

**Curtin University Confers Honorary Doctor Of Letters On Rosmah
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PERTH, Feb 12 (Bernama) -- Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, wife of the Malaysian prime minister, was today conferred the honorary Doctor of Letters degree by Australia's Curtin University in recognition of her efforts in the development of education, particularly children's education through the Permata Negara programme.

Chancellor of Curtin University Dr Jim Gill presented the doctorate to Rosmah at the institution's convocation here on Saturday.

Also present at the event were Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, Malaysia's High Commissioner to Australia Datuk Salman Ahmad and Malaysia's Consul General in Perth Hamidah Ashari.

More than 500 graduands of the university, a number of them Malaysians, also received their respective degrees at the convocation.

Rosmah, in her acceptance speech, expressed her deepest gratitude to the council members of Curtin University for the conferment.

Emphasising the importance of early education, Rosmah said many of the world's social ills can be mitigated when education is made accessible to all, including rural people and the urban poor.

She also said that when the young are prepared from an early age, they would be mentally, emotionally and psychologically more adept in projecting the best of themselves by the time they reach tertiary education.

"It is proven that the formative years of a child, to at least five years of age, significantly determine his or her ability to succeed later in life. There could potentially be a lost opportunity if we do not invest in the right kind of early education for our children," she added.

Rosmah said the setting of the Early Childhood Education and Care Programme or better known as ECEC, under the banner of Permata Negara, is to ensure that Malaysia's education focuses on holistic human development from an early age, and also to ensure that the country can build profound human capital.

She said that it was with this conviction, and through intensive deliberations and discussions with a wide range of professionals and volunteers in Malaysia, that the programme was launched in 2007 and known as Permata, meaning jewel or gem in the Malay language and symbolising the young as invaluable assets of the country.

Rosmah said the Permata programme provides opportunities to children below five years of age from rural and urban families in the lower socio-economic group to experience a holistic learning environment.

"Learning is based on exploration, experience and experiment designed to instill and

promote inquisitiveness and curiosity in a child. We benchmarked Permata to several high-performing programmes from around the world," she said.

Rosmah said that in just five years, the Permata Negara programme has expanded from the first five pilot projects to more than 600 Permata childcare centres around Malaysia.

"Our work continues with further expansion to ensure that no child is left behind or deprived of quality education," she said.

The Permata programme also encompasses four other programmes. A centre for the academically gifted and talented has a school for students aged 16 to 17 years attached to the National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan).

"An annual camp for gifted children aged nine to 15 years is also conducted in collaboration with Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth.

"Permata also has programmes for children talented in the performing arts as well as in studies of the Quran and Sunnah.

"Under the same banner, we have also rolled out programmes to empower Youths-at-Risk," she said.

Rosmah thanked her family, especially her husband and children, saying they have been the tower of her strength, enabling her to contribute to the country.

She congratulated Prof Jeanette Hackett, the vice-chancellor of Curtin University, for having been conferred the prestigious Member of the Order of Australia at the recent Australia Day ceremony.

Curtin University conferred an honorary doctorate in technology on former Malaysian prime minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2006.

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