's wife. She was always with me.

"Now I have a new wife and, hopefully, she too will always be with me," he said, drawing laughter.

At a press conference later, Abdullah said the proposal by Chief Justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Halim that the English Common Law be abolished should be studied.

To a question on the six express bus drivers caught for being under the influence of drugs under *Ops Bersih*, he said that action against them could include dismissal.